VOLUME TWO SOURCES OF CHINESE TRADITION
FROM 1600 THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

COMPiled BY WM. THEODORE DE BARY
& RICHARD LUFRANO

SECOND EDITION
Sources of Chinese Tradition

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VOLUME II

INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS
Introduction to Asian Civilizations

WM. THEODORE DE BARY, GENERAL EDITOR

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SECOND EDITION

VOLUME II
From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century

Compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano

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This volume is dedicated to Irene Bloom in appreciation of her outstanding contributions to the study and teaching of Chinese thought and to the development of Asian Studies.
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LATE CONFUCIAN SCHOLARSHIP: WANG FUZHI

Wang Fuzhi (Wang Quanshan, 1619–1692) is now widely recognized as one of the most important thinkers of the Ming-Qing period, but he was virtually unknown during his own lifetime, having been born into a strictly conservative and rather isolated family of scholars in Hengyang, Hunan. Wang’s personal life and official career were shattered by the catastrophic events surrounding the collapse of the Ming dynasty. In 1642, after succeeding in the provincial (juren) examinations, he set off for Beijing and the jinshi sessions, but marauding peasant rebels forced him to turn back, and when Zhang Xianzhong’s peasant army took Hengyang the following year, Wang’s family became a target of the insurgents. After the fall of Beijing in 1644, Wang took an active part in anti-Manchu resistance but was defeated when he raised troops in Hunan, and though he subsequently held a minor post at the southern “imperial” court of the Yongli pretender, he soon became a victim of factional strife and was forced to resign in 1650. Still only thirty-one years old, from then until his death some forty years later, he withdrew into the hills of Hunan and a life of scholarship. Fiercely loyal to the Ming, he refused either to serve the Qing or to rally to such dubious opponents of the alien regime as Wu Sangui, when the latter proclaimed a “Zhou” dynasty in Hengyang, in 1678.

Wang never, however, relinquished his hopes of a Chinese recovery, even though he had to content himself with expressing his ideas through a prodigious amount of writing that covered the entire range of traditional Chinese scholarship. His passionate commitment to Chinese civilization and its destiny shines forth through all his studies and, along with his fiery patriotism and savage criticism of barbarians, was responsible for the vast majority of his work remaining unpublished until the latter half of the nineteenth century. (Some was banned, but most was concealed from Qing officialdom by his family.) Yet once such writings as The Yellow Book (Huang shu), A Strange Dream (E meng), On Reading [Sima Guang’s] Comprehensive Mirror (Du Tongjian lun), and On the History of the Song Dynasty (Song Lun) had been published, they attracted the attention of both reformers and revolutionaries, who saw in Wang an early exponent of Chinese nationalism. Zeng Guofan, Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao, Zhang Binglin, and Mao Zedong were among those who declared their admiration for him.
Three imperatives animate Wang’s writings: the crucial need to return to the sound philosophical basis provided by the “true doctrines” of the early Song Confucian Zhang Zai; an urgent necessity to learn the lessons that the study of Chinese history could reveal; and a primordial duty to preserve Chinese culture and civilization from alien encroachment and indigenous debasement.

Indeed, the philosophical basis of all Wang’s thought was his own rational development of the monistic cosmology first worked out by Zhang Zai, whom he acknowledged as his master. Zhang had been one of the Song thinkers drawn upon for the great Song Neo-Confucian synthesis completed by Zhu Xi in the twelfth century, but, according to Wang, Zhang’s contribution to the genuine Confucian tradition had been accorded too little importance in the Cheng-Zhu system. Moreover, Wang Yangming and his followers had subsequently perverted Confucianism, and it was their influence that had resulted in the moral anarchy and social chaos that led to the ruin of the Ming dynasty. For Wang Fuzhi the realms of philosophy (both cosmology and ethics), history, and politics were dimensions of the same universal phenomenon, evolving as integrally related parts of the one great process of change. It was doubtless his desire to understand this process of universal change and, in particular, the cataclysmic changes of his own times that led him to devote himself to an extensive study of the Classic of Changes and Zhang Zai, whose entire system of thought was, as Wang himself remarked, inspired by this classic.

Following Zhang Zai, Wang built his philosophy on the identification of material-force (qi) with the Supreme Ultimate, the term that had become part of the Neo-Confucian vocabulary and was generally synonymous with the Way, either as the origin of the universe, as universal laws, or as the Absolute. Zhang had preferred to use the terms Supreme Void (Taixu) to describe its aspect as original, unformed substance and Supreme Harmony (Taihe) to refer to the complex but coherent process of activity and tranquillity, agglomeration and dispersal, in the harmony of yin and yang that constitutes the Way. In this universe of continuous change, Wang emphasizes the significance of the trend of material conditions (shi), which are the product of the evolving material-force (qi) and principles (li), in which the importance of the time factor is crucial. His concept of shi (translated here as “trend” or “condition,” depending on context) dominates both his historical criticism and his assessment of political institutions. It explains the rational empiricism of his proposals for
reform and his firm rejection of any notion of reviving the well-field system or the enfeoffment system as anachronistic (despite his Song master's advocacy of them!).

In responding to the critical problems of Ming China, Wang's proposals were generally moderate, tempered by an awareness of what was feasible in the prevailing conditions and his conviction that change should always be gradual if the proper equilibrium (zhèn from the Classic of Changes) were to be achieved and maintained. Having identified the systems of land taxation and distribution as the root of social and political disorder, he outlined original ways of improving the country's agricultural basis and restoring peasant prosperity. Perceiving the growth of commerce as a threat to the class structure of traditional Chinese society, he advocated repressive taxation on merchants. Arguing that imperial despotism had been a dominant factor in the decline of the Ming, he, like Huang Zongxi, proposed ways of restoring the balance of power shared between the emperor and his ministers—in particular, the restoration of the office of prime minister as the first step in a general decentralization throughout the administration that would put more power in the hands of scholar-officials. The latter were, according to Wang, the ultimate guarantors of the country's political health, and the Donglin activists of the late Ming had incarnated this role in their struggle with the inner court. As did such contemporaries as Huang and Tang Zhen, Wang severely criticized selfish and decadent emperors without ever calling the institution of monarchy itself into question. At the core of his proposals lay the aim to revive ministerial power and prestige, which had been dramatically eroded during the Ming.

Wang's proposals were never adopted or implemented, but he anticipated, in reply to a hypothetical critic, the objection that "at present, with the country overwhelmed and the dynasty cut off, to recount too much the errors of the past will simply arouse resentment. This is 'bolting the stable door after the horse has gone.'" Wang's answer was this: "Confucius, in writing the Spring and Autumn Annals, made many subtle criticisms of the reigns of Duke Ding and Duke Ai [who ruled Confucius's state of Lu during his lifetime]. At the time when one speaks, no one understands one. In setting forth what I have understood, I am also trying to advise future generations." (Huang shu, postface)

COSMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
In his commentary on Zhang Zai’s Zhengmeng (*Discipline for Beginners*), Wang elaborates the foundations of his own system. In a cosmos of being, consisting entirely of material-force (and in which there is no room for nonbeing), the natural harmony of the complex interplay of elements in the ceaseless process of evolution depends on their orderly organization into different categories and on the normal functioning of each within its respective category. The concept of universal order based on strict observance of natural categories had, of course, significant social and political implications.

In the Supreme Void all is being; but it has not yet taken form. The *qi* (material-force) is self-sufficient through agglomeration and dispersion, change and evolution; its original substance is neither diminished nor increased. The sun and moon in their risings and settings, the four seasons in their comings and goings, the various creatures in their life and death, together with the wind and the rain, dew and thunder, flourish when the time is ripe and decline when the time is ripe. In this they are one: they are all temporary forms.

. . . When the *qi* agglomerates, its existence is visible, but when it is dispersed one may suspect that it is nonexistent. Once it has agglomerated and assumed forms and images, then as regards talents (*cai*), matter (*zhi*), nature (*xing*), and feelings (*qing*), all accord with their own categories. They accept what is similar and oppose what is different; thus all things flourish in profusion and form their several categories. Moreover, the formation of each of these categories has its own organization. So it is that dew, thunder, frost, and snow all occur at their proper times, and animals, plants, birds, and fish all keep to their own species. There can be no frost or snow during the long summer days, nor can there be dew or thunder in the depths of winter. Nor can there be between man and beast, plant and tree, any indiscriminate confusion of their respective principles.

[Quanshan yishu, Zhangzi Zhengmeng zhu 1: 2a–3a—IM]

**WANG’S “REVISION” OF ORTHODOX NEO-CONFUCIANISM**

In criticizing his predecessors, Wang Fuzhi reserved his most vitriolic condemnation for Wang Yangming, but, in defending Zhang Zai’s *qi*-based monism, he also took issue with Zhou Dunyi, incorporated by Zhu Xi into his Neo-Confucian synthesis as one of its founding fathers, and with Zhu Xi himself over their dualism. He attacked Zhou’s notion of the Supreme Ultimate and the Way as the generative source of being together with the *qi* of yin and yang, and Zhu, for according priority to principle and the Way over material-force and actual phenomena.

Those who give a wrong explanation of the *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate* say that in the Supreme Ultimate there was originally no yin or yang, that yang was first produced by its movement and yin from its
quiescence . . . but movement and quiescence are the movement and quiescence of yin and yang. . . . It is not the case that there is first movement and afterward the yang, first quiescence and afterward the yin.

[Quanshan yishu, Zhangzi Zhengmeng zhu 1: 6a—IM]

When the qi disperses, it returns to the Supreme Void and reverts to the original substance of its state of fusion. There is no destruction. When it agglomerates and brings life to various things, this arises from the eternal nature of its state of fusion. Nothing new is born or reared. . . . The agglomeration and dispersion of qi constitutes the life and death of things. When it emerges they come, and when it withdraws they go. All this is the natural effect of principles and conditions (shi). It cannot be stopped. One cannot, by according with it, become eternal. One cannot, by direction, accelerate the process of dispersion. One cannot, by intervention, delay it. This is why the gentleman is unconcerned about life and death. . . . To achieve the correct norm (zhen) in life and death in following out the Human Way is the outstanding doctrine of Master Zhang, who developed the heritage of earlier sages in order to refute the Buddhists and Daoists and rectify the mind of men. Because he spoke of agglomeration and dispersion and of dispersion followed by a further agglomeration, Zhu Xi criticized this as “samsara.” My own humble opinion is that it is, on the contrary, Master Zhu's theory that is closer to what the Buddha said about nirodha. . . . The Classic of Changes also says, “Above forms it is called the Way. Below forms it is called the actual phenomenon (or concrete thing).” By the former is meant “that which is clear and penetrating and cannot take the form of images.” So actual phenomena are formed and destroyed, while that which cannot take the form of images is lodged within them as their function. As it is never formed, so it is never destroyed. The actual phenomenon wears out, but its Way never ends. . . . In autumn and winter the qi of life is stored in the earth, and though the branches and leaves of trees are withered their roots are firm and flourishing. So it is not the case that in autumn and winter they are destroyed once and for all with nothing remaining. If a fire is made of a cartload of firewood, it is consumed in one blaze and becomes flame, smoke, and ashes. But wood reverts to wood, water to water, and earth to earth: it is simply that they become so minute and subtle that man cannot see them.

[Quanshan yishu, Zhangzi Zhengmeng zhu 1: 3b-4b—IM]
The world consists of nothing but actual physical phenomena or concrete things. The Way is the Way (or Ways) of actual phenomena, but one cannot describe the actual phenomena as phenomena of the Way. “When the Way is nonexistent, so is the actual phenomenon” is something that anyone is capable of saying. But if the phenomenon exists, why worry about its Way not existing? The sage knows what the gentleman does not, and yet ordinary men and women can do what the sage cannot. It may be that people are not clear about the Way of some particular phenomenon, and so the thing is not perfected, but the fact that it is not perfected does not mean that it does not exist. “When the actual phenomenon is nonexistent, so is its Way” is something that few people are capable of saying, but it is really and truly so.

[Quanshan yishu, Zhou Yi waizhuan 5: 25a—IM]

**HISTORICAL TRENDS**

Wang insists on the need to understand history if one is to act appropriately in the present. In dealing with the evolution of society and its institutions, he argued, one must take the long view in order to appreciate what universal laws will work in the prevailing trends or conditions (shìjì). No trend is irreversible. Only change is inevitable. And man, who is, in Wang’s phrase, “the one who controls events, as the very mind of the universe,” can and must do what he can to influence it.

Wang’s theory of historical development, which was an integral part of his overall cosmology, freed him from the bonds of precedent and tradition that prevented so many scholars from adapting their classical learning to the problems of their times. His own attitude to political history and the political problems of his day was an empirical one.

The ideal is to be master of the time factor. The next best thing is to anticipate it, and the next best thing after that is to accord with it. The worst thing to do is to go against it. To go against the times is fatal. When one is master of the times, the vagaries of time fluctuate in correspondence to oneself as one controls and adjusts the times. When one anticipates the times, the cardinal principle is, when one sees what is going to happen, to guide and control its realization. When one accords with the times, one complies with that which the times make inevitable in order to save oneself and so escape from disaster.

[Quanshan yishu, Qunqiu shi lun 5: 7b—IM]

The ancient institutions were for governing the ancient world and cannot be taken as general rules applicable in the present, so the gentleman does not take them as precedents in his undertakings. One governs the world of today with what is appropriate to it today, but this will not necessarily be appropriate in the world of tomorrow, so the gentleman
does not bequeath laws as precedents for posterity. This is why the institutional arrangements regarding the enfeoffment and well-field systems, the attendance of the enfeoffed lords at court, punitive expeditions, the creation of offices, and the allocation of official salaries are not discussed in the *Classic of Documents* nor by Confucius. How then can those whose virtue is less than that of Shun, Yu, or Confucius dare to state categorically that the information that they have acquired through their studies constitutes a canon valid for all time?! . . . In compiling this book I have been concerned with tracing the origins of success and failure, and [have] done my best to remain in harmony with the fundamentals of the sages’ government, while I have considered each case on its merits in discussing the measures taken and have taken the time factor into consideration in assessing what was appropriate.

*Quanshan yishu, Du Tongqian lun: quanmo 4a–b—IM*

The discussion about the enfeoffment system is a good example of a dispute in which the proponents of two extremes engage in profitless argument. The prefectural system has survived for two thousand years without anyone being able to change it, and men of all classes have been content with it throughout that period. This being the [irresistible] trend (*shi zhi qu*), how could it possibly be so if it were not in accord with principles?* It was Heaven that made it inevitable that men should have rulers. No one caused it to happen: it was a spontaneous process. In the beginning everyone supported those whose virtue and achievements were superior to those of their fellows and served them. Subsequently, he who received overwhelming support was made emperor. All men without exception wish to be honored, and for there to be those who are honored there must be those who serve. This is in the general interest of humankind. He who is content with his position practices its Way, and so the principles behind hereditary succession were created. Though one [a ruler] might be stupid and cruel, he was nonetheless more capable than the drifting masses in the country at large. So this situation continued to exist for several thousand years, and people were content with it. But when the strong and the weak gnawed away at one another, the old ties of the enfeoffment system were completely destroyed, and by Warring States times almost nothing of it survived. How then could it possibly keep the nine regions of the empire in submission or secure the obedience of the various feudal lords and princes? Consequently the states were divided up into commanderies (*jun*) and prefectures (*xian*),
and men were selected to administer them. The prefectural system existed even in pre-Qin times. All Qin destroyed was [a China that consisted of] seven states. It was not responsible for the destruction of all the fiefs established during the Three Dynasties. So how could one have made the division into commanderies and prefectures, whereby those talented and capable of ruling the people were put in positions of authority where they could exploit their talents for governing the people if this had been contrary to the general interest of all-under-Heaven? Among the ancients the feudal lords handed down their states from generation to generation, and subsequently their officials followed their example and the tenure of office became hereditary. This was a gradual development made inevitable by the prevailing trend. However, as the sons of officials always became officials, and the sons of peasants always remained peasants, and there was no selection and utilization of those who were naturally talented, there were stupid men among the officials and accomplished men among the peasants. The accomplished could not submit to the stupid indefinitely, and so there ensued a struggle between them to gain the chance to rise in the world. This was a violent development made inevitable by the prevailing conditions. The enfeoffment system was destroyed, and the selection of officials through the examination system became the practice.

[Quanshan yishu, Du Tongjian lun 1: 1a–b—IM]

THE JUSTIFICATION OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVISIONS

Wang develops his arguments for the preservation of the distinctions between gentlemen (junzi) and mean men (xiaoren), Chinese and barbarians, in a parallel way. In both cases there is a difference in the stage of civilization attained, and the ultimate criterion is moral. Culture rather than race is still the prime consideration, even in the case of foreigners: Wang specifically declares that indigenous ethnic groups do not count as barbarians.

There are in the world two great lines of demarcation to be drawn: that between Chinese and barbarians and that between the gentleman and the mean man. It is not the case that there was originally no difference between them and that the former kings arbitrarily set up barriers between them. Barbarians and Chinese are born (live) in different lands. Since their lands are different, the climates are different too. Since their climates are different, so too are their habits, and consequently all they know and all they do is different. The noble and the inferior emerge spontaneously among them. It is simply that they are divided by physical frontiers and that their climates are different, and so there must be no
confusion. If there is confusion, the destruction of (the order of) the human sector will ensue, and the people of China will suffer from the encroachments of the barbarians and be distressed. If, however, early measures are taken to ward off the barbarians, (the order of) the human sector will thereby be stabilized and human life protected. This is in accord with Heaven. As for the gentleman and the mean man, they are born of different stock. Since they are born of different stock, their physical substance is different. Since they differ in their physical substance, their habits too are different, and consequently all they know and all they do are different. The clever and the stupid emerge spontaneously among them. It is simply that they are born of different stock and have different values, and so there must be no confusion. If there is confusion, then the principles of man are contravened. The poor and weak among the people will suffer from the encroachments (of the mean men) and be distressed. If, however, one prevents the excesses of the mean men, one may thereby preserve the principles of man and enrich human life. This is in accord with Heaven. Alas, the confusion that mean men have created between themselves and gentlemen is no different from that which the barbarians have created between themselves and the Chinese! Some people may toy with the prospect, but the gravity of the harm done thereby is beyond all expectation.

Among mean men the clever and stupid divide themselves into different classes. The stupid are content to rest in their stupidity, and so bring hardship on themselves. The clever use their cleverness to wrong others. The stupid become peasants: they bring hardship on themselves but do not harm others.

The Han regarded laboring in the fields as the equivalent [among commoners] of filial virtue in selecting officials, and the result was that rites and education were gradually destroyed. This is why people say that since the Three Dynasties orderly government has never flourished. It is because confusion has been created between the peasants and gentlemen that the situation has deteriorated. This is even more true of the merchants. The merchants are the clever members of the class of mean men, and their destruction of man’s nature and ruin of men’s lives have already become extremely serious. Their (constitution) is such that they always frequent the barbarians, and their physical substance is such that they always get on well with the barbarians. Consequently, when the barbarians prosper, the merchants are esteemed.

There are, fundamentally speaking, two great lines of demarcation to
be drawn in the world, but ultimately they are one. What is this one line of demarcation? It is that between morality and profit. . . .

There are those who are born into villages of profit and grow up in the paths of profit. It is what their elders esteem, what their own flesh and blood predispose them to, and what their hearts long after. Their will and their constitution act on one another, and so too do their minds and spirits. The result is that they are so deeply sunk in profit they cannot be made to move into the stream of gentlemen and Chinese. All are men, but the barbarians are separated from the Chinese by frontiers, while the mean men are differentiated from the gentlemen by their class. One cannot but be strict in drawing the lines of demarcation.

[Quanshan yishu, Du Tongjian lun 14: 2a–3a—IM]

THE PRESERVATION OF CHINESE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRITY

Wang's conviction that different peoples should live separately, "ignoring one another like the fish in rivers and lakes," is clearly linked to the philosophical conception outlined in his commentaries on the Classic of Changes and Zhang Zai. In his Huang shu, he develops the idea of a natural division into different species and draws out its political implications for Chinese survival. Wang's nationalism is remarkable in the history of Chinese thought not only for the violence and frequency of its expression but also for its theoretical justification.

This is why mountain creatures have cloven hoofs and those in the marshes have webbed feet; why the strengths of animals used for riding and animals used for ploughing lie in different directions; why water birds are proper to the south and cold-weather birds to the north. It is not a deliberate suppression of the state of confusion and dispersion that causes this great classification into different species: it is simply that conditions bring it about as the only way that (these creatures) can preserve themselves and ward off disaster. . . .

Therefore the sage, finding that this was true for all creatures and that each species defined its own limits, in controlling the empire and acting as its ruler separated the clever and the stupid, clarified cases where there was doubt, overcame the vicious and evil, and established lofty defensive barriers (between the groups) in order to ward off disaster and enable them to preserve themselves. . . .

Man is like other creatures insofar as he is constituted of yin and yang and eats and breathes, but he cannot be put in the same category as other creatures. The Chinese are like the barbarians insofar as their general physical characteristics are similar and they are both subject to
assemblies and divisions, but the Chinese cannot be put in the same category as the barbarians. Why is this? It is because if man does not draw lines of demarcation in order to set himself apart from other creatures, the order of Heaven is violated; if the Chinese do not draw lines of demarcation in order to set themselves apart from the barbarians, terrestrial order is violated. Heaven and earth regulate mankind through such demarcations, and if men are incapable of drawing the lines of demarcation between different groups, human order is violated. This is the way the three orders control the three sectors of Heaven, earth, and humankind. . . .

Now even the ants have rulers who preside over the territory of their nests, and when red ants or flying white ants penetrate their gates, the ruler organizes all his own kind into troops to bite and kill the intruders, drive them far away from the anthill, and prevent foreign interference. Thus he who rules the swarm must have the means to protect it. If, however, a ruler fails to make long-term plans, neglects the integrity of his territory, esteems his own person more than the empire, antagonizes colleagues, creates divisions where none should exist, is driven by suspicion to exercise a repressive control, and weakens the central region, then, while he clings desperately to his privileged status and enjoys the advantages of his position without fulfilling its obligations, disaster strikes and he is incapable of overcoming it. Confronted with an external menace, he is unable to stand firm against it. He can neither keep the succession for his own descendants nor protect his own kind. Such an extinction of the Way of the true king was what the Spring and Autumn Annals mourned. . . .

And so, with a mind full of grief and anger, and a heart full of sorrow, I rectify what went wrong in order to restore the original divisions established by the Yellow Emperor. I look forward eagerly to the advent of an enlightened ruler, who will restore sovereignty to the country, accomplish its mission, and stabilize its frontiers, and thereby guard the central territory and drive off the barbarians forever. Once this were accomplished, then though my body may perish my soul would rejoice.

[Quanshan yishu, Huang shu 1a–2b, and houxu 1b—IM]

GU YANWU, BEACON OF QING SCHOLARSHIP

Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), born in the last years of the Ming dynasty, had