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ARTICLE



The transformation of the Wang Yangming scholarship in the West, ca. 1960–1980: a historical essay

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ABSTRACT

Students of Ming philosophy and the thought of Wang Yangming likely know that the 1960s–1970s was a period during which many scholarships in this field of study were produced in the English language. Indeed, it has been almost half a century since a group of scholars came together at the University of Hawaii to present papers on Wang Yangming in commemoration of the fifth centenary of his birth. That group included, for example, Wing-tsit Chan, David Nivison, and Du Weiming. These scholars, along with two others not present—Julia Ching and Carsun Chang—played a transformative role in introducing Wang Yangming to an English-reading audience. But, the history behind their achievement, as well as how they interpreted him for that audience, has yet to be written. This paper provides a synopsis of that history, explaining why the scholars chose to write about him and what they said about his life and ideas.

KEYWORDS

Wang Yangming; Julia Ching; Wing-tsit Chan; Carsun Chang; David Nivison; Neo-Confucianism; Chinese Philosophy

The history of writing in the West about the renowned Ming Dynasty statesman, philosopher, and military commander Wang Yangming (1472–1529) developed in reasonably recognizable stages.¹ Prior to the 1910s, he had not been the topic of a scholarly article or monograph. However, his life and philosophy, and even some of his writing, did appear in other types of literature, such as histories, dictionaries, and works of an encyclopedic nature (Israel, 2017, pp. 36–42). In the second decade of the twentieth century, this limitation was overcome; because of his importance to Japanese intellectual history as well as the revival of interest in his work in China, Wang increasingly came to the attention of missionaries and scholars living in both China and Japan and, through their work, scholars living in Europe and North America. Consequently, during China's Republican Period (1912–1949), a substantial English-language translation of Wang Yangming's work was published, along with three monographs and four articles. Also, he was included in at least six French and German histories of Chinese philosophy (Chan, 1972b, pp. 75–92).

Although the quality of this modest volume of scholarship was high, it was largely overshadowed by a new stage in the study of Wang Yangming dating to roughly the 1960s and 1970s. After that, an English-language scholarship on Wang Yangming relied on or took as its point of reference translations of and publications about the Ming

philosopher written during those decades, rarely citing or using work published beforehand. In fact, in the 1960s, several historical factors converged to lead to a substantial growth in the publication of a distinctive scholarship on Neo-Confucianism in the United States (Cui, 2010, pp. 93–94). For the Wang Yangming scholarship, one of the most important factors was the contributions of Chinese scholars who, owing to the vicissitudes of China's twentieth-century history, chose to relocate from China to the United States, Australia, or Canada. They, then, spent a lifetime introducing Chinese philosophy to an English-reading audience. Not surprisingly, this generation of scholars went straight to primary sources, perhaps only referencing earlier English-language publications as a matter of good practice. Since this body of scholarship, in terms of scope, generally surpassed earlier work and became more widely available in the English language, scholars who wrote about Wang Yangming after the 1980s primarily reference it.

Yet, while these decades were critical to bringing Wang Yangming's life and philosophy to a broader audience in the West and to promoting the growth in scholarship on him thereafter, the story of how a small group of scholars made this possible and what they had to say has yet to be written. This article aims to provide a synopsis of the history of scholarship on Wang Yangming during this transformative period and to highlight important philosophical insights for the benefit of future scholarship.

In 1972, from June 12–16, a conference sponsored by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii was held in Honolulu as part of its continuing East–West Philosophers' Conference Program. The conference, titled *Wang Yangming: A Comparative Study*, commemorated the great Ming philosopher's fifth birth centenary. It was attended by many of the scholars who had published or would publish about him and Ming philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s. These were the two decades during which the study of Song and Ming Dynasty Neo-Confucianism rapidly advanced in North America. Wing-tsit Chan (1901–1994), who was then 71 and a professor of philosophy at Chatham College in Pittsburgh, presented a paper (1973, pp. 9–30) on Zhan Ruoshui's influence on Wang Yangming. Cheng Zhongying (b. 1935), then 37 and an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Hawaii, presented a paper (1973, pp. 49–72) on the metaphysics of Wang's philosophy of mind. Thomé Fang (1899–1978), then 73 and professor of philosophy at National Taiwan University, presented a paper (1973, pp. 73–90) on central tenets in Wang Yangming's philosophy. The relatively young Du Weiming (b. 1940), who was an assistant professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, presented a paper (1973, pp. 187–206) on the subjectivity and ontology in Wang's thought. At 49 and as a professor of philosophy at Stanford University, David Nivison (1923–2014), presented a paper (1973, pp. 121–38) on existentialism in Wang's moral philosophy.

Other prominent scholars gave papers on followers of Wang Yangming or aspects of the Wang Yangming school of thought. Tang Junyi (1909–1978), then professor of philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, gave a paper on Wang's contemporary critics; Mou Zongsan (1909–1975), professor of philosophy at the New Asia College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, gave a paper on Wang Ji's theory of the four negations; and Okada Takehiko (1908–2004), professor of philosophy at Seinan-Gakuin University, gave a paper on the Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming schools at the end of the Ming and Tokugawa Periods. One year later, in 1973, these papers were published in an issue of *Philosophy East and West*.²

Although two of the most important contributors to the English-language scholarship on Wang Yangming published during these two decades—Julia Ching (1934–2001) and Carsun Chang (Zhang Junmai, 1887–1969)—were not in attendance (Ching was in Australia and Chang had passed away in San Francisco in 1969), this conference symbolized the extent to which scholarship about him had advanced in North America during the second half of the twentieth century. The University of Hawaii’s Department of Philosophy had been established in 1936 under the leadership of Charles A. Moore and Wing-tsit Chan. Their hope was that this institution would both introduce the major ideas and distinctive ways of thinking in Asian cultures to the world of Western philosophy and foster a global community where comparative philosophical discussion could take place. Beginning in 1939, East–West Philosophers’ Conferences were held periodically with the goal of bringing together distinguished scholars from all over the world to present papers on East–West comparative themes.

Prior to the 1972 conference, which was one in a series of smaller conferences on individual philosophers that convened between 1968 and 1974, six major East–West Philosophers’ Conferences had been held. Not surprisingly, many of the distinguished scholars attending it, such as Wing-tsit Chan, Thomé Fang, Tang Junyi, and Cheng Zhongying, had participated in earlier ones (Fifty years of the Department of Philosophy, University of Hawaii, 1988, pp. 224–30). Here was a circle of scholars who were familiar with one another’s work and were actively introducing Chinese thought to the West.

Regarding this conference, in her opening remarks Yamasaki (1973, p. 7) stated that one goal was to achieve ‘greater mutual understanding and sharing of Eastern and Western philosophical ideas and ideals.’ Concerning Wang Yangming, she noted that ‘his ideas were introduced to the West around the turn of the century and within approximately the last fifteen years, he has attracted a significant degree of interest from persons outside his own country.’ That was true, as the conference itself amply testified. As we have seen, however, Wang Yangming also attracted a degree of attention in Europe and North America during the first half of the twentieth century.

In his monograph on Wing-tsit Chan, Cui Yujun noted that when measured by the quantity and scope of publication, Chinese studies in the United States saw a ‘dramatic change’ after the 1950s. There were several reasons for this. First, in the aftermath of World War II, the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and the Cold War, government and private foundation funding for research on China increased, resulting in a growing number of academic institutions (departments, programs, and classes), journals, conferences, and publications devoted to Chinese studies (Cui, 2010, pp. 93–103). Second, in terms of human resources, many Americans who had spent time in Asia because of World War II returned to the United States with both the skills to study China and an interest in doing so. Last, also because of the wars and shifting political scene in Asia, including the founding of the PRC, many Chinese academics relocated to the United States. As Cui (2010, p. 93) explained, ‘This group of Chinese and American scholars became the principal force behind research on Chinese philosophy in the United States after the 1950s.’

All those who presented papers on Wang Yangming in 1972 illustrate some features of this broader historical context. Here, we consider scholars who wrote more extensively about Wang Yangming for an English-language audience, especially David Nivison and Wing-tsit Chan. Following, because Julia Ching and Carsun Chang also illustrate

these patterns and published about Wang Yangming in the 1960s or the 1970s, their work and the background to it will be described and explained.³ Where they relate to the contributions of these authors, miscellaneous articles published by other scholars will be discussed.

David Nivison, for example, had his program of classical studies at Harvard University interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. He was drafted and then assigned to learn Japanese and serve as a codebreaker. After the war, he returned to Harvard but changed his major to Chinese, earning an AB in Far Eastern Languages in 1946. He then completed a doctorate in Chinese philosophy in 1953 (his dissertation was on Zhang Xuecheng). While studying at Harvard in 1948, he was also hired by the Oriental Languages Department at Stanford University. He would remain at Stanford, actively involved with several departments (East Asian Languages and Cultures, Philosophy, and Religious Studies), until his retirement in 1988 (Van Norden, 'Obituary').

The first of Nivison's three papers on Wang Yangming grew out of discussions with other academics at Stanford. He collaborated with colleagues in the philosophy department, often holding fruitful conversations with Donald Davidson, a prominent student of W. V. Quine (Van Norden, 2015). One issue they discussed was the problem of 'weakness of will'—that is, how and why a person fails to do what he or she knows to be right. Recognizing that this problem was not only pondered in the West going all the way back to Socrates but also discussed in Chinese philosophy, and especially by Wang Yangming, Nivison, 1953, pp. 112–45) wrote a paper titled 'The Problem of "Knowledge" and "Action" in Chinese Thought since Wang Yang-ming.'

The institutional setting for this essay's publication is worth noting. In 1951, John King Fairbank had contacted several scholars with a shared interest in China's intellectual traditions. They met and formed the Committee on Chinese Thought. This was a sub-committee of the Committee on Far Eastern Studies sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Far Eastern Association. Members had a shared interest in finding fresh approaches to Chinese thought and, to that end and with funding from the Ford Foundation, held a conference on this subject in Colorado in 1952 (Wright, 1953, p. ix). That is where Nivison, who was then completing his Ph.D. at Harvard and also serving as an instructor of Chinese at Stanford, first presented this work.

Nivison's conference paper was published together with the others the next year in *Studies in Chinese Thought*, a volume edited by another professor at Stanford, Arthur F. Wright. In the 'Introduction,' Wright (1953, p. 1) observed that the 'Western interest in Chinese thought has persisted for more than three centuries. Despite that interest there has been to date little sustained, objective, and systematic study of Chinese thought.' Although he was somewhat exaggerating the case, with contributions from such scholars as Joseph Levenson, Derke Bodde, and William Theodore de Bary, the volume did signal a new stage in the study of Chinese intellectual history in the United States, just as David Nivison's chapter signaled a different kind of scholarship on Wang Yangming.

Nivison, however, did not go on to publish a scholarly monograph on the Ming philosopher. His interests were wide-ranging, and he worked in many areas of Chinese philosophy and history. His next paper on Wang was the one presented at the 1972 conference. But as Bryan W. Van Norden (2015) explains, 'many of Nivison's most interesting essays were delivered at conference presentations and remained

unpublished, circulating among a small but admiring group of other scholars as photocopies or even blue “ditto-sheet” copies.’ For example, in 1973, the very year his conference paper was published in *Philosophy East and West*, Nivison was also giving talks about Wang Yangming at universities in California. The paper for those was only published in 1996 as part of an edited volume containing articles on many topics. Interestingly, according to Van Norden (Nivison, 2009, p. 308), knowing that Wang was suspicious of the educational value of the written word, ‘Nivison preferred to leave the chapter in the informal, conversational style in which it was originally delivered.’

Even with this informal style, *The Philosophy of Wang Yangming* provided a remarkably sensitive overview of Wang’s theory of mind and program for moral self-cultivation. For Nivison (2009, p. 218), Wang is a philosopher concerned with ‘standard problems,’ such as ‘the relation of mind to body, the mind’s place in nature, [and] the way the mind works.’ But, these concerns are secondary to his ethics: ‘He is always a moralist, interested in straightening out people and society, teaching people how to make themselves better persons.’ Furthermore, his moral philosophy has a powerful psychological and religious dimension. In terms of psychology, Nivison (2009, p. 218) stated, ‘he is constantly engaging in a sort of inner phenomenological scrutiny of moral experience.’ As for the religious dimension to his thought, he demonstrates a messianic sense of mission, uses the language of mysticism to point to ‘a transcendent and imminent higher reality that all people ... somehow partake of, ordinarily without being aware of it’ (p. 218), teaches the soteriological goal of moral perfection (sagehood), and describes *liangzhi* (pure knowing) in such a way as to make it a “god within” and without—‘an object of faith’ (p. 220). Lastly, Nivison said that Wang articulates a path of self-transformation leading to ‘the good state—total anxiety free effectiveness, “pure knowing” illuminating every response, the mind like a mirror so that we “roam the universe with the creator”’ (p. 224). Throughout the paper, Nivison explained these philosophical, psychological, and religious elements of Wang’s philosophy in some detail.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, as Ming Confucian philosophy was being translated into and interpreted in English, some scholars sought to bring Wang Yangming’s thought and the *learning of mind* into dialogue with existentialism, phenomenology, and existential phenomenology. In response to an essay Okada Takehiko published in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, titled ‘Wang Chi and the Rise of Existentialism,’ Nivison presented a paper at the 1972 conference examining whether Wang Yangming’s ideas about how moral decisions are made contained existential dimensions.

At times, Nivison (1973, pp. 123–24) noted, Wang seems to suggest that the mind has no inherent direction other than the direction it gives itself in acting. Insofar as the ‘moral truth is just given in the mind and the mind just is its acts in particular situations,’ Wang’s ethics appear radically situational and in some sense existential. Furthermore, both the apophatic terminology used to describe the mind and the language of spontaneity and immediacy used to describe the functioning of *liangzhi* (‘pure knowing’) suggest parallels to existential ideas concerning nothingness, free choice, and authenticity (Nivison, 1973, pp. 123–24). However, while fleshing out these apparent similarities, Nivison also highlighted fundamental differences. Existentialists, for example, generally reject the notion of human nature and an objectively definable good that can be revealed to reason and provide the basis for moral judgment. Wang Yangming, on the other hand, believed that ‘each human

does, after all, have a nature or direction that we may well call the “substance” of the mind, which is not reducible without remainder to whatever might actually happen to be one’s mental and intentional acts’ (Nivison, 1973, p. 134).

But, Nivison was neither the first nor the last to write such a comparative study. Just five years later, in 1978, Ching (1978, pp. 3–27) composed a penetrating comparative study of the thought of Wang Yangming and Martin Heidegger. She referenced not only Nivison’s contribution but also the pioneering work of Hwa Yol Jung, the first to write about this topic in English. A Korean-American political theorist and philosopher who spent most of his academic career at Moravian College, Jung (1931–2017) published a substantial English-language study (1965, pp. 621–36) in the journal *International Philosophical Quarterly* in 1965. Titled ‘Wang Yang-ming and Existential Phenomenology,’ the article is groundbreaking for the clarity with which it brings into dialogue seemingly distinct philosophical traditions, all of which had (and still have) a reputation for being abstruse, esoteric, and difficult to read. Subsequently, in 1969 (pp. 169–88), 1986 (pp. 19–38), and then as late as 2013 (pp. 461–87), Jung carried this discussion further. The last article (Jung, 2013, p. 462) explains why he felt so passionate about writing about this:

As a neophyte in philosophy who had just begun in earnest to study phenomenology and existential philosophy in the era of positivist dominance under the tutelage of the American philosopher John Wild at Northwestern University in the fall of 1961, I wrote an experimental essay on Wang Yangming in the hopes of showing an affinity between him and existential phenomenology or the “second school” of phenomenology, which hybridizes Søren Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy in the 19th century and Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology in the 20th century.

The major reason for writing this essay on Wang Yangming and existential phenomenology was simply to counteract Eurocentrism prevalent in the long tradition of modern Western philosophy ... which regards the non-West, for example, China and India, as non-philosophy, while the West monopolizes the universal truth of philosophy. If I showed, I thought, an affinity between Wang Yangming and existential phenomenology, that is to say, if I elevated the comparable status of the former to the level of the latter, Chinese thought exemplified in Wang Yangming would legitimately be a philosophy, not just a species of intellectual thought.

Julia Ching and Hwa Yol Jung recognized the seemingly insurmountable cultural and linguistic gaps between these distinct traditions, but they also aspired to the universal by finding common ground. Ching’s decision to focus on two philosophers whom she believed showed a ‘basic compatibility’ was wise (1978, p. 3). That she could also read German and Chinese, among other languages, made the fruits of her research even more compelling. On the European side, Jung cast the net far wider, over a ‘diverse’ group of thinkers: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, John Wild, and Martin Buber. Jung had obviously read deeply into the French-, German-, and English-language literature pertaining to existentialism and phenomenology, whereas, for Wang Yangming, he appears to have relied largely on primary-source material translated into English by Wing-tsit Chan. Jung (1965, p. 636) hoped that the tools of existential phenomenology would help to build a bridge between East and West, perhaps even opening a path to articulating ‘a phenomenology of phenomenologies.’ Although that has not yet happened, comparative inquiry along the lines pursued by both of these

scholars has continued to bear fruit up to the present, most notably in the work of the Lu (2014, pp. 197–211) and the German philosopher Iso Kern (2010).

Although the synoptic quality of their articles makes it impossible to go over all the points of comparison they raise, a few stand out. Jung (1965, p. 622) stated that both phenomenology and Wang Yangming are concerned with examining the world from the perspective of the subject. He finds parallels between Wang Yangming's concept of *xin* (mind) and *yi* (will; intention) and what the phenomenologists describe as consciousness and intentionality. Both define things or objects in terms of how they appear to and become meaningful to persons in acts of consciousness. Furthermore, Jung (1965, p. 627) found parallels between the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) and pre-reflective knowledge and Wang Yangming's description of the functioning of *xin* and *liangzhi* (intuitive knowledge).

In German phenomenology, the life-world is the world as directly or immediately experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life. Pre-reflective knowledge is a type of intuitive awareness that is prior to reflection and orients the individual to the lived world in a very practical sense. Jung believes that *liangzhi* is similarly pre-reflective and intuitive, as a type of knowledge that guides the individual in everyday life. In sum, 'there is a close affinity between the philosophy of Wang Yangming and existential phenomenology both in their approach and spirit, particularly in their philosophical spirit, which shuns much of the traditional speculative conundrums and chimera of abstraction in the name of humanity' (Jung, 1965, 636). However, in his interpretation of Wang Yangming, Jung might be criticized for minimizing the moral and metaphysical import of *liangzhi*, which is the inborn capacity to distinguish and do what is right and, therefore, to become sagely. This seems quite different from a phenomenological description of the operation of pre-reflective knowledge in the life-world, even if the intent in both cases is analysis of how people act and make decisions in everyday life.

Ching (1978, pp. 6–7) claimed that both Heidegger and Wang Yangming have a central concept around which all their other concepts revolved. For Heidegger, that is the ontology of *Dasein* (being); for Wang, it is mind. Both posit a dialectic of the hidden and manifest, whereby what is real has been forgotten or obscured and is in need of rediscovery: 'For both men, truth is basically that which is hidden, yet awaiting manifestation. Thus, on the personal, existential level, both accord in emphasizing the need to achieve authenticity in one's personal life, to become in truth what one is' (Ching, 1978, p. 7). Likewise, also for both, the aspiration to authenticity developed out of a youthful striving for self-fulfillment and for finding meaning in life. They built their philosophies around a kind of visionary moment of truth, an existential moment 'which marks the passage from inauthenticity to authenticity' (p. 21). For Wang Yangming, that was the enlightenment he had in Longchang, Guizhou, when he discovered the identity of mind and principle (*xin ji li*); for Heidegger that was a 'moment of vision' when 'Dasein has brought itself back from falling' (Ching, 1978, p. 22). Last, both men drew on traditions of speculation about the dialectic of the latent and manifest. For Heidegger, Ching (1978, p. 24) stated, 'it may be traced to Plato and Plotinus, and is especially characteristic of the great mystics, of those philosophers who have incorporated and articulated the insights of mysticism. I refer here to Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, and Hegel himself, but also to Heidegger's contemporaries, the mystic Teilhard de Chardin and the philosopher A.N. Whitehead.' In China, of course,

similar speculation (about, for example, substance and function, or ontological ground and practice) can be found in all the major traditions, Daoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism.

The Chinese-American scholars who presented papers on Wang Yangming at the conference are equally illustrative of historical patterns in the second half of the twentieth century. They were also more important contributors to this scholarship, at least as measured by quantity. By 1972, Wing-tsit Chan had contributed the most. His *Oral Biography* (Bloom, 1995, pp. 327–347) provides some insight into how he ended up publishing about Chinese philosophy in the United States. Like other Chinese scholars who migrated to the West and then published in English, he grew up in the semi-colonial environment of early twentieth-century China and was therefore compelled to live between East and West. Likewise, the turmoil of the 1930s and the 1940s played an important role in his decision to relocate to the United States. Thus, prior to studying at Harvard and obtaining his PhD in 1929, Chan's intellectual development had been shaped by a traditional Chinese upbringing and education but also by his study of modern subjects taught by Americans or Western-trained teachers at a Christian missionary school (Canton Christian College, which was later renamed Lingnan University).

In 1935, after having served as Dean of Academic Affairs at Lingnan for six years, Chan took a visiting professorship at the University of Hawaii. After returning to Lingnan briefly, he accepted a full-time position at Hawaii, leaving China just before the Japanese invasion in the summer of 1937. That move launched his long career in the United States. As he explained in his interview (Bloom, 1995, p. 343), because the war prevented him from returning to China, 'I decided I would stay, and the whole family would stay here permanently.' He also explained that these decisions left him feeling that he had somehow failed China because he did not take part in the Japanese resistance or contribute to the reconstruction of China. Nevertheless, he found some consolation in his scholarship: 'Of course, I can say that I have been spreading Chinese culture in the United States, and honestly I believe I have done and have tried to do a good job' (p. 342).

Chan did indeed do a fantastic job. What stands out about his work is the extraordinary volume of high-quality educational materials he published, all of which became so important for both undergraduate and graduate education as well as for making Chinese philosophy more widely available to the public. Thus, although he would become most well known in East Asia for his large corpus of scholarship on Zhu Xi, students in the United States encountered him through his guided translations of Chinese philosophy and, less so, his encyclopedia contributions. Regarding the latter, Chan quipped, 'I perhaps have had a monopoly on encyclopedia writings on Chinese philosophy' (Bloom, 1995, p. 334).

The 1960s was the decade during which he produced most of his translations, including his widely utilized *Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (1963). At this point, he was professor of philosophy at Chatham College and emeritus professor of Chinese culture and philosophy at Dartmouth College. But, he also translated other major works that same year, such as the *Chuan xi lu (Instructions for Practical Living, and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming)* (Chan, 1963a), *Dao de jing (The Way of Lao Tzu: A Translation and Study of the Tao-Te Ching)*, *Liu zu tan jing (The Platform Scripture, the Basic*

Classic of Zen Buddhism by Hui-neng), and the *Jin si lu* (*Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology* by Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-Ch'ien).

Wing-tsit Chan's choice of texts for translation was dictated by the state of English-language scholarship on Chinese philosophy in the 1950s. According to Cui (2010, p. 244), this decade was 'a turning point in [Chan's] academic life.' He saw that in Europe and the United States, scholarship on Tang Buddhism and Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism was lacking, and therefore he sought to introduce this literature more completely, especially Neo-Confucianism and the philosophy of Zhu Xi. That is where the state of American scholarship had led him (Cui, 2010, p. 244–46).

Almost all of Chan's publications on Wang Yangming date to the 1960s and early 1970s. For a broader public, he published 'Wang Yangming' entries in three major encyclopedias—*Encyclopedia Britannica* (1960, 1967), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), and *Encyclopedia Americana* (1969). For students of Chinese philosophy, he produced important translations of Wang Yangming's work that became standard reference material for scholars writing in English. Chapter 35 of his *Sourcebook* (pp. 654–91), 'Dynamic Idealism in Wang Yang-ming,' includes the *Inquiry on the Great Learning* and selections from the *Instructions for Practical Living*. The copyright page for the first edition (1963) indicates the kind of institutional support he found for this major project. Published by Princeton University Press, the primary source of support was a grant from the Ford Foundation for publication of work in the humanities and social sciences through university presses.

Chan also collaborated with William Theodore de Bary in producing what was destined to become the most widely utilized primary source reader for studying Chinese history: *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. First published in 1960, it included a chapter with an introduction to selections from Wang Yangming's writings. This book was just one of the many fruits of the growing collaboration between these two scholars. Beginning from the 1960s, they played a pivotal role in the introduction of Neo-Confucianism to the English-language world.

Chan and de Bary first met in 1949 at China's Lingnan University. De Bary was then instrumental in bringing Chan to Columbia as an instructor in 1964 and as a visiting professor in 1966 (Cui, 2010, pp. 270–271). Together, they arranged seminars and conferences on Neo-Confucianism at Columbia University and promoted the publication of much scholarship on this topic and late imperial China's intellectual history. Thus, Wing-tsit Chan's scholarly work on Wang Yangming was one component of their broader efforts in the 1960s and the 1970s to make Neo-Confucianism more widely available to and understood by students in American universities. No doubt, Chan's most important publication was the *Instructions for Practical Living, and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming*. This book includes a complete translation of the *Chuan xi lu*, the *Inquiry on the Great Learning*, as well as documents representative of Wang Yangming's social and political thought and policies. Chan also included bibliographies for the English, Chinese, and Japanese scholarship on Wang, thus encapsulating the state of the field as of 1963. For his translations, he used the *Si bu congkan* (Four Branches Collectanea) edition of the *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* (Complete works of Sir Wang Wencheng).

The *Instructions* was one volume in a larger set of translations of Asian historical materials made possible through funds granted by the Carnegie Foundation. This series,

'Records of Civilizations: Sources and Studies,' was edited by members of the history department at Columbia University, and the books were published by Columbia University Press. De Bary was responsible for editing East Asian publications. In fact, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* was also published through this venue.

Aside from providing translations of Wang Yangming's work for students in the English-reading world, Chan and de Bary also wrote about Wang Yangming. However, while Chan published four journal articles—including a study of the extent to which Wang's philosophy was Buddhist (1962a, pp. 203–216), a comparative study of Wang and Zhan Ruoshui (1973, pp. 9–30), a brief biography (1972a, pp. 63–74), and an annotated bibliography (1972, pp. 75–92)—de Bary did not produce scholarship solely focused on Wang. As it is well known, he rather wrote wide-ranging interpretations of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism or, more specifically, about the Wang Yangming school in the late-Ming and Huang Zongxi.

Both scholars praised Wang Yangming. It goes without saying that they thoroughly admired the person and found his life story compelling, sentiments they convey to their readers. They also rightly stressed his great importance to China's intellectual history. In his preface to the *Instructions* (p. xi), Chan wrote, 'The *Instructions for Practical Living* (*Chuan xi lu*) has been chosen for translation for the simple reason that no one can adequately understand Chinese thought without having read this work in its entirety. This embodiment of Wang Yangming's philosophy is indisputably the most important Chinese philosophical classic since the early thirteenth century.' In the *Sourcebook*, De Bary (1999, p. 842) observed that among vibrant developments in the intellectual and cultural activity of the Ming, 'it was the teachings and personal example of Wang Yangming that were to have the most explosive effect.' Wang's dynamic conception of self and sagehood, and the 'near revolution in sage learning' brought about by his reformulation of 'the learning of the mind-heart,' De Bary (1999, p. 843) wrote, 'came to dominate the intellectual scene during the sixteenth century almost as if they represented a new orthodoxy.'

Both scholars also highlighted Wang's humanism, valuing of subjectivity, emphasis on ethical conduct, and stress on the ultimate goal for the individual: realizing the oneness of self with all things. They found, too, that his thought had a liberating quality. Concerning his philosophy, Chan, 1963b, p. xi) stated that 'it set Chinese thought free. It created a new philosophy and it restored Confucianism to its central emphasis on purpose and action.' De Bary (1970, p. 151) found that his subjective approach 'opened up almost unlimited possibilities for individual development and self-expression.' Thus, Wang's conception of sagehood 'opened the way to a kind of "popular" movement involving a greater potential participation of ordinary men in the fulfillment of Confucian ideals' (De Bary, 1970, p. 150).

On the other hand, both scholars were at times critical of Wang Yangming. Chan believed that in terms of his theory of knowledge, Wang had narrowed the field of intellectual inquiry strictly to moral inquiry. Regarding the investigation of things (*ge wu*), he changed it from what Zhu Xi had intended. Whereas Zhu had interpreted 'investigating things' as rational and objective inquiry, Wang redirected it solely to moral introspection. For him, a person shall apply himself to interpreting the moral quality of emerging thoughts and desires so that he can proactively do good and remove evil. Chan, 1963b, p. 655) concluded that, 'philosophically, Wang's position is

weak because it entirely neglects objective study and confuses reality with value.’ He characterized Wang’s philosophy as a kind of naïve idealism.

De Bary (1970, p. 151) believed that, although Wang’s ideas fostered individualism during the later Ming, his own understanding of *liangzhi* ‘was based on the assumption of a common moral nature,’ something that was ‘almost Wang’s fundamental article of faith.’ For that reason, ‘individual differences were for him of secondary importance, and the value of the individual in his uniqueness is not something Wang dwells on.’ Consequently, although he sought to free the individual from within by pointing to the autonomous source of moral knowledge, Wang Yangming did not believe that acting on it would lead to radical social reforms or any kind of restructuring of traditional social relationships and obligations. Thus, he strongly emphasized community over the individual and, at times, appeared to be a ‘hopeless traditionalist and idealist ... naively addicted to moralistic solutions of complex cultural problems’ (De Bary, 1970, p. 153).

Over time, Wing-tsit Chan’s translation efforts gave impetus to growth in scholarship on Wang Yangming. Reviews (Nivison, 1964, pp. 436–42) were generally positive and found his translation of the *Chuan xi lu* to have surpassed the work of Frederick Henke. Specialists and students both able and unable to read Chinese routinely consulted it and cited it in their work. Mostly that happened from the 1980s forward, when a larger body of literature began to appear. But there were some earlier publications that benefited from it. For example, Paul Wienpahl (1916–1980), a philosophy professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, wrote two articles, one titled ‘Wang Yang-ming and Meditation’ (1969) and the other ‘Wang Yang-ming and Spinoza.’ Most of Wienpahl’s career was spent writing about Japanese Zen Buddhism and Spinoza. Unable to read Chinese, he relied entirely on Chan’s translation, even if he was dissatisfied with some of it. He believed, for example, that translating *liangzhi* as ‘innate knowledge’ would call to mind theories of knowledge put forward by Plato and Descartes. He found that Carsun Chang’s use of ‘intuitive’ more correctly conveyed the meaning.

As for his first article on Wang Yangming, Wienpahl argued that a close reading of the *Instructions* demonstrated both that he was a practiced meditator and that sitting in meditation was a critical element of his teaching throughout his life. Wienpahl (1974, p. 210) claimed that the goal of meditation was to achieve oneness or unity: ‘non-dualism is the goal.’ That goal was also sometimes described as the ‘desire to form one body with all things.’ Furthermore, although Wang found many pitfalls in meditation, it was nevertheless a way of life for him. Wienpahl (1974, p. 220) was impressed by how, for Wang, ‘all of life is meditation’ because one is meditating whether tranquil or active.

Regarding Spinoza and Wang Yangming, Wienpahl drew many comparisons, even if only in an exploratory fashion. Of most interest, perhaps, is the comparison between *liangzhi* (‘innate knowledge of the good’) and Spinoza’s notion of the intuitive knowledge. For Spinoza, at an intuitive level of understanding the distinction between ideas and objects disappear. Ideas transition from book knowledge to active knowledge, and we become free relative to the extent to which ideas are adequate. This intuitive knowledge also gives rise to universal love and the intellectual love of God. That love is eternal, has no beginning, and possesses all the perfections of love. Finally, the virtuous man is the man who knows intuitively—that is, a man who lives in accordance with reason and, therefore, according to his true nature. All these ideas, Wienpahl

believed (1969, pp. 22–27), found parallels in Wang Yangming’s understanding of the innate knowledge of the good and the unity of all things in the world.

One other scholar present at the 1972 conference who has also contributed important English-language work on Wang Yangming was Du Weiming (Tu Wei-ming). After graduating in 1961 with a BA in from Tunghai University (where he had studied under such modern new Confucians as Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan), Du went to the United States on a Harvard-Yenching Institute scholarship. He completed a Ph.D. in History and East Asian Languages and Civilizations in 1968, and first taught at Princeton University from 1967 to 1971. His dissertation (Tu 1968), ‘The Quest of Self-Realization: A Study of Wang Yang-ming’s Formative Years,’ documents Wang Yangming’s youth with the goal of elucidating formative intellectual influences and how he reached his first set of fundamental doctrines after his experience of enlightenment in Guizhou in 1509. This is what Du revised and published in 1976 as a book titled *Neo-Confucianism in Action: Wang Yang-ming’s Youth (1472–1509)*.

Explaining the origins of his project, Du Weiming wrote, ‘My research led me to believe that the single most important perennial concern in Yang-ming’s formative years was his quest for sagehood defined in terms of Confucian symbolism’ (1976, p. xi). Thus, Du (p. xii) found it necessary to explore ‘not only what sagehood really means but also how it can be attained.’ For him, Wang saw sagehood primarily as an ethico-religious ideal and viewed attaining it as a dynamic process of transformation. Du’s ‘analysis of the first crystallization of Yang-ming’s thought in his quest for sagehood’ (p. xii) therefore includes exploration of religious and psychological dimensions. Those concerns were, no doubt, stimulated by his having studied Neo-Confucian metaphysics under modern New-Confucians in East Asia and also by his exposure to Western psychological theory while studying under Robert Bellah, Erik H. Erikson, and Benjamin Schwartz at Harvard University (Tu, 1976, p. xv).

One scholar who was unable to attend the 1972 conference but was certainly as qualified as anyone there to speak about Wang Yangming was Julia Ching. At that time, she was likely in Australia, where she held a position as a tenured lecturer at Australian National University. ANU was also the alma mater for her doctoral work. The title of the dissertation she defended in 1971 had the same name as the book it became in 1976: ‘To Acquire Wisdom: The “Way” of Wang Yangming.’

The path to her Ph.D. work was long and winding. Born in Shanghai in 1934, Ching spent the first 15 years of her life moving between Shanghai and Hong Kong. Not surprisingly, referring to air raids in Shanghai, Ching (1998, p. 11) recounted that ‘my earliest memories are of war.’ First, her family fled to Hong Kong after the Japanese invasion, and then, after returning to Shanghai, her father’s close connections to the Nationalists required them to flee when the Communists took over in 1949 (p. 16).⁴ Nevertheless, throughout that time she was able to attend Catholic schools in both cities, something that led to a major life decision. Ching moved to the United States and, in 1951, began attending the College of New Rochelle, a Catholic women’s college. Two statements in her autobiography explain the impact of these formative early years. Ching (1998, p. 9) highlighted how ‘birth and circumstances conspired to place me between two cultures, between east and west,’ and says that ‘the constant wandering, the uprooting and re-rooting, became a theme in my life’ (p. 19). Such shuffling

between continents led her to be 'always aware of my smallness and aloneness in a sea of humanity, whose waves threaten to engulf me' (p. 19). Clearly, the foundation for her extraordinary ability to write between cultures was laid early in life. Additionally, engaging in the study of comparative religions and philosophy inspired her intense search for meaning.

For the next two decades, Ching's life was largely shaped by her religious vocation. Believing that she had a 'calling from god' (Ching, 1998, p. 20), she entered the Catholic Ursuline Order as a novice in 1953. Then, upon finishing her B.A., she entered the Catholic University of America, where she finished an M.A. in 1960. In 1963, after a brief stint serving as a private tutor in Paris, Ching went to Taiwan to teach as a novitiate nun. She was placed at a mission school in Hualian, at the time an underdeveloped part of the island largely populated by native Taiwanese.

Those familiar with her work will know that Julia Ching wrote much about Chinese religions but also about the religious dimensions of Chinese philosophy, especially the philosophies of Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi. Her approach to scholarship was influenced by her own lifelong, intense search for meaning and transcendence. Early on in her novitiate, for example, Ching (1998, pp. 34–36) avidly pursued her religious calling; with her 'soul yearning for communion,' she took very seriously 'finding god,' doing the proper readings and meditations, and steeping herself 'in the liturgical mysteries' to the point that she became 'spiritually intoxicated,' and 'strong spiritual emotions rose to the fore.'

But the time she spent in Taiwan, where she remained from 1963 to 1967, eventually led her in a different direction that culminated both in her obtaining a Ph.D. in Chinese philosophy and then, in the following year, leaving the religious order altogether for an academic career. In sum, the contradictions in Taiwan's post-colonial environment, where French-speaking nuns from Belgium, Canada, and France were missionizing the Taiwanese children in a language Ching little understood, troubled her personally. She notes (1998, p. 43) that this experience left her 'in culture shock during my whole time there.' She witnessed firsthand how another Chinese nun who, although competent in French, still became unhappy, ate less, and then decided this was not her vocation and departed (pp. 43–44). Ching simply felt alienated by these circumstances. She also fell afoul of her mother superior, with whom she spoke frankly about concerns she held, 'confessing' them before her.

This was a critical turning point in her life. Julia Ching (1998, p. 44) recounted that upon leaving her office, she 'felt a psychological release' that left her at peace, as if she was 'buoyed up by a strange sense of the divine presence within, and by communion with the universe of mountains and trees without.' This happy state persisted for months, just when Ching began to spend her free time at the school library reading Chinese literature, history, and philosophy. Her recollections (1998, pp. 44–45) about this moment in her life bring out clearly where she was going intellectually and reveal why she chose to study Wang Yangming at the Australian National University:

I spent whole weekends reading, so absorbed at times that I could hardly stop in the evening. I had received a Chinese education much earlier. Now I was giving myself a refresher course, while also deepening my understanding.

The great human being is one with heaven and earth and all things [her italicization]. I was fascinated by such lines in Chinese philosophy, which reflected my own spiritual experience.

One with heaven and earth and all things. Even *one body with heaven and earth and all things.* There is perceived unity between soul and body, and there is crossing of the boundary between the human and the natural. For the human body is the microcosm, while the universe is the macrocosm.

There were great philosophers, who aimed at becoming sages. Not so different from my quest for holiness. Their philosophies were not separate from their lives. And their lives were not split between soul and body.

From my readings I was acquiring a new respect for Confucius and those who were his followers. Especially Mencius and Wang Yangming. Those men were committed to improving society. Some of them were mystics, *one body with the universe.*

There is hidden meaning in what the Chinese classics say about birds flying and fish leaping, I murmured to myself. These creatures are showing their zest for life. Often, I repeated to myself the lines from my favorite philosopher, Wang Yangming: "As I sit in silence in the woods, the green mountains understood well my unspoken words."

The core of Chinese thought lies in the oneness of heaven and the human being in virtue. So we misunderstand China if we say that Chinese culture limits itself to external human relations or behavior, that it has no inner spiritual life or religious or metaphysical sentiment.

The shapers of Chinese culture always thought in the context of the great, wide world, of "all under heaven." *That is the difference between Chinese culture and the particular cultures of other countries with clear boundaries, of which it forms a part. But it remains the most important part, that which gives consciousness to the rest of the universe.*

And even in Taiwan, a place of exile for many Chinese, we can extend our minds to the great, wide world. Even if, as Plato would say, we live in a small spot on the earth like ants and frogs in a marsh, lodging around the sea. Or some may think we're like China's proverbial frog, looking at the sky from the bottom of the well. But the well is deep and can capture the moon, if not the sun itself.

I was returning home to Chinese culture. Another important development pushed her life in a new direction. In 1966, Julia Ching discovered lumps in her breast and became very ill. She had developed breast cancer at the shockingly young age of 32. For treatment, she went to Taipei, where she lived with relatives while undergoing surgery and radiation treatments. Then, in 1967, after having served briefly as dean of studies at the newly established Wenzao Ursuline College in Gaoxiong, she left Taiwan and spent time traveling and studying—in Rome, Vienna (where she studied German at Vienna University), Israel, Thailand, and then Australia. In Australia, she settled down into her doctoral program and began teaching. In 1969, she was appointed as a tenured lecturer.

In her autobiography, Ching (1998, p. 60) asked, "Why did I choose Chinese studies anyway?":

I had started out moving far away from things Chinese toward the compelling attractions of Western civilization. I only came back to the study of China as an adopted child looking for its natural parents.

I was deeply interested in the spiritual and religious dimension of Chinese thought. At a time when the Cultural Revolution made some disturbing headlines, and when the survival

of Chinese civilization was at stake, I felt a personal mission to keep the flame alive. That was in the late sixties. I ended up receiving a doctorate from the university.

Before publishing her book on Wang Yangming in 1976, Ching had served as a lecturer at ANU until 1974 and as a visiting associate professor at Columbia from 1974 to 1975, and then she moved to Yale University in 1975, where she was appointed associate professor of the East Asian Studies and Philosophy Department. During these years, the majority of her publications were about Wang Yangming. She published a book containing translations of many of his letters (Ching, 1971) as well as articles in *Numen* (1973b), *Oriens Extremus* (1973a), and the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1974). These articles were spun out of the book revision process. In addition, after publishing her book, she wrote the article comparing the thought of Martin Heidegger and Wang Yangming. While accomplishing all of this, she benefited greatly from conversations with such accomplished scholars as Okada Takehiko, William Theodore de Bary, Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Wing-tsit Chan, and Liu Cunyan, among others.

To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yangming remains the only work in English that systematically presents Wang Yangming's philosophy. As for why she wrote it, Ching (1976, p. xix) explained that, 'writing as a woman—and hence with a more personal note—it may be useful for me to say that the figure of Wang Yangming, with his restless energy for activity and social commitment, and his irrepressible yearning for stillness and contemplation, held an attraction for me which has been powerful and enduring.' She believed that in today's world, where intellectual pursuits favor technical specialization, study of the Chinese *rationale* as articulated by Wang reminds us of what it means to search for the good, to undertake a quest for wisdom, and to seek a more meaningful human existence (Ching, 1976, p. xix).

The merits of Julia Ching's book—and all her writing for that matter—are the clarity with which she presents complex philosophical ideas and her sensitivity to religious ideas and indeed profound questions of meaning. It goes without saying that her mastery of numerous languages and learned knowledge of philosophical and religious traditions East and West meant that she was able to write at a level few could match. Here, since it will be impossible to sum up the rich territory covered by her book, a few of her insights will be presented.

In her introduction, 'Truth and Ideology: The Confucian Way and Its Transmission,' Ching explains the background to Wang Yangming's thought in the evolution of Confucian philosophy from the Song to the early Ming Dynasty. She sees in that evolution an interplay between philosophical truths established by the great Confucian philosophers and the institutionalization of that philosophy by state authorities who, by so doing, sought ideological legitimation. During the early Ming, Ching writes (pp. 20–21), 'the price of government support, and of official promulgation in the whole country [of Zhu Xi commentaries on classical texts], was the loss of Confucianism's inner vitality, 'rigidity and stagnation.' Like others before him, Wang reacted against this prevailing orthodoxy, the ideologizing of Song Dynasty *Learning of Principle*, by returning 'to the sources of Confucian inspiration in the name of truth rather than ideology' (p. 2).

In chapter 1, 'Wang Yang-ming: The Man and the Philosopher,' Ching offers a brief intellectual biography while paying special attention to Wang's personality and

character. She states that ‘Yangming’s entire life was to become an expression of mad ardor. His was the daring of a magnanimous man, driven by a restless energy, to fulfill limitless ambitions, not for worldly success, but for the attainment of absolute values’ (p. 27). This is the passion that drove him throughout his life, both in his philosophical journey and in his rocky political career, as he weathered trials and opposition. Ching also explains his intellectual journey through the lens of the ‘Five Falls’ described by his friend, Zhan Ruoshui, and the ‘Three Changes’ documented by his principal student and biographer, Qian Dehong. The ‘Five Falls’ refers to Wang’s dabbling in knightly ventures, horsemanship and archery, literary arts, Daoism, and Buddhism before becoming committed to the learning of the sages in 1506, at age 34 (p. 36). The ‘Three Changes’ refers to the evolution of his principal precepts: the unity of knowledge and action, quiet meditation, and the extension of the innate knowledge of the good (p. 43). Ching (p. 50) concluded that Wang Yangming’s restless energy and ambition ultimately led him to a higher goal: ‘He was to reach beyond ardor, on to sagehood.’

In chapter 2, ‘The Starting Point: *Xin* [Mind],’ Ching (p. 56) explains why mind is central to Wang Yangming’s philosophy. Mind is the starting point because, ‘For him [Wang], *xin*, which is one with nature, is the source of all goodness as well as the principle of all conscious and moral activity, possessing within itself the power of conducting the human person to the highest goals of sagehood.’ That is, the mind is capable of self-transcendence, of perfecting itself. In its original, pristine state, it is one with *li*, ‘the source of all being and virtue,’ and ‘the totality of all goodness present in the universe as well as in man’ (p. 59). But, in all but the sage, the mind finds itself in an obscured state with imperfections, incompletely manifested and realized, its purity, simple goodness, and capacity to fully embody heavenly virtue blocked by selfish desires. To return to the pristine state, where the original substance of mind and therefore the highest good has again been fully realized and manifest, requires finding the right method. That is what Wang Yangming restlessly sought. Fortunately, it is none other than the mind’s capacity for self-transcendence that prompts the practice of virtue: ‘It is the moral or virtuous nature of *xin*, which manifests the presence of natural knowledge of the moral nature of human relationships and of a natural ability to act in accordance with such knowledge.’ By virtue of having this mind, all are capable of fully realizing their inherent goodness, of becoming perfected beings: ‘the mind-and-heart, is the self, which is both given and to be created, possessing the seed of perfection and yet in need of continual perfection, finding and fulfilling itself through testing itself in the ebb and flow of stillness and activity which makes up the whole of life’ (Ching, 1976, p. 73).

Chapter 3 also addresses issues of methods and the doctrines pertaining to them, in a preliminary way, covering in brief Wang Yangming’s theory of the unity of knowledge and action and the importance he placed on sitting in meditation. But Ching’s following two chapters, ‘The Controversies: *ge wu*’ and ‘The “Way” Discovered: *zhi liangzhi*,’ go more deeply into the practices Wang espoused. As it is well known, Wang did not accept Zhu Xi’s arrangement of the *Great Learning*, rather preferring the Old Edition. He believed that Zhu Xi had defined the practice of investigating things and extending knowledge in a manner that was overly onerous, unfocused, linear, and cumulative. If the goal remains realizing heavenly principle (*tianli*)—that is, acquiring wisdom and illuminating virtue—through recovering the pristine purity of the mind-heart, then the method must be tailored to its dynamic capacity for self-perfection. Hence, Wang made

'making the intention sincere' the principal message of the *Great Learning* and the starting point for self-cultivation. As well, he interpreted *ge wu* as 'rectifying affairs' (Ching, 1976, pp. 76–77). The focus is the mind in its every movement. Regardless, since the mind has this dynamic self-perfecting and self-determining capacity, by which its essential goodness is realized, authoritative texts and figures—such as Song commentaries, classical texts, and even Confucius—can only provide, with their spiritual richness, preliminary guidance to the individual. Ultimately, wisdom can only be rediscovered at its source—in one's own heart (pp. 102–103).

In chapter 4, Ching presents Wang Yangming's doctrine of extending knowledge of the good (*zhi liangzhi*). With it, he had finally formulated his long-sought universal method for attaining sagehood. The knowledge to be sought is good knowledge, a foundational, moral sense that is inborn but also acquired through practice. It is the original substance of mind (*xin zhi bentì*), mind in its purity, genuine sincerity and compassion, the mind of the Way (*daoxin*), the bright and spiritual expression of heavenly principle (*tianli*), and an inner forum discerning right and wrong. To extend this knowledge is to develop the capacity for virtue that the individual inherently possesses, enabling him 'to act according to his originally good nature by the practice of virtue leading to complete self-transcendence' (p. 106).

This is achieved primarily by allowing one's goodness to overflow into social responsibility. A moral doctrine requires moral action. But to extend knowledge is not merely to adhere to principles or to perform moral duties; rather, 'it is simply the great principle to do always in one's life what one's mind and heart says is right and good' (p. 114). As long as one acts morally, the mind will remain tranquil whether one is socially and politically active or withdrawn in contemplation. The original substance of mind is made known or manifested in righteous action, in what Mengzi refers to as 'accumulating righteousness (*ji yi*).' That is what extending the good knowledge entails. To the end of his life, this simple method remained Wang's infallible starting point for achieving sagehood. Wang Yangming saw it as the true and orthodox teaching of the sages of ancient times.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the culmination of Wang Yangming's teachings late in life. Ching finds (p. 126) in his philosophizing a kind of mysticism rooted in his having realized an enduring state of mind from which all reality is perceived as dynamic unity. Mind is not only the source of moral activity but also a vital consciousness uniting the individual to the universe. As the mind becomes ever more pure and transparent, its fundamental goodness, the fully humane heart, otherwise known as the original substance of the good knowing (*liangzhi bentì*), which is a higher order of ontological reality and the absolute, naturally and spontaneously reveals itself, culminating in an experience of 'oneness with Heaven and earth and all things' or, in other words, true sagehood (p. 126–127). His final teaching is of this self-transcending mind-in-itself (*xinti*) or *liangzhi*-in-itself (p. 159). As the ultimate reality and highest good, *liangzhi* provides the path to oneness, universality, and inclusiveness, redefining traditional divisions between orthodoxy and heresy, transcending conventional understandings of good and evil, and overflowing into social and political responsibility.

One other scholar who made important contributions to English-language scholarship on Wang Yangming was Carsun Chang (Zhang Junmai). Had he not passed away in San Francisco in 1969, the 1972 conference would have been incomplete without him.

Chang had published a paper on Wang in *Philosophy East and West* in 1955 (Chang 1955), a book about him in 1962, and an extensive chapter about him in volume 2 of his *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, which was also published in 1962.

Chang produced this scholarship as part of a broader corpus of English-language work on Confucianism dating back to the 1950s. In 1949, at 63, he departed China. Because of his associations with the Nationalist regime, Chang left just prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. At the invitation of the Ministry of Education in India, he first spent time in India on lecture tours. After briefly returning to Hong Kong in 1952, he relocated to the United States that same year, remaining there until he passed away in 1969 (although he was often traveling the world on lecture tours) (Liu & Luo, 1996, pp. 232–42). With his political activities diminishing, he spent more time on scholarly research and publication and was particularly concerned to explain and promote Confucian thought.

As it is well known, Chang is recognized as either a first- or second-generation modern New Confucian. Therefore, he has been categorized as one among a group of individuals who promoted this tradition because they saw it as being the essence of China's intellectual and cultural traditions, as well as having the potential to bring about moral regeneration and modernization in China. For this reason, he has also been labeled as a cultural conservative whose vision for China differed from those who embraced liberal or radical political ideologies (Zheng, 1999, p. 334).

Beginning in 1953, Tang Junyi traveled to the United States and visited Chang several times. They agreed that Chinese studies in the West were both underdeveloped and distorted by how missionaries had understood and transmitted Chinese traditions, by the practical emphasis of foreign affairs experts, and by what they perceived as a tendency on the part of sinologists to treat the objects of their study as historical curiosities (Zheng, 1999, p. 334). For them, Chinese historical culture was a living tradition with spiritual significance for both China and the world in modern times. In the 'Preface' (1957, p. 7) to his *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, Chang wrote of Chinese culture that it is a dynamic, vital organism. He pointed out that Western scholars had largely limited themselves to studies of the thought of Confucius and Laozi, as well as that of some of their contemporaries and successors, while largely neglecting the intellectual thought of the last 1500 years. He found this to be one-sided and mistaken.

Most important, Chang believed that Confucian traditions, especially the learning of the mind and nature in Neo-Confucianism, offered an ethics and metaphysics that addressed questions of meaning and values in ways that empiricism, scientism, and positivism could not. In cooperation with Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan, Chang issued a well-known declaration, the 'Manifesto on Behalf of Chinese Culture Respectfully Announced to the People of the World.' This Manifesto contains sections that explain what they believed the West should learn from the East. In the last one, 'Our Hopes for World Learning,' they wrote,

Humanity should engage in another type of study, one that does not merely regard nature and humans themselves objectively, as targets for sober-minded study. This learning, rather, should be the sort that treats humanity itself as an existential subject, and strive for the condition in which this existential subject gradually surpasses the ordinary and achieves sagehood, with their aspirations increasingly expanding and their wisdom becoming

increasingly lucid. Thus they can then reach the stage of being rounded and spiritual, where grand emotions are increasingly so deep that one's chest overflows with the benevolence of compassion and the mind of sympathy. This sort of study is not theology and it is not the study of external ethical norms or psychology. Rather, it is a type of study that connects knowledge and actions in order to allow for man to transcend his own existing body and ascend to spiritual enlightenment. This is what the Confucians called the Learning of the Mind and Nature or the Doctrine of Learning and Pattern, or the Learning of Sagehood. (Harris, pp. 27–28)

As Luo Yilin and Luo Qingfeng have pointed out (1996, p. 293), Chang thought that Wang Yangming had an especially important role to play in this regard and found him to be not only one of China's great philosophers but also a philosopher of global importance. These authors conclude that because of the extent to which Chang's writings about Wang Yangming reveal a deep reverence and respect, he was 'clearly Wang Yangming's pupil.'

The *Philosophy East and West* article, the chapter in *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, and the book *Wang Yang-ming: Idealist Philosopher of Sixteenth-Century China* largely traverse the same information about Wang Yangming. In fact, at 102 pages, the book is not much longer than Chang's survey history chapter, especially if the epilogue, 'A Study of Chinese Intuitionism,' is not included in the total. This book was published by the Institute of Asian Studies at St. John's University as the first in a series of studies on Chinese philosophers. 'If Zhu Xi during the Song period brought Confucian thought to its highest expression in the realm of cosmology,' wrote the Institute director, Paul T.K. Sih (Chang, 1962a, p. v-vi), 'Wang Yangming brought this same tradition to its finest expression in the realm of epistemology and possibly in ontology. Yet, there are few studies of Wang in any Western language.'

After a brief account of Wang Yangming's life, Chang (1962b, p. 13) outlined what he considered to be Wang's basic doctrines. He found that Wang was an ontological idealist who firmly believed in the intelligibility of the world and who held these ideas:

- (1) Man's mind is the mind of the universe.
- (2) The mind's knowing is the core of reality; that is, reality is contained in consciousness.
- (3) Through knowing, the principles of everything can be found; things are not external to us but are objects of consciousness.
- (4) The universe is a unity in which man is the mind or center; men comprise a brotherhood, and physical things show a spiritual affinity with mind.
- (5) If there were no mind or intuitive knowledge, the universe would not operate.
- (6) Matter, or the world of nature, is material for the mind to work with.

In what follows, as Wing-tsit Chan summarized it in his review (Chan, 1962b, pp. 458–59), Chang discusses Wang Yangming's theory of mind and the realization of intuitive knowledge (*zhi liangzhi*), providing substantial quotations from the *Inquiry on the Great Learning* and *Record of Practice*. He explains Wang's system of idealism by showing how he attempted to solve the problem of the dualisms of the individual and universe, mind and world, and knowing and acting. Chang also explains Wang Yangming's position in relation to his Confucian predecessors, how his thought developed over

time, and differences that emerged among his followers. He concludes with an analysis of the relationship between Wang's thought and what Chang labels 'Chinese intuitionism'.

With the work of Carsun Chang, this historical overview of a transformative period in the study of Wang Yangming in the English-language literature published between 1950 and 1980 can be concluded. As we have seen, many factors lay behind the appearance of this dynamic scholarship: big-picture historical developments in China prior to those decades, funding for research on China during the Cold War, and the unique biographies of scholars who wrote about Wang Yangming and shared their confident belief in the importance of his compelling life story and the universal significance of his philosophy. These scholars provided foundational translation work, important studies of Wang's life and philosophy, and promising avenues for looking at him in a comparative philosophical perspective. After the 1980s, a new stage in the study of Wang and Ming philosophy can be said to have developed, in the sense that a more dispersed, wide-ranging scholarship trickled into the stream, written by scholars of a new generation whose academic careers were shaped in different and diverse settings.

Notes

1. I am using the term 'West' here simply to refer to the English-, French-, and German-language literature. But in fact, for the period under study here (1950 to 1980), I have only found English-language monographs and articles. The literature in the other languages was quiet during that time.
2. For the conference and journal, see prefatory information in *Philosophy East and West* (1973), 23(1–2). 3–4.
3. Thomé Fang and Cheng Zhongying also gave papers at the 1972 conference. Additionally, Cheng (1979, pp. 37–68) wrote a chapter titled 'Practical Learning in Yen Yuan, Chu Hsi, and Wang Yangming' for inclusion in *Principle and Practicality: Essays in Neo-Confucianism and Practical Learning*. This was one of three volumes on Neo-Confucianism edited by William Theodore de Bary in the 1970s. Obviously, these are two highly influential figures in the history of East–West dialog, and what they have to say about Wang Yangming merits attention because of the penetrating quality of work penned by individuals with comprehensive philosophies who sought to globalize Chinese philosophy. However, although they studied and wrote about Wang Yangming, he does not hold a special status in their comprehensive philosophies or their research and writing. Their work on him merits attention in a lengthier study of their thought.
4. He was a practicing attorney in Shanghai, president of the Shanghai Bar Association, member of the Nationalist Assembly. He also played a role in drafting the constitution of the Republic of China.

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