

## Book Review: *The Journal of Wu Yubi*

Kelleher, M. Theresa, *The Journal of Wu Yubi: The Path to Sagehood*, Hackett Publishing Company, 2013, 230 pp, \$13.00 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-62466-042-9.

In *The Journal of Wu Yubi: The Path to Sagehood*, M. Theresa Kelleher aims to depict how Wu Yubi 吳與弼 (1391-1469), a Neo-Confucian who provided the vital link of transmission of the Confucian Way from the Song 宋 (960-1276) to the Ming 明 (1368-1644), struggled with putting his ideas into practice. In doing so, she offers a complete, annotated translation and a thorough study of Wu's private journal (*rilu* 日錄, literally "daily records"), which chronicles both progress and lapses in his daily pursuit of the Neo-Confucian goal of sagehood.

The book consists primarily of three sections. The second, and most dominant, section is devoted to the translations. Wu's original text is not voluminous, but it is, as Kelleher notes, "by nature a document of personal and subjective nature" written in "terse and allusive" classical Chinese (xli). To offer deeper insights into Wu's philosophy of education and his personal efforts at self-cultivation, translations of fifteen letters and some miscellaneous works have also been included. To thoroughly understand, translate, and annotate such a text requires a considerable amount of philological spadework. Kelleher accomplishes a truly admirable feat in providing a felicitous and readable translation. Some parts of the translation are buttressed with extensive notes and annotations (19 footnotes for the first 13 entries, for instance), while in other parts Kelleher takes some liberties by adding extra phrases to provide context while avoiding cluttering the text with elaborate footnotes (only 27 footnotes for the 15 relatively lengthy letters occupying 24 pages).

Preceding the translations is the introduction, in which Kelleher offers a succinct outline of Wu's life and a brief description of Neo-Confucianism and the Ming dynasty, which together serve as the historical context for Wu's journal and letters. Wu's accounts in his journal have not been consistently detailed or systematically maintained, and they vary greatly in number and length from year to year. Their subject matter also ranges widely, from expressions of intense emotion to quotation of the classics to moralizing on human behavior. In fact, the trajectory of Wu's life explains the uneven distribution of the 328 entries in his journal and the changes in their contents and tone. The bulk of the entries (201) comes from the middle period of his life, from 1425 to 1436, as these years were quiet for Wu, "preoccupied as he was with his family, farm, and students" (xxxii). The time was also crucial in Wu's pursuit of sagehood, as he was in continuous struggles not only in his scholarly endeavor but also in daily life. There is much resentment and frustration expressed in his journal, and an equal measure of joy and pleasure. A significant decrease can be observed in the number of entries from the following two decades, while Wu's writing picks up again during the last three years of his life, from 1467 to 1469. In those entries we find a more reflective, somber tone "due to the death of several of his good friends dur-

ing this period” (xxxviii).

The translations of Wu’s original text are supplemented with Kelleher’s extensive comments, which she organizes around three major sets of polarities. In the first set, Kelleher identifies various obstacles to Wu’s endeavors, as well as sources from which he derived support in his quest for sagehood. The second set centers around Wu’s daily program of cultivating himself via discipline and nurture, which involved reading books and engaging in quiet sitting. The power of the journal, as Kelleher suggests, lies in the third set, in which we see Wu constantly weighing and gauging the type and degree of his personal growth or lack of it. The third section concludes with a discussion of Wu’s contribution to Neo-Confucianism and his role as a teacher who “undertook to exemplify [the Confucian] teachings and embody the Way as a living tradition” (150).

It is a joy to read Kelleher’s conscientious translation and meticulous study of Wu Yubi’s journal. What emerges from this volume is a lively picture of the personal growth and development of a fascinating Neo-Confucian personality over the gradually unfolding course of a lifetime. Wu’s path to sagehood is anything but steady and smooth. For Wu, however, the struggles he experienced in his quest were not an indication of a personal defect, but rather an expected part of the pursuit. He was fully aware of his shortcomings, but he also acknowledged that it was “the very difficulties of [the quest’s] pursuit that became the means of its realization” (164). Such a picture, as Kelleher cogently observes, is “more devotional, confessional, and nature-oriented than we usually associate with Neo-Confucians” (xiii).

As the first monograph-length treatment of Wu Yubi, this book represents the culmination of Kelleher’s over thirty-years’ labor of devotion and love. However, it seems evident that it is still primarily based on her 1982 Columbia University PhD dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Some recent studies on Wu found their way to the bibliography, but many others remain overlooked, such as Zou Jianfeng’s elaborate examination of the studies of Wu and his disciples.<sup>2</sup> Readers who are better versed in Chinese may wish to have the original text of Wu’s writings included, though these can be accessed without too much difficulty. Having the originals at hand would make it easier for readers to attempt their own translation, and Kelleher frankly admits that “a variety of readings are possible” and her approach “does not exhaust the possibilities of other readings and interpretations” (xli). Two extensive glossaries are appended, yet one may wonder why these only cover some of the many names and titles that appear in the book.

These minor quibbles aside, Kelleher’s book is a welcome contribution to the study of Chinese Confucians and their path to sagehood. There is little doubt that it will become an indispensable guide to Wu Yubi and his writings for specialists in the field, and at the same time also appeal to the general reader interested in Neo-Confucianism and Chinese intellectual history.

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#### NOTES

1. M. Theresa Kelleher, “Personal Reflections of the Pursuit of Sagehood: The Life and ‘Journal’ of Wu Yü-pi (1392-1469),” PhD dissertation. Columbia University, 1982.
2. Zou Jianfeng 鄒建鋒, *Mingdai lixue xiang xinxe de zhuanxing: Wu Yubi he Chongren xuepai yanjiu* 明代理學向心學的轉型: 吳與弼和崇仁學派研究 (*Transformation of the Learning of Principles to the Learning of Heart in the Ming Dynasty: A Study of Wu Yubi and the Chongren School*) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2011).