

***Self-Realization through Confucian Learning: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Xunzi's Ethics.*** By Siufu Tang. SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016. Pp. viii + 183. \$80.00.

Siufu Tang's new book on Xunzi's ethics is based on his Oxford dissertation (2006), of which two chapters have been previously published (p. vii).<sup>1</sup> Readers interested in Xunzi will now be glad to read the book in its final form.

Tang's interpretations are based on wide reading in the field and largely congruent with the consensus view of Xunzi that has emerged over the past two decades. The first section is summarized by this paragraph on p. 51:

People's *xing* [性] consists of components of two levels. First, there is the substance of our *xing*, which is endowed by Heaven. Such a substance is the cause of our natural life and includes various natural faculties. Second, the substance when stirred by stimuli will give rise naturally to various natural dispositions. These natural dispositions have a tendency to dominate the heart-mind [*xin* 心] and lead us to act them out. Since natural dispositions are without an ethical framework and do not form a natural order, activities based on them are necessarily perilous and chaotic. Thus from Xunzi's point of view people's *xing* is bad. Although our *xing* will naturally be manifested in a certain way, the heart-mind can reflect upon our feelings and guide their realization. Actions guided by the heart-mind's deliberation are called *wei* [偽]. From such first-level *wei* it is possible to derive norms for both deliberation and actions. These norms are called ritual propriety [*li* 禮] and appropriateness [*yi* 義], standards and measures [*fadu* 法度]. With such norms it is possible to bring about flourishing for all human beings and achieve the utmost goodness.

Most specialists would readily accept these claims (which Tang has, by this point in the book, defended with good references to the text). Tang emphasizes the novelty of his two-level interpretation of both *xing* and *wei*,<sup>2</sup> but overall the précis seems similar to arguments that Eric Hutton was making nearly twenty years ago.<sup>3</sup> When Xunzi

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<sup>1</sup> "Xing and Xunzi's Understanding of Our Nature," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi*, ed. Eric L. Hutton, Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy 7 (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2016), pp. 165–200; and "Self and Community in the Xunzi," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7, no. 3 (September 2012), pp. 455–70.

<sup>2</sup> One interesting offshoot of Tang's emphasis on two levels of *wei* is a comparison with Harry G. Frankfurt's concept of first-order and second-order desires (pp. 85–91).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., "Does Xunzi Have a Consistent Theory of Human Nature?," in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, ed. T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000), p. 221.

says that our *xing* is “bad” (*e* 惡), he means that we are not innately equipped with an ethical framework to restrain our appetites, desires, and emotions, yet if we merely indulge them (“follow them” [*shun shi* 順是], in Xunzi’s own words), we will end up taking morally problematic actions. Consequently, we must seek out such an ethical framework and habituate ourselves to abide by it.

A few pages later, Tang moves on to the most controversial claim in his book—the one significant area where he diverges from the consensus view. The issue is what Xunzi means by “the Way” (*dao* 道). In Xunzi’s system, the ethical framework necessary for “transforming the *xing*” (*huaxing* 化性) consists of rituals (*li* 禮) designed by sages (*sheng* 聖 or *shengren* 聖人) on the basis of the Way. In my work, I have consistently argued that “the Way” stands for patterns observable in nature—which themselves derive from Heaven.<sup>4</sup> Tang takes me to task for this position: “it seems premature for [Machle]<sup>5</sup> and Goldin to suggest further that Heaven itself embodies a normative pattern, the Way” (p. 59). On Tang’s view, “the Way does not represent an external normative order that exists in the world” (p. 119); rather, norms must be “created” (p. 99) by human beings—a process that he calls “interpretative construction” (p. 97).<sup>6</sup> Tang describes the evidence for his assertions as “overwhelming” (p. 59), but he relies heavily on a single passage from the “Ruxiao” 儒效 chapter (cited here in his translation):

道者，非天之道，非地之道，人之所以道也，君子之所道也。<sup>7</sup>

The Way is not the Way of Heaven nor the Way of Earth, it is the Way by which people are directed and that which the noble man is practicing (p. 59).

Tang rehearses this line three times (also pp. 75 and 118), but does not seem to be aware that I anticipated this objection in a book that he does not include in his bibliography and evidently has not read.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Tang ignores much relevant material in the “Tianlun” 天論 chapter, such as the following:

<sup>4</sup> E.g., *Confucianism*, Ancient Philosophies 9 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 80ff.; and *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1999), pp. 100ff.

<sup>5</sup> The reference is to Edward J. Machle, *Nature and Heaven in the Xunzi: A Study of the Tian Lun*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Tang recognizes that his position is comparable to that of Kurtis Hagen, and sketches the similarities and differences in an extended note (p. 159, n. 71).

<sup>7</sup> Wang Tianhai 王天海, *Xunzi jiaoshi* 荀子校釋, *Zhonghua yaoji jishi congshu* 中華要籍集釋叢書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), *juan* 4, p. 273.

<sup>8</sup> *Confucianism*, pp. 84ff.

所志於天者，已其見象之可以期者矣；所志於地者，已其見宜之可以息者矣；所志於四時者，已其見數之可以事者矣；所志於陰陽者，已其見和<sup>9</sup>之可以治者矣。<sup>10</sup>

Their aspiration with respect to Heaven is no more than to observe the phenomena that can be taken as regular periods [e.g., the progression of the seasons or stars]. Their aspiration with respect to Earth is no more than to observe the matters that yield [sc. crops]. Their aspiration with respect to the four seasons is no more than to observe the data that can be made to serve [humanity]. Their aspiration with respect to *yin* and *yang* is no more than to observe their harmonious [interactions] that can bring about order.

In particular, Xunzi's repeated references to the importance of observing and appropriately "responding" (*ying* 應) to the seasons vitiate Tang's contention that natural patterns are not to be taken as normative. To be sure, the surviving text of *Xunzi* is vague enough to permit various interpretations, but Tang does his readers a disservice by declining to discuss passages that seem to conflict with his reconstruction. That is called the fallacy of incomplete evidence. While I certainly agree with Tang's interpretation that human beings (i.e. sages) created the rituals, I believe he has gone too far by denying that they did so on the basis of the natural order handed down by Heaven. It is always helpful to bear in mind Xunzi's rhymed apophthegm, "Heaven and Earth generated it; the Sages completed it" 天地生之，聖人成之. The Way is discovered, the rituals invented.

Finally, there are two minor weaknesses that a conscientious reviewer is obliged to point out. First, Tang is simply wrong when he declares that *wei* 僞 and *wei* 為 are homophones (p. 42). They are probably cognate, but were *never* homophones. (In technical terms, *wei* 僞 contained both a prefix and a suffix in Old Chinese: \*N-g<sup>w</sup>aj-s vs. \*g<sup>w</sup>aj.)<sup>11</sup> They are distinguished in Modern Mandarin by tone, and are pronounced even more distinctly in other Chinese dialects (such as Cantonese, spoken in Tang's own city of Hong Kong). Second, when Tang declares that "we do not have a definite picture of the state of Confucianism at the time of Xunzi" (p. 60), readers may wonder why he does not mention (let alone discuss) the manuscripts from Guodian 郭店. They can be very helpful in fleshing out the significance of Xunzi's arguments in their day.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Following the commentary by Wang Niansun 王念孫, *Xunzi jiaoshi*, *juan* 11, p. 685, n. 44.

<sup>10</sup> *Xunzi jiaoshi*, *juan* 11, p. 677.

<sup>11</sup> Here I follow the system in William H. Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> For my own view, see *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 36–57.

In sum, Siufu Tang's *Self-Realization through Confucian Learning* is a notable contribution to Xunzi studies, but will not fundamentally reorient future research.

PAUL R. GOLDIN  
*University of Pennsylvania*

***Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China.*** By Chang Woei Ong. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016. Pp. xi + 354. \$49.95/£39.95.

Ong puts Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1529) at the forefront of the title he's chosen for his book, but a biography this is not. Perhaps best remembered for his controversial theory of how poetry should be written, Li becomes in the hands of the author a lens through which to clarify his real interest, which is the whole intellectual world of Ming China down to its collapse in the mid-seventeenth century. That's what Ong means by "literati learning." Li's effect upon that learning was on the whole negative.

The "north-south divide" noted in the title takes up the question why posterity refused to give what Ong rightly thinks is his due—why his ideas failed to gain traction in the south. The answer is complicated. Li was a northerner. In Ming times, north China was overborne by the larger population and greater wealth and sophistication of the south. North China's literati were fewer in number, and had a very difficult time achieving national acclaim and a national following. But how hard did they try?

It was not simply prejudice against or disdain for the north that disadvantaged intellectuals like Li. Northern society spawned a literati ethos that conferred supreme value on the emperor, on the central state and its bureaucracy, on state service as the only proper aim for its young men, and on an education tightly geared to the demands of the civil service examination system. The southern intelligentsia much preferred a more horizontal arrangement, de-emphasizing the top-down verticality the northerners championed, and favouring a sub-political focus on families, lineages, local academies, and informal literati networks, with the emperor and the state simply as benign protectors of all this. Li was definitely in the statist camp, and not in sympathy with the south's preferences.

The author offers a path-breaking study of what Li had to offer intellectually. He gives a good account of Li's interest in the metaphysics of nature—in *li* 理 and *qi* 氣, *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. Li had a "theory of the cosmos." He understood the cosmos to be a source not of unity and regularity (as the dominant Cheng-Zhu 程朱 consensus