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Kelleher, M. Theresa, trans., *The Journal of Wu Yubi: The Path to Sagehood*

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Wu Yubi 吳與弼 (1392–1469) is an unjustly neglected figure in the history of Chinese thought. He was a teacher of three of the most important philosophers of the 15th century (162), and was so highly regarded that the emperor gave him a personal audience to offer him the position of Tutor to the Heir Apparent (xxxiv). There was nothing original in the content of his teachings, which faithfully followed the orthodoxy of the Cheng-Zhu 程朱 School of Neo-Confucianism (152). However, he did not seek originality; he sought to become a sage. If this seems to us a Quixotic or even arrogant goal, we should keep in mind that the belief that one has achieved sagehood is proof that one is not a sage (see Philip J. Ivanhoe, trans., *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009], pp. 120–121). Furthermore, Wu believed that one of the main sources of moral failure is the denial that sagehood is a practical goal: "Whenever anyone mentions the ancients, they put them aside as being outside their range of consideration. But whenever people mention their own contemporaries, they say, 'I am better than he is,' or 'I am the same as he is,' or 'Even though he is better than I, it is not by very much'" (80). It is by identifying an exalted goal, acknowledging one's distance from it, yet ceaselessly working to come closer to it that we improve our characters. Wu kept a journal (*rilu* 日錄) to aid him in his own quest for moral improvement. He recorded the personal challenges he faced, and his failures and successes in meeting them. M. Theresa Kelleher has provided an outstanding contribution to the field by making this journal available in a fluent and learned English translation. This volume also includes an Introduction that locates the journal in its historical context, selections from Wu's correspondence, and a detailed analysis of Wu's methods of teaching and self-cultivation, which included (in addition to journaling) meditation, mindfulness, reading and discussing the classics, mentoring, and physical labor.

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Wu was the son of a politically important father, and like other young men of his social class, he was expected to study intensively to pass the civil service examinations, the primary route to government service, and with it wealth and prestige. Also like most of his contemporaries, he found such study tedious and intrinsically worthless. (For a classic discussion of the examinations and dissatisfaction with them, see David S. Nivison, "Protests against Conventions and Conventions of Protest," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, edited by Arthur Wright [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960], pp. 177–201.) There is a problem with forcing young people to study the classics, though. They are classics for a reason, and if you are not careful, your children will actually learn something from them, and that will lead them to question the status quo. This is what occurred with Wu. He happened to read an account of the 11th-century Confucian sage CHENG Yi 程頤 and his struggles to overcome his love of hunting. Suddenly, Wu saw how the practice of ethical self-cultivation described in the ancient Confucian classics could mean something for people here and now. He realized that "the Way of the sages and worthies is not solely of the past and inappropriate to the present, that truly it is not impractical and inapplicable to the conduct of affairs, that really it is neither eccentric nor strange, as my critics have charged" (81). Wu's epiphany gave him sincere appreciation for the classics, but it also led him to regard studying them in order to pass the examinations as intrinsically corrupting. Wu explained, "I completely burned up all my examination papers" (80), something that so enraged his father that he would not speak to his son for years afterward. (As Kelleher notes in her insightful discussion of Wu's life, he may also have had motivations of a more political kind for refusing to sit for the exams [xxvi–xxvii].) Without parental support, Wu retired to the country, where he was forced to eke out a living as a farmer, just as ancient sages like Shun 舜 once had.

Financial problems would dog him through most of his adulthood: "Near evening time today, I went to a neighbor's storehouse to borrow some grain. I remembered then that I had not yet repaid my former debts. This new debt will only add to what I already owe. Oh, what should I do about this life of mine?" (25, no. 72) (Wu turned down the offer to be Tutor to the Heir Apparent, and Kelleher offers interesting speculation about why [xxxvi–xxxvii].) Wu also suffered from illnesses, particularly boils and eye problems. (Diabetes would have made Wu susceptible to both, but boils can also be the result of poor nutrition and unhygienic living conditions, both of which Wu faced, and his eye problems could simply be an independent condition.) However, as Wu came to realize more and more clearly, one's greatest and most important moral task is to deal with such daily problems, handling them properly without losing composure: "After restlessly tossing and turning for a good long time, unable to sleep, I came to realize that extreme poverty and suffering strengthen a person's will and mature his sense of humaneness" (34, no. 116). This was the meaning behind the saying from the *Analects* he frequently repeats: "Confucius said, 'I do not complain against Heaven or blame people. I study things on the lower level, but my understanding penetrates to higher things.'" Wu comments, "I must treasure this saying for the rest of my life" (60, no. 252).

As Kelleher notes, people respond differently to WU Yubi as a person, some "find him an incredibly whiny boor; others are moved by what they regard as his wonderfully sensitive soul" (x). (Augustine's *Confessions* polarizes readers in a similar way.) While I can appreciate what motivates those who find Wu irritating, I developed a fondness

for him. Confucian literati do not gush about their families like idealized American fathers, but this makes the passing references that Wu makes to his own family even more poignant. He talks with evident pleasure of teaching the *Analects* to his daughters (31, no. 101), and of his concern when one of them is ill (19, no. 53). He appreciates the sacrifices and support of his long-suffering wife (34, no. 117; 32, no. 103). Wu's love of nature is genuine and inspiring: "Contemplating the flowers and trees around me today, I feel one in spirit with them" (15, no. 36). He suffered from what we now call Imposter Syndrome: at the age of 62, when he had numerous adoring disciples, Wu commented, "For several days now, I have been thinking how I've passed the days of my life as a fake" (54, no. 212). Many reflective people will sympathize with his bouts of self-doubt, insomnia, and sadness: "Last night on my pillow, I was thinking how lately I have made no progress in my learning and moral character. I tossed and turned, unable to find rest. It was only with the crowing of the cock this morning that I fell asleep" (50, no. 191).

Wu's practices of self-cultivation are of continuing relevance. He came to recognize that "negatively restraining" his emotions "is a rigid and painful approach," while "positively acting" by "using principle to deal with each situation is a flexible and smooth one" (9, no. 13). But what does "using principle (*yi li* 以理)" mean for us today? Our popular culture and education teach us to treat ethics as nothing but a series of insoluble moral dilemmas. However, Neo-Confucians like Wu believed that we can discover what is morally required of us in each situation, either by reading the classics or by using our innate moral intuition. In fact, genuine moral dilemmas are rare for most of us (thankfully). Our everyday life consists of situations in which we know what is obligatory. As a parent, you know that you should make an effort to keep the lines of communication open with your sullen teenagers, even if you are tempted to give up. As an educator, you know that you should not pander to the desire of the students for vacuous validation, but should establish intellectual challenges, and then provide the support and inspiration to help meet them. Wu's insight was that if we deal with life's challenges by trying to repress our frustration, anger, envy, and other negative emotions, we will become dispirited and fail. In contrast, if we simply acknowledge our responsibilities in each situation and focus only on doing our best to meet them, we will, like Wu, feel "a great unburdening inside" (9, no. 13). Part of focusing only on doing our best is letting go of the things over which we have no control, whether it be in the past ("The past thirty years I should have been exerting more effort, but what can I do about that now?" [19, no. 53]), present ("All things in the world are unalike. How can I hate those things that are contrary to my tastes?" [9, no. 13]), or future ("With respect to success and failure, gain and loss, I can only entrust myself to the will of Heaven" [22, no. 60]).

Kelleher's work is obviously a labor of love, and her dedication shows in the high quality of the translation. I might have handled a few things differently myself, though. *Shen xin* 身心 is consistently rendered "body and mind." This is a tempting translation into English, where such dualistic contrasts come naturally. ("I'm all for you body and soul," croons Billie Holiday.) *Shen* can certainly mean "body" in some contexts, but as the opening of the *Great Learning* illustrates, when paired with *xin*, they are related as part and whole: "Those who desired to regulate their families would first cultivate their selves [*shen*]. Those who desired to cultivate their selves would first correct their minds [*xin*]" (Justin Tiwald and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Later Chinese*

Philosophy [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2014], p. 188). A related hiccup is this line: "it is impossible suddenly to make the imbalances of my physical nature and the defects in my learning disappear" (16, no. 38). "Physical nature" is not entirely mistaken for *qi bing* 氣稟, but the connotation of the English translation is narrowly materialistic. "Personality," "character," or "natural dispositions" might better convey the sense of the Chinese expression. Finally, *gongfu* 工夫 is variously translated as "program" (26, no. 74; 29, no. 89; 31, no. 97), "practice" (27, no. 78; 32, no. 105; 37, no. 127; 39, no. 137; 42, no. 151), and other ways. However, *gongfu* is a technical term in Neo-Confucianism, referring to any task one undertakes as part of one's moral cultivation. (See Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism*, p. 124, n65.) Consequently, it might be preferable to consistently render it as something like "moral effort" (39, no. 138; 57, no. 232; 71, no. 312) or "practice of self-cultivation" (44, no. 162). These would be my suggestions, but since "I don't even have enough free time to correct my own faults, how can I correct the faults of others?" (25, no. 71)

An important aspect of Wu's program of ethical cultivation is reading the classics: "Only by constantly settling it down by reading books will the mind not be overwhelmed by external things" (30, no. 92). However, only the right sort of reading will do: "the problem for people is that they don't know how to turn inward and seek within themselves. For them, books are just books, the self is just the self, and there is no connection between the two. When the books that a person reads only benefit his mouth and ears, then it is all a great failure" (93). I hope people will read Kelleher's excellent translation of Wu's journal and use it to benefit more than just their "mouths and ears."