



Review: Education in Sung China

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REVIEW ARTICLES

EDUCATION IN SUNG CHINA*

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This conference volume addresses the formal and informal aspects of education and schooling for men, women, and children during the Sung dynasties (960–1279). The institutionalization of private academies and schools that stressed a Neo-Confucian curriculum are the focus for elucidating formal education during the Sung. Chu Hsi's educational theories and school activities are the focus for what the editors call "Neo-Confucian education." Informal aspects of education through ritual, community compacts, and public instruction reveal education as a social practice in Sung China that encompassed elite and popular society. Other essays focus on legal education and the role of Buddhism in clerical and popular education from the T'ang through the Sung. The editors present Neo-Confucian education as a liberal and progressive pursuit that went beyond earlier Confucian forms of education, but the degree to which Neo-Confucian educational ideals yielded progressive and liberal educational institutions in imperial China is insufficiently demonstrated.

THERE ARE MANY OUTSTANDING ESSAYS in this volume, which address the multi-faceted social, intellectual, and institutional dimensions of education in China from the T'ang through the Sung dynasties, roughly 700 to 1300. Unfortunately, the claim the editors make in the introduction (echoed on the book-jacket and in press advertisements) that "[t]his study provides a much-needed linking of the studies of Neo-Confucianism with those of late imperial Chinese social history" is overstated. Beyond suggesting some long-term continuities between Sung educational practice and late imperial society, few essays in the volume cross the Mongol divide (1250–1350) and delve in much depth into the role of education from 1400 to 1900. Consequently, the editors' conclusion that the papers "address the way Neo-Confucian thought and ethics were adapted to changes in Chinese society, which anticipate many features and problems of society today" is rhetorical, an example of the dubious wedding between contemporary Pacific Rim rhetoric concerning the "Four Little Dragons" (South Ko-

rea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) and neo-Weberian claims made for a "Neo-Confucian ethic of Asian capitalism."¹

What the volume is about is education and schooling for men, women, and children during the Sung dynasties, the role of Buddhism in clerical and popular education, and the informal aspects of education through ritual, community compacts, and public instruction. Neo-Confucianism, although not central to all of the papers, is a constant thread, which is identified for the most part with the teachings of the Southern Sung Confucian Chu Hsi (1130–1200). Reflecting the perspective of the editors more often than the contributors, Chu Hsi's educational philosophy and program are deemed "liberal" and "progressive." Chu's stress on "learning for the sake of oneself" and his appeal to the

* *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*. Edited by JOHN W. CHAFFEE and WM. THEODORE DE BARY. Berkeley and Los Angeles: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 1989. Pp. 606. \$65.

¹ Cf. my "Confucianism and Modernization: A Reevaluation," in *Conference Volume for the International Conference on Confucianism and Modernization* (Taipei: Freedom Council, 1987), 1–19. See also the essays in *Education and Society in Late Imperial Society*, ed. Woodside and Elman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, forthcoming), for discussion of formal and informal learning, classical and vernacular literacy, gender aspects of education, and elite versus popular education during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

"renewal of the people" are interpreted by William Theodore de Bary in particular as a relevant challenge to all contemporary educators worldwide.

CONFUCIANISM/NEO-CONFUCIANISM

Other than Wei-ming Tu's lucid summary of the core ideas in Confucian education before the Sung period, presented in the middle of the volume to highlight papers on "Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucian Education," no effort is made by the editors or contributors to explain the historical trajectory of education in China during the time of Confucius, the role of Confucianism in education under the first empires of Ch'in and Han, or the educational system established by the T'ang state after A.D. 618 to end centuries of disunity and educational decentralization among aristocratic elites.² "Neo-Confucian Education" is presented by de Bary as a Sung dynasty "revolution in education" (p. 186) surpassing earlier Confucian educational traditions. De Bary's characterization of Neo-Confucianism in his earlier writings as the "more intensive application of traditional elements rather than through the elaboration of new concepts and institutions" is rejected.³ For the editors, Chu Hsi replaces Confucius as the "father" of late imperial Chinese education.

Yet, Wei-ming Tu's paper on the background to the "Sung Confucian Idea of Education" suggests otherwise. A tour de force in examining the role of the "Way," "Learning," and "Politics" in Confucian education, Tu's account is based on a careful reading of Confucius' *Analects* and other parts of the Four Books. Tu poignantly describes the theoretical roots of Chu Hsi's Neo-Confucianism in Confucius' faith in the perfectibility of human nature through individual effort as the moral answer to the dehumanizing historical moment. Finding the transcendental anchor for civilization in the inner resources of humanity, Confucius established an educational agenda for learning built around the curriculum of the classics: 1) poetry re-

vealed the commonality of human feelings; 2) politics revealed the ideal of benevolent government; 3) social rites were the self-expression of a fiduciary community concerned with its collective existence; 4) history marked the recorded conscience of collective memory; 5) metaphysical change pointed to the unity of man and Heaven.

Confucius' program for learning, according to Tu, translated into a political commitment. The Confucian ideal of an inner-directed personality standing guard for civilization meant that politics and culture were inseparable, once Confucianism was declared orthodox. Tu cogently describes how the Confucian manipulation of the symbolic world through which politics was defined, legitimated, and practiced ultimately came to politicize all Confucian values. Such politicization in turn made possible the manipulation and compromise of Confucian values by oppressive authoritarian regimes. Sung Neo-Confucians such as Chu Hsi retraced Confucius's classical vision of learning in their own discovery of self-cultivation or "learning for the sake of oneself." When viewed in light of Tu's presentation, Chu Hsi's advocacy of a school system for all, need for a well-defined curriculum, and suitable goals and models for personal development are not unprecedented.

BUDDHIST AND LEGAL EDUCATION

The volume begins with two outstanding studies by Erik Zürcher and Chün-fang Yü on Buddhism and education during, respectively, the T'ang and Sung dynasties. Zürcher initially contrasts the Buddhist ideal of moral training with the Confucian concept of education. Buddhist education centered first on training a clerical elite who then transmitted the Buddhist religious message via schools for the laity. As a secondary religious elite overshadowed by an established secular elite, Buddhist clerics embodied an autonomous church organization that for the first time threatened the official hegemony of the Confucianized elite. To limit such autonomy, the T'ang state encapsulated the six hundred thousand to one million Buddhist clerics in the bureaucracy. Via state clerical examinations modelled after the civil service, Buddhist clerics became a functional group of religious experts assigned to particular monasteries. The state thereby gained control over the number of clerics permitted and the nature of the curriculum by which clerics would be tested.

The role of the monastery in educating the laity, Zürcher points out, was restricted because of Confucian dominance in T'ang secular life. Nevertheless, the laity was attracted to an education by clerics because of

² For the latter, one must turn to Taka Akigoro, *The History of Education in T'ang China*, trans. P. A. Herbert (Osaka: Osaka Univ. Press, 1986); P. A. Herbert, *Examine the Honest, Appraise the Able: Contemporary Assessments of Civil Service Selection in Tang China* (Canberra: Australian National Univ., 1988); and David McMullen's valuable *State and Scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

³ De Bary, "Some Common Tendencies in Neo-Confucianism," in *Confucianism in Action*, ed. Nivison and Wright (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959), 37.

the merger between Buddhist and secular education during the T'ang-Sung transition. Fusion between semi-monastic training in Buddhist texts and local community schools meant that many poorer families sent their sons to clerical schools not to become monks but to gain enough literacy to be able eventually to compete in the civil-service examinations. Thus, Buddhist clerics contributed to general literacy and reading habits among the laity. In such parochial schools, the study of the Confucian classics was likely to have been more lively and less tradition-bound, possibly creating the conceptual space that led to the Sung Neo-Confucian synthesis. Such relatively autonomous clerical schools, Zürcher suggests, also became models for later Confucian private academies and charitable schools based on voluntary philanthropy and local civic duty.

Chün-fang Yü's essay illuminates the ideals and procedures in Ch'an Buddhist education during the Sung dynasty. Yü notes how difficult it is to know the practical details in Ch'an pedagogy, yet she successfully overturns our usual "anti-booklearning" image of Ch'an by demonstrating how prolific Ch'an monks were in their literary outpourings. So much so, that she labels as "Literary Ch'an" the recorded sayings, lamp records, and monastic codes that are the crux of her study. Extensive reliance by postulants and abbots on *kung-an* literature as teaching and study material suggests to Yü that Ch'an followers had a great deal of scriptural knowledge, which often included knowledge of the Confucian classics.

Because postulants were ordained as novices through clerical examinations, imperial favor, or purchase of ordination certificates, it is likely that members of the clergy were literate enough to pass a scriptural test. Literacy in scriptures came from study in public monasteries, where the practice of Ch'an monks dutifully reading the sutras was the rule not the exception. In addition, Ch'an adepts were open to both the Confucian and Taoist traditions. According to Yü, both Ch'an followers and Neo-Confucians regarded the ancient Chinese classical tradition as their common heritage, a universal body of symbols and values that enriched both groups. Despite Neo-Confucian antipathy toward Buddhism, both groups shared common educational ideals emphasizing role models, rituals, and self-cultivation, which suggests to Yü the mutual educational influences between Ch'an Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.

Brian McKnight's paper on "Mandarins as Legal Experts" serves as a useful framework to address the role of professional learning during the Sung dynasties. Like the discussion of Buddhism, McKnight's analysis of legal expertise for bureaucrats conveys the larger

context within which Neo-Confucian education took shape. McKnight begins by noting the divergent motives and goals of education. Although Neo-Confucians stressed self-improvement as the road to sagehood, the imperial state sought to indoctrinate its subjects in beliefs acceptable to it. Hence a modicum of expertise in prescriptive administrative laws and proscriptive penal laws was expected of state bureaucrats.

Officials with legal training came from two different sources. In sharp contrast to late imperial China, Sung officials were frequently recruited from the ranks of *yamen* clerks. Many senior clerks, who were nominated for office based on bureaucratic quotas, had substantial legal experience before joining the civil service. Other officials were selected via examinations that tested the candidate's knowledge of statutes and ordinances. Wang An-shih abolished such legal examinations, but a new field in law was later reestablished, which lasted until the last century of the Southern Sung. In addition, candidates in other examination fields were also tested on some legal materials. Because the Sung state encouraged legal studies, McKnight revises the anti-law stereotype of Neo-Confucian officials. Moreover, he notes that even Chu Hsi (like Confucius, one might add) was active as a judicial official. As long as training in law was grounded in mastery of the classics, the Confucianization of law since the Han dynasties made legal studies legitimate and important thereafter.

ACADEMIES AND SCHOOLING

Seeking to link Neo-Confucian ideas to institutions historically, a number of essays describe in detail the evolution of state and private schools and academies during the Sung dynasty. Thomas Lee presents the educational crisis schools faced in Sung China before Chu Hsi. The tilting of education toward preparation for civil-service examinations compromised the Confucian ideal of moral integrity as the goal of education. Bureaucratization of state schools meant that education was perceived solely as a means for entry into public service. The ideal of "study for the sake of oneself" was shunted aside. A crisis in pedagogy ensued because the government failed to provide adequate guidance in educational matters. Basic literacy was left to the private sector by default, while the state merely supervised the civil examinations. State schools became practice testing centers.

According to Lee, the Sung state tried to open up officialdom to commoners, in order to counter the success of elites in monopolizing examination quotas based on their private wealth, a situation which gave

them educational advantages. Lee places the popularity of the *Thousand-character Essay* for basic literacy training within the larger context of linguistic studies during the Sung dynasty. Such studies focused on the correct pronunciation and orthography of Chinese written characters, which were useful for establishing basic literacy. Rhyming dictionaries, for instance, were useful to examination candidates who required classical literacy for success.

Linda Walton's contribution to the volume describes the institutional context of Neo-Confucianism. She delineates how schools and academies in Ming prefecture (Ning-po) during the Sung and Yüan dynasties successfully provided the *Tao-hsüeh* movement with an institutional base for its cultural reproduction. In addition, schools devoted to Neo-Confucianism legitimated the sociopolitical order through the socialization of young males in Neo-Confucian values. Schools as ritual centers on the one hand sanctified *Tao-hsüeh* as orthodox and, on the other, reaffirmed a social order that placed scholar-officials at the top. Particularly during the Yüan dynasty, private academies in Ming prefecture became increasingly standardized as instruments of social control. Under a centralized political structure, schools as local sources of ideological authority championing imperially sanctioned Neo-Confucianism extended the state's mantle of orthodoxy downward through the educational system.

Wing-tsit Chan and John Chaffee in separate essays explore Chu Hsi's important role in promoting private academies for education. Chan begins by discussing the evolution of various names that Buddhists and Confucians mutually used to describe schools and academies outside the state educational network. During the Northern Sung, private academies, such as Chu Hsi's White Deer Grotto Academy, became venues for teaching, preserving books, and performing sacrifices to Confucian worthies. According to Chan, Chu and his followers were more active than any other group during the Sung period in establishing private academies to promote their teachings.

Chaffee notes that Chu Hsi's educational activities in Nan-k'ang, a rural backwater in central China, were controversial. Chu's efforts there to revive the White Deer Grotto Academy from 1179 to 1181 were presented in surprisingly modest terms in proclamations to the court. This suggests to Chaffee that Chu was minimizing the educational importance of the academy, in order to circumvent local criticism that Chu's revived academy was usurping the role of the prefectural school in local education. Chu Hsi's time in Nan-k'ang marked the beginning of his popularity as a Neo-Confucian educator stressing moral self-cultivation. The notable

growth of his following in Nan-k'ang, according to Chaffee, may have alarmed officials and local elites. The latter directed a series of *ad hominem* attacks on Chu Hsi and his followers, portraying them as a factional group that threatened the local order. Such criticism suggests to Chaffee the beginnings of the later attack on *Tao-hsüeh* as "spurious learning."

In her paper on community compacts, Monika Übelhör defines the Confucian notion of education as a program to cultivate moral insight for leaders and a program to make the populace behave. Community compacts developed by locally organized associations beginning in the Northern Sung had as their goal the promotion of socially desirable behavior. Chu Hsi's version of the Lü family community compact was a means to regulate the social life of the educated elite. Such devices for mutual help had their origins in Buddhist lay associations, but Chu Hsi and others reasserted Confucian ideals for community compacts that would extend below the umbrella of the state and serve as a haven for voluntarism in the local community.

Übelhör contends that there was no particular stress on submissive attitudes in such compacts, although she does concede that the force of ritual and ceremony introduced an elaborate system of hierarchical grading in society. Unable to distinguish between the high-minded intent behind such compacts and the social and historical consequences that ensued, Übelhör's account winds up mainly as a litany of rules and regulations that overlooks the disjunction between rhetorical Neo-Confucian ideals and authoritarian, elite, and patriarchal social practice. She makes little effort to integrate her account with the valuable literature on late imperial social history that has accrued in the last decade. This limitation is true of a number of essays in the volume, which provide only a surface intellectual reading of the social and political structures underlying the educational phenomena they describe.

If Chu Hsi and the *Tao-hsüeh* movement stressed the creation of private academies as the institutional basis for the reproduction and transmission of their Neo-Confucian ideals, why did other scholars, like Lu Chiu-yüan, not emulate them? Robert Hymes explores this paradox by first exploding the notion that anti-intellectualism is a sufficient explanation for Lu Chiu-yüan's disinterest in establishing private academies in local communities. Lu was not opposed to academy education, even if he advocated a particular kind of education less focused on a specific written curriculum than Chu Hsi. One might add that Wang Yang-ming later, during the Ming dynasty, shared many of Lu's educational ideals, but unlike Lu, Wang Yang-ming actively promoted private academies.

Hymes thinks academies should be interpreted as one of a group of local institutions that were formed to incorporate voluntarism in local communities. When integrated into a fuller understanding of the social fabric of Sung society rather than just disaggregated into an autonomous educational form, the private academy, according to Hymes, represents a community structure like the community compact and community granary that mediated between state power and family interests. Accordingly, Lu Chiu-yüan's lack of interest in voluntary community institutions favored by Chu Hsi and his followers represented a different response toward local affairs after the failures of state reforms during the Northern Sung dynasty. Lu continued to stress family organization as the solution for the maintenance of local order in an era of increasing localism and the devolution of state power. For Hymes, Lu Chiu-yüan's commitment to communal family ideals contrasts with Chu Hsi's promotion of "middle level" institutions such as private academies and community compacts. Each strategy was based on a competing vision for how local society should be organized to achieve social and moral order after the collapse of Northern Sung state power and the political activism associated with it.

EDUCATION AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

A number of important essays in this volume address the social nexus within which Neo-Confucian educational theory was articulated and the informal, non-literate patterns for schooling that were developed. Patricia Ebrey explains that education is a process of schooling for some and molding for others. She emphasizes that education through ritual, particularly family rituals, was an important aspect of educational molding throughout the Sung period and thereafter. As a process of socialization rather than an intellectual exercise, molding through family rituals became an important social program that Sung Confucians such as Ssu-ma Kuang and Chu Hsi, in particular, stressed. Going back to the T'ang dynasty, Confucian efforts to reformulate family rituals became an important part of Neo-Confucian education through the popularity of Chu Hsi's *Family Rituals*.⁴

⁴ Whether Chu Hsi in fact compiled the version of the *Family Rituals* Ebrey discusses has been a controversial issue since Wang Mou-hung raised doubts about its authorship in his 18th-century accounts of Chu Hsi. Ebrey addresses this point on p. 297, note 58. She sides with contemporaries such as Ch'ien Mu and Ueyama Shumpei, who argue that Chu Hsi

As a set of rituals to encompass elite and popular behavior that would supersede the outdated feudal sumptuary principles in the Confucian classics, Chu Hsi's *Family Rituals*, according to Ebrey, built on Ssu-ma Kuang's earlier medieval prescriptions for reforming customary practices for ancestral rites. In the process, the role of Buddhists and Taoists as accepted experts in funeral and ancestral rites was challenged, and an updated Confucian alternative was articulated and put into practice. As a means for educating children and civilizing rural folk, Confucian attention to education through ritual combatted inroads made by Buddhists and Taoists in local society and enabled the Neo-Confucian message to reach commoners who sought practical ritual guidance for their daily lives.

Chu Hsi's ritual handbook, published in the early thirteenth century, became the standard reference on family rituals, consulted by both elites and commoners. The mid-Ming version, which was shortened and focused on the family rather than the particular descent line that the Sung version had stressed, gained a greater following than the original. Ebrey ends her discussion by raising a fundamental question: did texts such as the *Family Rituals* contribute to the Confucianization of commoner values? Unlike many who assume the penetration of Neo-Confucian values into the vast world of peasant and commoner society, Ebrey perceptively contends that such assumptions must be explored beyond the level of ritual theory and demonstrated in the actual use of texts such as the *Family Rituals* by descent groups.

The education of children during the Sung dynasty is explored in papers by Pei-yi Wu and M. Theresa Kelleher. Wu tries, unsuccessfully, to build out of a scarcity of information on elementary education a persuasive account of the widespread education of children during the Sung dynasty. Extrapolating from the Sung money economy, Wu contends that "a sizable proportion" of the populace (100 million?) must have received

should be credited with the text, while admitting that later scholars may have edited a text that had not taken final form in Chu Hsi's time. Rather than lending additional credence to a hotly debated issue that is tangential to her central concerns and to which she has nothing to add, Ebrey would have done better to bracket the controversy and indicate that Chu Hsi's authorship can be analyzed as a late imperial assumption that we need not automatically grant. A similar problem arises with Confucius' authorship of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which many scholars today no longer acknowledge while, at the same time, admitting that most premodern Confucians granted such authorship without question.

rudimentary education. Based on this assumption, Wu argues for a modest level of rural literacy. But he then leaps to the conclusion that such rural literacy was the prerequisite for what Mark Elvin has called "a class of adaptable, rational, profit-oriented, petty entrepreneurs." Such uncritical acceptance of the "rational peasant" during Sung times is made to order for Pacific Rim rhetoric when Wu concludes his account with references to contemporary East Asian academic success and the role of "bourgeois Confucianism" as the cultural component for economic and industrial revolution. Since Wu's account tells us very little about the economic transformation of Sung China, the premature leap to the 1980s is symptomatic of the contemporary Pacific Rim mentality concerning Confucianism. Is Sung Neo-Confucianism an early example of "bourgeois Confucianism"?

Wu's speculations aside, he does present a useful discussion of the role of primers in elementary education, particularly the *Three-character Classic*, and he evaluates the charter of one prefectural school in the mid-eleventh century. Wu notes that children entered the school at age 8, and then at age 15 (according to the ideal system outlined in the *History of the Former Han Dynasty* 1100 years earlier) moved on to studies designed for the civil-service examinations. Based on the fact that there was a faculty of mathematics in the National University with as many as 260 students in the capital in the twelfth century, Wu concludes that, although no accounts verify it, mathematics must have been taught to some children during the Sung. He also notes the encouragement of literary precociousness during the Sung dynasty. Wu contends that the Neo-Confucian philosopher Chang Tsai, for instance, anticipated educational principles commonplace today. The evidence? Wu cites a passage where Chang Tsai compares the early education of children to animal training (p. 316).

A more authoritative discussion of elementary education in Neo-Confucian terms appears in Kelleher's summary of the use of Chu Hsi's *Elementary Learning* as a textbook. This Neo-Confucian primer, containing an anthology of selections from the classics, provides illustrations of Chu Hsi's pedagogical methods. It was designed to prepare students in practical learning and also for later advanced intellectual and spiritual development associated with "Greater Learning." There is some question about its utility for educating children, however. Kelleher notes that the *Elementary Learning* is more difficult to read than the Four Books and thus was likely meant for children at a more advanced level, in addition to its use by an adult audience.

Unlike primers such as the *Three-character Classic*, Chu Hsi's textbook may not have had popular appeal.

The basic themes in Chu Hsi's textbook are: 1) the role of the family and state in establishing the education process; 2) clarifying the cardinal human relationships; 3) reverencing the self. Hence, the work upheld the classical Confucian ideal that the purpose of education was moral transformation, while at the same time it groped for solutions to contemporary issues. Kelleher concludes that in its daily regimen for community discipline, Chu Hsi's *Elementary Learning* ends up trying to imbue the Confucian household with some of the spirit of a monastery, a conclusion that does not fit very easily with the editors' portrayal of Chu Hsi's "liberal" educational philosophy.

Bettine Birge's essay on Chu Hsi and women's education presents an important complement to the essays on elementary education. She compares the Sung ideal for the subordination of women, which Chu Hsi shared with his contemporaries, with the more flexible depictions of women in Chu's eulogies for particularly able women. In his philosophical writings, Chu revived and strengthened classical gender distinctions, but in practice, Birge contends, Chu accommodated his views to include women as active participants in the society and in educational matters. Although he never provided a curriculum for women's schooling at home, Chu commended women for book-learning and saw them as an important element in the moral education of children. Basic cultural values and basic literacy training could be handled by women as educators in the home.

Birge argues that some of the voluntarism and accommodation that Chu Hsi built into his view of the educability of women was later lost, particularly during the Ming when, she contends, the severe subjugation of women in late imperial China began. In her discussion of female literacy, Birge suggests that women were more likely to be literate in the Sung, and that increasing criticism of female literacy beginning in the late Ming further suggests that female literacy in scholarly families may have actually declined in the Ch'ing (p. 356). It is likely, however, that Birge has misread the evidence for the increasing criticism of female literacy in the seventeenth century. Such criticism increased because of the *increasing*, not decreasing, levels of female literacy in elite families. This increased literacy among elite women (of course most women, Chu Hsi's daughter included, remained illiterate throughout the duration of imperial China) can be tied to the increasing literary production of women from elite lineages in poetry and the arts mentioned in family genealogies from the Ch'ing period. Li Ch'ing-chao as a female

poet was exceptional in the Sung. In the Ch'ing, however, a single lineage could boast in its genealogy of scores of talented female poets and document the claim with examples of their poetry.⁵

Ron-guey Chu's discussion of public instruction during the Sung dynasty focuses on how Confucian values were propagated at the local level via the educational use of public proclamations that were designed initially as a medium for promulgating laws and state policies. Chu Hsi, according to the author, brought new meaning to these proclamations by imbuing them with an educational function. Of the 115 proclamations in Chu's collected essays, 100 of them were composed when he was in Nan-k'ang. The major issues Chu dealt with in these public exhortations were: 1) local schools as venues for promoting cultural matters; 2) rational justifications for public morality as the basis of a just society; 3) ritual observances; 4) anti-superstition themes when dealing with popular religion; 5) anti-litigation.

In his concluding remarks, Ron-guey Chu notes how Chu Hsi correlated rituals and laws as complementary means for maintaining and restoring public order. The author adds that the intent of Chu Hsi's proclamations concerning the authority of parents, for example, was to affirm the mutual responsibilities of parents and children. Thus, Neo-Confucianism did not advocate the unquestioned authority of parents over their children. Whether such public intentions materialized in public and private practice, Ron-guey admits, is impossible to assess. Had he carried his analysis into the late imperial period by browsing through genealogical prescriptions and imperial edicts for the subordination of the young to the old and the ruled to the ruler, the author might be less sanguine about the overall impact of filial piety in the hands of gentry and imperial patriarchs. The social and political consequences of filial piety in Chinese society are analytically distinct from their idealized representations in Chu Hsi's proclamations.

EDUCATION AS A THEORETICAL ENTERPRISE

The papers by Peter Bol and Wm. Theodore de Bary focus on Sung intellectual history and should be read in tandem with Wei-ming Tu's analysis of the pre-Sung Confucian idea of education discussed earlier. Bol examines the intellectual alternatives avail-

able to Sung literati at the time that Chu Hsi's views became prominent. By stressing the linkage between Confucian theory and literati learning, Bol successfully captures the homology between the perceived cultural and political role of the literatus in society in Sung times and the goal of learning most appropriate for that role. The clash of opinions described by Bol is marked by different socio-cultural visions that yield different educational regimes.

Bol divides the diversity of intellectual opinion on learning into three major literati groups. Wang An-shih achieved a large following, extending into Chu Hsi's time, by appealing to political action as the mark of "true learning." The literatus, if he followed "Wang Learning," must master the arts of sagely statecraft and reform contemporary institutions by adhering to the models bequeathed from antiquity to the present. Su Shih, on the other hand, stressed that literati should recognize the link between sageliness and literary creation. For adherents of "Su Learning," the sages were creative individuals who learned from culture how to express their human sentiments in writing and painting. Unhappy with these alternative visions of literati life because they both had missed what he thought was fundamental to learning, Chu Hsi redefined literati learning in terms of personal morality. For Chu's followers, a literatus must first cultivate a moral self as the basis of character development and public responsibility.

Chu Hsi appealed to transcendent principles of morality as the basis of "true learning." His followers thought Su Learning was dangerous and undisciplined while Wang Learning was bereft of a moral vision. In this battle for the hearts and minds of the literati, politics and culture were the key arenas of tension. The future course of Confucianism, that is, "literati learning," was at stake, according to Bol. Would the destiny of Confucianism be determined by Legalist Confucians (Wang Learning), Taoist Confucians (Su Learning), or Confucian moralists (*Tao-hsüeh*)? The battle was fought in the political arena, principally over the content of literati learning in the civil-service examinations. The values and talents of the civil man were at issue. By "capturing politics" for his literati ideal, Chu Hsi and his followers placed moral cultivation at the heart of the civil-service curriculum. Learning must stress morality, not literary creativity or institutional expertise.⁶

⁵ Cf. Ellen Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 10.2 (1989): 1-34.

⁶ Bol does not carry his analysis beyond the Sung, but it is interesting the degree to which the late imperial state, although it championed the Ch'eng-Chu Neo-Confucian school,

De Bary's essay explores Chu Hsi's aims as an educator, while at the same time admitting that these aims yielded unexpected consequences in the late imperial education system, such as the installation of Chu's ideas at the heart of an examination process he himself was critical of. In de Bary's essay, Chu is presented as a bearer of tradition who instigated a "virtual revolution in education" (p. 186). More so than Confucius, de Bary claims, Chu Hsi was concerned with the institutionalization of education, which successfully defined a new Confucian curriculum and a new educational process that prevailed throughout East Asia in the second millennium (e.g., on pp. 198–99 de Bary deploys Neo-Confucian learning diagrams from Tokugawa Japan while discussing the conduct of schools in Sung China).

Such claims in a study devoted to elaborating Chu's progressive and liberal educational philosophy would be more credible if they were tied to actual social, political, and cultural implementation of that philosophy. In his haste to overdetermine the role of Neo-Confucian educational theory in Chinese educational practice, de Bary has undervalued significant historical matters that lay outside his analysis. Educational practice frequently subverts educational theory. The ideology of schools as a liberating force and means of social mobility, whether Neo-Confucian or contemporary, masks the cultural inertia and conservative role of education in perpetuating the existing social system and maintaining educational inequality. By stressing Neo-Confucian philosophy as liberal and progressive, de Bary overlooks the objective processes in the practice of Neo-Confucian education that excluded children who came from the least privileged social classes.⁷

For example, de Bary describes Chu Hsi's model schools as venues for a system of universal education from elites down to peasants. Chu, like the sage-kings of old, favored establishing schools to institutionalize universal schooling. Such schools would promote true self-understanding, that is, "learning for the sake of oneself," an ideal to which the civil-service examinations and worldly success should be subordinated. There is little reason to dismiss completely de Bary's exposition of Chu's educational aims, although many

chose to include in the curriculum for the Ming and Ch'ing civil examination system a synthesis of moral, literary, and institutional concerns.

⁷ See Pierre Bourdieu, "The School as a Conservative Force: Scholastic and Cultural Inequities," in *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education*, ed. Eggleston (London: Methuen, 1974), 32.

might question Chu's commitment to an institutionalized educational regime for the schooling of peasants and women, which none of the other papers in the volume confirm. The more serious problem with de Bary's intellectual analysis of Sung education, however, is its limited grasp of the sociology and history of education in China, which could help pin down with more precision the progressive aspects of Neo-Confucian education.

A "progressive" educational system, for instance, is one that draws a large proportion of its advanced students from the lower classes. The more progressive an educational system, the more nearly proportional the distribution of educational places reflects the society at large.⁸ In addition, an "inclusive" system of education offers schooling to a relatively large proportion of the population or of the relevant age-group. Does Chu Hsi's educational philosophy reflect such concerns? Only when we give the most generous "modern" interpretation possible of his writings on popular education and at the same time bracket the vast corpus of his writings that deal only with elite, male education. Does the Chinese historical record reflect such concerns? At no point until the twentieth century do Chinese educators consciously put into practice a school system whose goals are progressive and inclusive. The inspiration for such efforts in Republican and Communist China did not come from Chu Hsi. In fact, modern Chinese reformers, as de Bary acknowledges, saw Chu Hsi as an obstacle.⁹

Educational opportunity, moreover, was never equalized in Neo-Confucian educational theory or in imperial state policy. Rather, the reverse was the case. If Chu Hsi's educational philosophy was progressive, its implementation by the state never increased social mobility to the degree that a representative portion of its students were recruited from the lower strata of society.

⁸ Cf. Fritz K. Ringer, *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), 25–29. See also Lawrence Stone, "The Educational Revolution in England, 1640–1900," *Past and Present* 28 (1964): 41–80; Stone, "Literacy and Education in England, 1640–1900," *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 69–139; and Charles E. McClelland, "The Aristocracy and University Reform in Eighteenth-Century Germany," in *Schooling and Society: Studies in The History of Education*, ed. Stone (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), 146–73.

⁹ Alex Woodside, "Some Mid-Qing Theorists of Popular Schools," *Modern China* 9.1 (1983): 3–35. Cf. *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919–1920* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1973), 183–293.

Unfortunately, de Bary does not refer to the relevant evidence on social mobility in China that has accrued since the publication in 1962 of Ping-ti Ho's pioneering *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*.¹⁰

To gloss the late imperial period, de Bary simply notes in passing that education after Chu Hsi's time cut back on the voluntarism and critical scholarship that Chu had favored (p. 213) and diverted men from Chu's moral and spiritual goals (p. 215). The state examination system misappropriated him for questionable purposes (p. 216), and "a simplified, populist version of the Neo-Confucian curriculum" became the basis for the late imperial mandarin elite (p. 209). Such concessions indicate that de Bary agrees that Chu Hsi's educational ideals were subverted. But why? Let me elaborate on this issue at some length.

Because the national school system established during the Sung dynasty was limited to candidates already literate in Classical Chinese, and thus oriented only to the civil examinations and not reading, writing, or other more elementary learning tasks, initial stages in training and preparing a son for the civil service became the private responsibility of families seeking to attain or maintain elite status. Consequently, the civil service required cultural and linguistic resources few could provide their children. Licensing examinations stood as a purposive barrier sealing in, at best, semi-literate masses from classically literate elites. Did Chu Hsi ever address this fundamental problem in literacy as a prerequisite for schooling? Does his critique of examinations contain any hint of Chu's recognition of the elitism inherent in the civil-service selection process? The evidence from Chu's *Elementary Learning*, discussed by Kelleher, indicates that even though Chu and his followers advocated the easier-to-read Four Books over the formidable Five Classics as textbooks for moral education, they remained committed to the supremacy of classical over vernacular literacy in reading and writing.

It is naive to expect that artisanal or peasant mothers and fathers could afford the luxury of years of training for their sons in a second language divorced from vernacular grammar and native speech. The occasional peasant boy who toiled in the fields by day and read by oil-lamp late into the night is celebrated precisely because he was so rare. Although theoretically open to all,

¹⁰ In fact, de Bary does not cite Ho's book (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1962) or E. A. Kracke, *Civil Service in Early Sung China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1968) in his discussion of the progressive and liberal aspects of Neo-Confucian education.

the state's Neo-Confucian education system excluded 90% of China's people from even the first step on the ladder to success. Unequal social distribution of linguistic and cultural resources meant that those from families with limited traditions of literacy could not compete successfully in the education market with those whose family traditions included classical literacy.¹¹

What social mobility there was in Sung and late imperial China mainly occurred within the strata of Chinese who had the cultural and linguistic resources to prepare their sons for the rigors of an examination cycle based on memorization of ancient texts in archaic Classical Chinese. Edward Kracke and Ping-ti Ho have estimated that officials whose immediate ancestors had commoner status for at least three generations before they passed the metropolitan examinations comprised 53%, 49.5%, and 37.6% respectively of the Sung, Ming, and Ch'ing *chin-shih* examination rolls they studied. Recent studies suggest, however, that these figures are highly inflated because they overlook or undervalue the number of those commoners who had officials as relatives from collateral lines in a lineage or from affinal ties to other families.¹²

Exclusion of those who lacked cultural and linguistic resources for their sons was successfully disguised by the Confucian ideology of formal equity and open competition to select the "best and the brightest" in the empire. Illusions of the social neutrality of the state in educational matters and misrecognition of the cultural autonomy of the educational system papered over the reality of the social structure of classical literacy after

¹¹ See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, trans. R. Nice (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), 114–30. David Johnson in his "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. Johnson et al., (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 59, estimates there were at least 5 million classically educated male commoners in Ch'ing times, or roughly 5% of the adult male population in 1800, 10% in 1700. None of the papers in the volume being reviewed tells us anything precise about Sung levels of literacy.

¹² Kracke, "Family vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations During the Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 105–23; Ho, *Ladder of Success*, 70–125, especially p. 114 (table 10); Robert Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 34–48; Ann Waltner, "Building on the Ladder of Success: The Ladder of Success in Imperial China and Recent Work on Social Mobility," *Ming Studies* 17 (1983): 30–36.

the Sung dynasties. Examination selection effected an elimination process that was more thorough the less advantaged the social class. Treating students from all social classes as equal, when in terms of their cultural resources they were not, sanctioned initial educational inequities.¹³

Because those who could not qualify to meet the classical literacy requirements were not randomly distributed among the different social classes in imperial society, the Neo-Confucian educational process concealed social selection under the guise of the selection of talent. Moreover, the stringent requirements of state examinations to gain admission to qualifying examinations meant that families dependent on the productive labor of sons in agriculture, crafts, and trade could not provide them with the years of classical training needed to keep up in the elite education process. This ensured that those who competed in the official system were a self-selected minority of young men from Confucianized families, lineages, or clans with sufficient cultural resources to invest in their male children.¹⁴

Literati monopoly of the cultural and linguistic resources legitimated by the state enabled families of wealth and power to continue to monopolize those resources over several generations. Social differentiation in handling the tools of reading and writing required for a Neo-Confucian education precluded those who were not classically literate. The hereditary transmission of cultural resources replaced the medieval hereditary transmission of official status. Trial by examination, based on linguistic competence in Classical Chinese, concealed the preliminary process of social elimination that took place.¹⁵

Because the Neo-Confucian civil-service examinations tested classical learning based on ancient texts drawn from an antiquity datable to the Chou and Han dynasties and tied that to mastery of Chu Hsi's commentaries, they were essentially tests administered in a

literary language that was divorced from the vernacular Chinese of late imperial China. To acquire the legitimate cultural training, students essentially mastered a second language whose linguistic terseness, thousands of unusual written graphs, and archaic grammatical forms required almost total memorization and constant attention from childhood to manhood. Elite culture was so near to that of the school that children from the lower classes could acquire it only with extraordinary effort, sacrifice, and help.

Although no one could deny that moral values such as filial piety and ancestor worship transcended class and cultural barriers in imperial China, or that popular literacy in vernacular Chinese was widely prevalent among non-elites, nonetheless the unbridgeable distance between vernacular and Classical Chinese ensured that scholar-officials were entering a world of discourse that few in local society could understand or participate in.¹⁶ The dominant values, ideas, and questions that prevailed in Neo-Confucian learning and teaching were transmitted via a classical language only the privileged could fully grasp after years of training. In class and individual terms, social and political reproduction yielded both "literati culture" and the literatus as a "man of culture" (*wen-jen*). His monopoly of cultural values and the institutional signs of educational success was magnified by Neo-Confucianism, not lessened.

Access to a classical education, then, was not simply a high-minded goal of the few, but possession of the proper linguistic tools and educational facilities for mastering Confucian political and moral discourse was. Such cultural expectations were heightened by the gentlemanly requirements that candidates be adept in the art of calligraphy, which became in T'ang and Sung times one of the most esoteric and yet most characteristic cultural forms of training in the mastery of written Chinese.¹⁷

If de Bary and others wish to proclaim Chu Hsi as "the educator par excellence of East Asia into the twentieth century" (p. 218), then the issues raised above cannot be swept aside by simplistically appealing only to the positive side of Chu Hsi's educational philosophy as the key to Neo-Confucian education. An intellectual history of education in China that ignores the relevant literature on the social history of education in China

¹³ Cf. Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (N.Y.: Norton, 1974), 3-7, and Bourdieu and Passeron, *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture*, tr. R. Nice (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 1-27.

¹⁴ For examples of systematic educational success, see Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁵ Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), 27-68.

¹⁶ Evelyn Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1979), 1-23.

¹⁷ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), and "An Approach to Chinese Calligraphy," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 7.1 (1972): 1-14.

consequently reproduces uncritically for posterity the same ahistorical pretensions to philosophical timelessness that Neo-Confucians themselves projected.¹⁸

FINAL COMMENTS

Although most of the essays in this volume do not do so, the editors have unwittingly presented Neo-Confucian education within a “modernization narrative” that now credits Neo-Confucian culture as the decisive catalyst in the transformation of Asia, replacing earlier stress on Western imperialism as the major factor. Neo-Confucianism, as an unfolding educational philosophy, is presented in largely cultural terms as a dynamic and positive force in the modernization of China. Although it may be useful as a corrective to earlier rejection of the positive role of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in imperial China, the overall “modernization narrative” presented in this volume disaggregates Neo-Confucian educational theory from its “pre-modern” political and social practice. Such apolitical readings of Neo-Confucianism misinterpret the Chinese historical record.

During the late empire, rightly or wrongly, the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi became part of the imperial political system, with the Hanlin Academy and the empire-wide school system in charge of its official interpretation, dissemination, and reproduction through civil-service examinations. In practice, then, Neo-Confucianism was politicized during the Ming and Ch’ing dynasties to a degree that would likely have horrified Sung Confucians. Stripped of its political legitimacy in the twentieth century, like Christianity in Europe, Neo-Confucianism has remained influential in the cultural life of Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea,

Japan, and Singapore. Such politically benign forms of cultural practice today should not be read uncritically into the late imperial period, however. When Ming and Ch’ing emperors publically claimed that they were true Confucian sage-kings who had mastered the teachings of Chu Hsi, we moderns can dismiss this as ideological nonsense or simply label it as “imperial Confucianism.” But late imperial Confucians who gainsaid these pretensions paid for it with their lives. Most individuals, such as imperial tutors, went along with the illusion, perhaps for the sake of political order, perhaps for the sake of softening the iron fist of state power, perhaps out of personal venality.

Finally, one might too readily dismiss the editors’ efforts to disaggregate Chu Hsi’s educational theories from their social and political context as simply another example of a “Neo-Confucian culturalist fallacy” or “Pacific Rim ideology.” While a certain amount of apologetics is involved in rescuing Neo-Confucianism from its earlier detractors, it is nevertheless essential to acknowledge the intellectual role Neo-Confucianism, whether as educational philosophy, imperial ideology, or family morality, played in the cultural life of China since Sung times. Whatever “we moderns” or “post-moderns” might think of it, education in China from 1000 through 1900 had the imprint of Chu Hsi’s ideas written all over its formal and informal institutions, from top to bottom. The issue I raise in my criticism is one of attention to historical practice in addition to theory. As historians begin to trace and evaluate the mediating social structures and political institutions through which education in China was practiced from 1400 to 1900, we will likely leave the “modernization narrative” that has dominated four decades of scholarship irrevocably behind. With greater scholarly vigilance, we can document the refractions, fractures, and continuities that occurred in Neo-Confucian education after its formative stage during the Sung dynasty described in this important conference volume.

¹⁸ Cf. an earlier critique of de Bary’s methodology by H. D. Harootunian in “Confucianism: Two Reviews,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7.1 (1981): 111–31.