

Book Reviews



Philip J. Ivanhoe (2016) *Three Streams: Confucian Reflections on Learning and the Moral Heart-Mind in China, Korea, and Japan*. New York: Oxford University Press, Pp. xii + 250, Hardback, \$82.00, ISBN: 9780190492014.

Philip J. Ivanhoe's *Three Streams* is a brilliant book of striking breadth and depth. It is a philosophical introduction to the central issues in Confucianism from the classical period through early modern times. As the title suggests, it is also a transnational project which presents the Confucian traditions in the three major East Asian countries, China, Korea, and Japan. The book features an inspiring comparative vision: not only does the author make careful, well-contextualized comparisons between the three East Asian traditions, he also weaves in similar issues from Western philosophy, thus creating a dialogue bridging East and West. *Three Streams* answers three broad questions. First, what are some of the essential philosophical inquiries running through the three developmental stages of East Asian Confucian tradition, namely, classical Confucianism, neo-Confucianism, and the early modern reaction to neo-Confucianism? Second, what are the similarities and differences between the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese versions of Confucianism, and how should we understand them through philosophical and historical lenses? Third, and most broadly, what consensus does the Confucian tradition share with Western philosophy, and how does the former add insightful perspectives to the discipline of philosophical studies?

The central topic of *Three Streams* concerns the Confucian agenda of moral learning. Ivanhoe starts with the classical thinker Mengzi and focuses on the era of neo-Confucianism and later (ca. 10th to 19th centuries), when generations of philosophers repeatedly debated, augmented, and reinterpreted Mengzi's basic philosophical propositions. Mengzi believed that humans are born with nascent moral sensibilities, that is, the four "sprouts" (*duan* 端) of "alarm and concern" (*ceyin* 惻隱), "shame and loathing" (*xiu'e* 羞惡), "yielding and deference" (*cirang* 辭讓), and "approval and disapproval" (*shifei* 是非). To cultivate

one's moral character is to nurture the sprouts and turn these potentials into reality.

Confucians of later ages responded to the Mengzian model in different ways. As I read Ivanhoe's narrative, I noted that an underlying theme that connects these differences involves a kind of dualist metaphysics and its implications for the practice of moral learning. The first and sharpest disagreement occurred between neo-Confucians and early modern "textual-critical Confucians" (better known as "evidential scholars" in historical studies). The neo-Confucians took a "metaphysical turn" by installing a new dualism, whereas the textual-critical Confucians obviated the turn by appealing to a more naturalistic philosophical foundation.

The neo-Confucians posited the new metaphysical scheme to substantiate their re-appropriation of the Mengzian model based on the concept of "the heart-mind" (*xin* 心). They conceived of a pure, universally present heart-mind as the source of moral perfection, with Mengzi's four moral feelings as indications of this perfect state. Unfortunately, the heart-mind is often obscured, and one has to remove interfering influences to restore its original clarity. Neo-Confucians envisioned a kind of dualistic dynamic occurring in the heart-mind. There is *li* 理, which Ivanhoe translates as "principles" and takes as rules of moral excellence, and in its ideal state the heart-mind would be able to reflect *li*. And there is *qi* 氣, the material-energy constitutive of all creatures and all phenomena in the physical world, which often disrupts the heart-mind and inhibits its access to moral truth. In the *li-qi* dichotomy, the former is conceptually and ontologically prior to the latter. *Li* exists beyond the sensory realm, where *qi* resides; *li* is the unitary, and *qi* is the particular; *li* stands for moral perfection, and *qi* often incurs chaos.

The textual-critical Confucians fiercely opposed this metaphysical dualism, worried that it might inhibit the practice of moral cultivation. As *li* is abstract and above the sensory realm, how could this ontologically separate entity have a causal impact on the sensory world, and, more importantly, how could it effectively motivate moral actions? The textual-critical Confucians suggested simplifying the metaphysical structure and advanced a more "anthropologically based" understanding of the heart-mind (p. 9).

The second difference occurred mainly among the neo-Confucians themselves. Although the two major branches of neo-Confucianism—the Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang schools—both endorsed the *li-qi* metaphysics, they held different opinions regarding how stark the dualism should be. For many, this difference directly affected the judgement on the role of emotions in moral learning. Whereas in a strong dualism, one relies mainly on cognition and knowledge to access the abstract *li*, in a weaker dualism, one values one's

proper feelings much more as guides to moral goodness. After all, the four sprouts proposed by Mengzi are moral feelings.

The two sets of debate occurred in China, Korea, and Japan and generated distinctive yet comparable sub-arguments. Ivanhoe evenly distributes his discussion among the three regions in three parts, and in each part he presents three thinkers who held the ideas most representative and relevant to these debates.

Part I addresses China, where Ivanhoe introduces three thinkers: Cheng Hao 程灝 (1032–1085), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), and Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777). The Cheng brothers were founding figures of neo-Confucianism; their consensus laid down the new metaphysical foundation, and their differences heralded the division of the two major branches of neo-Confucianism. Cheng Hao focused on the concept “heavenly *li*” (*tianli* 天理), which is the source of creative generation as well as the all-encompassing connection between humans, other living creatures, and things. According to Cheng Hao, moral learning is to endeavor to experience heavenly *li* “directly and viscerally” (p. 29), which he rendered as “benevolence” (*ren* 仁). Cheng Yi took one step further in accentuating the dualism between *li* and *qi*. *Li* is the underlying unity and *qi* accounts for particularity. To pursue moral improvement, one has to grasp *li* with one’s heart-mind—as propositional knowledge—and keep under control *qi*-based feelings with “reverence” (*jing* 敬). Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi differed mainly in their treatment of emotions: the former viewed emotions as the primary way to access *li*, while the latter recommended approaching *li* by way of cognition. This distinction later became the dividing line between the Cheng-Zhu school (in line with Cheng Yi) and the Lu-Wang school (similar to Cheng Hao). The third Chinese thinker, Dai Zhen, is a figure representative of textual-critical learning. He strongly opposed the *li*-*qi* dualism, arguing that *li* should be embedded in the phenomenal world. Instead of trying to recover preexisting moral standards latent in the heart-mind, one should instead explore “what in fact regularly works to promote the fulfillment of life” (p. 57).

Part II centers on Korea. Unlike scholars in China and Japan, Korean Confucians in the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) endorsed the Cheng-Zhu school exclusively. In the first two chapters, Ivanhoe introduces two debates which played “a commanding role” in the development of neo-Confucianism in Korea (p. 72). The first is the so-called Four-Seven debate (*sach’illon* 四七論). Four stands for the Mengzian four sprouts, and seven is short for “seven emotions” (*ch’iljóng* 七情, including happiness, anger, grief, joy, care, dislike, and desire). The central question of the debate concerned the ontological nature of the four sprouts: do they belong to *li*, the principles of moral perfection, or are they related to the seven emotions embedded in the realm of *qi*? This question arose

from the Cheng-Zhu scholars' efforts to better connect the *li-qi* dualism to the Mengzian scheme of moral sprouts. The second debate, the so-called Horak Debate, also revolved around the *li-qi* dualism, and this time scholars tried to link the concept of "nature" (*seong* 性) to it. Participants in the debate endeavored to resolve conflicts between two propositions: on the one hand, the original state of human nature stands for moral perfection, and, on the other, it is also embedded in *qi*, which does not warrant perfection. In the third chapter, Ivanhoe introduces Jeong Yakyong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836), who proposed a naturalistic solution to the metaphysical debates. Jeong opposed the privileged status of *li*, arguing that *li* and *qi* both exist in the phenomenal world and that *qi* precedes *li*. He also argued that proper emotions/feelings constitute the most appropriate route by which one attains moral excellence.

Part III concentrates on Japan. Due to the diversity of Japanese Confucianism, Ivanhoe chooses three thinkers to stand for different orientations: Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–1648), representative of the Lu-Wang branch, Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇齋 (1619–1682), a follower of Cheng-Zhu, and Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627–1705), a textual-critical opponent of neo-Confucianism. Nakae Tōju claimed central significance for filial piety, viewing it as a feature of the universe rather than a matter of interpersonal relations. When in natural operation, filial piety becomes "loving reverence" (*aikyō* 愛敬), the only viable means of moral cultivation. Ansai focused on reverence (*kei* 敬) and righteousness/duty (*gi* 義) as the central precepts of moral learning; yet, he assigned priority to "repository of knowledge" (*chizō* 知藏)—the principle within oneself—and prescribed an approach to this knowledge through "cool contemplation and determined pursuit of duty" (p. 153). Itō Jinsai was thoroughly against neo-Confucian metaphysics. He viewed the source of the phenomenal world as the so-called "single original *qi*" (*ichigenki* 一元氣), and *li* as an ontological equivalent to *qi*. He saw no need to restrain emotions; instead, moral cultivation was precisely about nurturing proper feelings.

Three Streams comprehensively covers the three East Asian regions, and yet it is far more than a simple juxtaposition of three traditions. Ivanhoe draws extensive connections between thinkers, presenting an intellectual map glittering with comparative insights. Some connections are philosophical. For instance, Dai Zhen, Jeong Yakyong, and Itō Jinsai found common grounds in their critique of neo-Confucianism. All three saw the impersonal, abstract *li* as an obstacle to motivating moral actions, and all appealed to a concept of "sympathetic consideration" (*shu* [Chinese], *seo* [Korean], and *jo* [Japanese] 恕) as a major means of moral learning. As Ivanhoe aptly points out, "even thinkers in profoundly different settings and circumstances can be led to remarkable consensus on important issues" (p. 185), a reminder that philosophical

comparisons help reveal hidden wisdom common across regions. Ivanhoe also handles these connections with rigor by always presenting a full comparison. While highlighting the striking common interest in “sympathetic consideration,” he identifies the differences between the three thinkers. For example, Dai Zhen spoke of extending sympathetic consideration beyond humans, while Jeong Yakyong did not show much concern for non-human creatures.

Three Streams also identifies empirical connections between thinkers. Much to the appreciation of historians, Ivanhoe skillfully balances the articulation of philosophical arguments with contextualization. As he considers the historical links between thinkers, Ivanhoe constantly places their similarities in context and avoids a simplified way of conceiving philosophical continuity. For example, Nakae Tōju was the leader of the Lu-Wang school in Japan, and he connected his central concept of filial piety to Wang Yangming’s “pure knowing” (*liangzhi* [Chinese], *ryōchi* [Japanese] 良知). Ivanhoe emphasizes, however, that Tōju did not encounter Wang Yangming’s writings until late in his life. That is to say, we should view Tōju’s philosophy as primarily the product of his own innovation, embedded in his personal experience and the historical circumstances of Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868). The Japanese and Korean Confucian traditions are *not* simply derivatives of the Chinese original. This is an important message in a field where precautions against a Sino-centric perspective will encourage more diverse research.

Historians will appreciate Ivanhoe’s efforts to contextualize for reasons beyond making connections. Although the book evenly distributes the content between China, Korea, and Japan, Ivanhoe accommodates regional characteristics. He includes significantly more historical details in the Japanese section, supplying a personal history, social background, and major cultural activities for each thinker. For instance, he discusses in particular the influences of Shintō beliefs and the samurai culture on Japanese Confucians. I assume he does so because Japan is more removed from Korea and China in terms of political circumstances and intellectual landscape. Also, in the current scholarship on East Asian philosophy, the Japanese tradition is a relatively new subject and less studied than are the connections between China and Korea.

Among the many brilliant points *Three Streams* makes, I wish to engage Ivanhoe further on one: the definition of *li*. Ivanhoe translates *li* as “principle,” an entity humans grasp in propositional terms, and he characterizes it in a spectrum of ways. On the far end of the spectrum, Ivanhoe stresses the abstract nature of *li* by calling it “a priori” (p. 174), which, in my opinion, suggests a strict kind of ontological transcendence he does not intend in his earlier characterization, “tempered dualism” (p. 197, n. 6). I accept Ivanhoe’s observation that some neo-Confucians might make stronger claims than others on the

ontological distinction between *li* and *qi*, but I also wonder if later scholars' complaints about this dualism were evoked exclusively by a strong ontological claim (a philosophical issue), or, possibly, by practical challenges in preserving ontological subtleties when *li* became a subject in (often dogmatic) teaching (an empirical issue).

Of course the consideration above by no means detracts from the value of the book. I want to commend Ivanhoe on the accessibility of *Three Streams*. He writes in an eminently jargon-free style, presenting philosophical ideas with admirable clarity. He also structures the book in a way that readers will find engaging. In each part, Ivanhoe previews key ideas in a preface, elaborates on them in chapters, and offers further comparisons in the summary. Undoubtedly, this book will benefit scholars of East Asian thought, as it will advanced college students. *Three Streams* should reach a broad audience and sustain a lasting influence.

Ya Zuo

Bowdoin College

lzuo@bowdoin.edu