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Book Review: Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought

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Abstract

Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought, a volume of eleven essays written in honor of Wing-tsit Chan and William Theodore de Bary, proposes to explore how Confucian and Neo-Confucian traditions have responded to and have influenced other traditions (Buddhist, Taoist, folk, Japanese nativist, and so on) in China and Japan. The essays are arranged first geographically (seven articles on China precede four on Japan) and then roughly chronologically. All essays, save one, describe Sung or post-Sung developments. A few sentences per essay must suffice in this review. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

tradition, religion, China

Disciplines

Chinese Studies | History of Religions of Eastern Origins | Religion

Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought. Edited by Irene Bloom and Joshua A. Fogel. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Pp. 391.

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Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought, a volume of eleven essays written in honor of Wing-tsit Chan and William Theodore de Bary, proposes to explore how Confucian and Neo-Confucian traditions have responded to and have influenced other traditions (Buddhist, Taoist, folk, Japanese nativist, and so on) in China and Japan. The essays are arranged first geographically (seven articles on China precede four on Japan) and then roughly chronologically. All essays, save one, describe Sung or post-Sung developments. A few sentences per essay must suffice in this review.

Irene Bloom's "Three Visions of Jen" is the only essay on the classical period. Informed especially by Wing-tsit Chan's work on *jen* and shaped by Sung and later notions of the transmission of the way, the essay examines the notion of *jen* in the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and Chu Hsi's "Jen shuo" (Discussion of *jen*), succinctly

emphasizing the significant differences of perspective therein. Nodding to the book's larger intent of examining intellectual interactions with other traditions, some attention is given in the conclusion to comparisons with the Mohist, Yangist, and Ch'an traditions. Rodney Taylor's "Chu Hsi on Meditation" is also deeply indebted to Wing-tsit Chan and starts by resurveying much terrain already explored in Chan's 1989 "Chu Hsi and Quiet-Sitting" (in *Chu Hsi: New Studies*, published by University of Hawai'i Press). Taylor enlarges upon Chan's work especially in his discussion of Chu Hsi's practices of breath-control techniques to improve health. In keeping with the larger direction of the book, Taylor contrasts Chu's emphasis on quiet sitting as a support for study with the different spiritual goals of Ch'an Buddhism.

Patricia Ebrey's "Sung Neo-Confucian Views on Geomancy" examines a topic that is seldom encountered in American scholarship: the attitudes of such figures as Ssu-ma Kuang, Ch'eng I, Chu Hsi, and Ts'ai Yan-ting toward popular practices governing the placement of graves. Ebrey outlines the views of those who, as it were, are "for" or "against" geomancy (Chu and Ts'ai took geomancy seriously, although Ssu-ma and Ch'eng viewed it with apprehension) but also provides textual evidence that allows one to see the grayer areas between support for, and condemnation of, *feng shui* and other arts. Julia Ching's "Chu Hsi and Taoism" considers Chu's interpretations of such classical texts as the *I ching*, *Lao Tzu*, *Chuang Tzu*, and *Ch'u tzu* and also assays his commentaries on such later texts as the *Ts'an-t'ung-ch'i* (an alchemical text Chu commented on with the assistance of Ts'ai Yan-ting) and the *Yin-fu-ching* (a commentary that Ching concludes is most likely not Chu's work). She also explores in some detail the specifics of Chu's regimen of breathing practices.

Moving from specific thinkers of the Sung to general developments in the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties, Chn-fang Y's "The Cult of Kuan-yin in Ming-Ch'ing China: A Case of Confucianization of Buddhism?" describes how the cult of Kuan-yin served the aims of Confucian family values and facilitated the realization of women's domestic expectations of filiality and fertility. Y explores the little-studied practice of *ke-ku*, or the cutting off of one's flesh to feed another, and relates Kuan-yin's role as a protector of those who engage in such filial excisions.

Koichi Shinohara's "Ta-hui's Instructions to Tseng K'ai: Buddhist 'Freedom' in the Neo-Confucian Context" returns to the Sung but continues the focus on Buddhism, finding an example of Buddhist-Confucian interaction in the religious instruction given by the monk Ta-hui to a vice minister of rites. But what is particularly Confucian about minister Tseng K'ai's interest in Buddhism? The author has provided much primary material but left the work of synthesis and interpretation to the reader. The essay concludes with the tangentially related subject of Yanagida Seizan's analysis of Ta-hui's Ch'an and its influence on Chu Hsi. Judith A. Berling's "When They Go Their Separate Ways: The Collapse of the Unitary Vision of Chinese Religion in the Early Ch'ing" also focuses on Buddhist-Confucian interactions but considers mainly the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, describing not only antinomies, in the case of Confucian critiques of Buddhist eschatological movements, but also points of syncretic convergence.

The meeting of minds in Japan begins in the Tokugawa with Minamoto Ryoen's "The Acceptance of Chinese Neo-Confucianism in Japan in the Early Tokugawa Period," which surveys Japanese interpretations of Chinese Sung and Ming intellectual traditions and military thought and, with the vision of hindsight, retroactively finds roots of modernization in the perceived "empirical rationalism, philological positivism, and political ideology of teleological rationalism" (p. 256) of late Tokugawa thought. Peter Nosco's "Confucianism and Nativism in Tokugawa Japan" is an encyclopedic summary of Chinese Confucian and nativist thought in that era. The tenor of these historically focused articles contrasts with Okada Takehiko's "Mastery and the Mind," an English translation of a 1952 essay on the relationship between the martial arts, *ch'i*, and the mind. Perhaps the grandfather of much popular martial-arts-and-*ch'i* literature that proliferated in the sixties and beyond, this essay poignantly illustrates how the field has developed since the early fifties.

Joshua Fogel's "Confucian Pilgrim: Uno Tetsuto's Travels in China" surveys later Japanese travel literature about China, forays into the literature of pilgrimage in Europe and Asia, and finally describes the travels of the nineteenth-century sinologist Uno Tetsuto in China. Relatively little attention is granted to Uno's persona as a Confucian "pilgrim," but Fogel does recount Uno's gushing tale of his somatic melding into the spirit of Confucius during a visit to Qufu, which suggests that the expression "meeting of minds" is not, for this traveler, just a synecdochical trope.

The authors of these essays have perhaps more modest goals than Uno's effusive spiritual union with the Sage, satisfying themselves with providing new interpretations of well-known materials and outlining new directions for understanding the intellectual and religious complexity of the cultural traditions of China and Japan.