

宋
遼
金
元

The Bulletin of
SUNG YUAN
Studies

Number 19
1987

Horst Huber, Wen T'ien-hsiang (1236-1283): Vorstufen zum Verständnis seines Lebens (First Steps in Understanding His Life). Phil. Diss. Universität München, 1983, 513 pp.

The 700th anniversary of Wen T'ien-hsiang's execution might have been an additional motivation for Horst Huber to complete, at least temporarily, his long-term studies of Wen's life and times as well as the history of Wen's becoming a popular Chinese hero. In spite of its seemingly preliminary title, this published dissertation appears rather to be the fruit (nearly overripe) of profound scholarship with the aim "to ponder on Wen's biography looking for still new perspectives and, above all, for those which can be experienced personally" (pp. 2-3).

Is not the intellectual restlessness of the historian—the willingness to leave known paths combined with the demand for new perspectives—an equivalent to Wen T'ien-hsiang's maxim to model oneself unceasingly upon Heaven (fa t'ien pu hsi 法天不息)?! Huber confirms that this concept, which was the focus in Wen's official biography in the Sung shih, had also been the main idea in Wen's palace examination essay (p. 14). This phrase made by combining quotes from the classics expressed a new notion within the context of Sung Confucianism. In a recent biography of Wen, Wan Sheng-nan utilized this concept as the main key for understanding Wen's life and thought,¹ but Huber rarely mentions the concept again in his own study. It appears certain that an inquiry into the life and thought of Wen T'ien-hsiang is not Huber's actual intent, for he is not focused upon figuring

¹ See Wan Sheng-nan 萬繩楠, Wen T'ien-hsiang chuan 文天祥傳, Cheng-chou: Ho-nan jen-min ch'u-p'an-she, 1985, p. 350.

out the crucial facts of Wen's biography. Furthermore, his does not represent the "first steps" because as Huber briefly notes on p. 1, William A. Brown earlier completed a Harvard dissertation in 1962 entitled, *The Biography of Wen T'ien-hsiang in the Sung shih*.

Huber acknowledges a certain "deviation from the historical Wen T'ien-hsiang" (pp. 3-4). Instead of a biography per se, the dissertation descends the "backstairs" of Wen's biography to deal with the protagonist's reception in literature and his effect on Sung loyalists. The introductory section (through p. 22) sets forth the direction of the thesis. Instead of the spreading popularity of the Wen myth in modern China, the dissertation concentrates upon the roots of the myth; that is the period of Wen's moulding into a "redeemer" (p. 81) for his contemporaries or near contemporaries during and immediately after the fall of the Sung dynasty. Some of the early reverence paid to Wen in local and prefectual temples is surveyed.² In view of the long tradition of revering Wen in his native place, Huber expresses his amazement about Wen's quite late attainment of nationwide popularity and admission into the Confucian Temple in 1844. We might wonder, is he really unaware of the fact that the government inducted Wen into the Confucian Temple as a result of growing patriotic sentiment against imperialist encroachment in the wake of the Opium War?³ Through an interpretation of early texts about Wen T'ien-hsiang, a scenario opens up to the reader which can be compared to a similar one encompassing the way to Golgotha and the event at Emmaus (to which Huber is explicitly referring to on p. 61). As to Wen's death, there is a comparable situation in that it signals the final breakdown of a world order for the "dependents of Sung" (*i-min*), i.e. Sung loyalists, thus leading to the eruption of a spiritual crisis among those who attend to, but do not really take part in, the events. This kind of experience, to which Huber refers as "vicarious experience," denotes the "decisive mode of existence for the loyal 'dependents of Sung'" (p. 60). It is presented as the "main idea" (p. 4) throughout three texts which take the image of Wen T'ien-hsiang as the central issue.

The first part of the of the dissertation is comprised mainly of: an interpretation of three chosen texts about Wen T'ien-hsiang by his contemporaries or near contemporaries (chap. I, pp. 23-61); and a discussion of anecdotes about Wen (chap. II, pp. 62-139). The first text, the *Sheng chi Wen Ch'eng-hsiang wen* 生祭文丞相文 by Wang Yen-wu (1252-1324), is a "requiem in lifetime" in the form of an "open letter" to Wen, who was at the time being taken to Peking. A "casuistry of heroic lives for political ends" (p. 26) [that is to say, discussing special cases of right and wrong in the political conduct of individual heroes by applying general ethical principles] is presented to demonstrate that the potential hero [Wen] has to make decisively use of his opportunity for a heroic

² The temple in the schoolyard mentioned in the official biography of Wen in the *Sung shih* is not identified by the author. Actually this is the "temple honoring the worthies of our place" (*Hsiang-hsien tz'u*) of the district school in Lu-ling; here reverence was paid to Wen was worshipped already since 1325. See Liu Yueh-shen's "Chih-cheng ch'ung-hsin miao-hsueh chi" 忠正先生祠記, in: *Chi-an fu-chih* 吉安府志, comp. by Ting Hsiang/Liu T'o, 1875, 17/33b.

³ See Wang Sheng-nan, op. cit. An interesting literary monument showing the patriotic use of the Wen T'ien-hsiang myth is the *Hai-sheng hun* 海誓魂, edited by Sun Chü-yuan 孫君淵 and Sun Hsün 孫君, Ch'ang-sha: Hu-nan jen-min ch'u-p'an-sha, 1985. Written anonymously at the end of the Ch'ing or beginning of the Ch'ing or beginning of the republican period in the traditional style of historical novels, it was printed for the first time two years ago.

death. Otherwise, Wen would run the risk of a prolonged life; it was inconceivable to Wang that Wen would die in a trivial way! Reviewing this text the author illustrates his repeatedly offered suggestion that Confucians since the Sung increasingly applied terms describing various states of mind to the realm of political theory. In the case of Wang's "requiem in lifetime," this tendency is displayed in an "interlocking of the civil servant/monarch relation with the son/father relation" (p. 30) that is unprecedented in terms of its rigor. By "paralleling filial piety to loyalty" (p. 122) or by transforming 'loyalty' into 'filial piety' (p. 25), the conflicting claims upon Wen to live due to filial piety and to die a heroic death due to loyalty are seemingly superseded, but not dissolved. As the author stated, we find in the literature on Wen T'ien-hsiang "the most, until that time, rigorous formulations of loyalty which in it Sung version had no vestiges of a loyalty based upon bonding between persons as in feudal times. Instead, Sung loyalty was totally linked with the developing political and institutional system" (p. 108). Unfortunately, the author does not say anything about the origins or further elaboration of this part of Confucian political theory.⁴

The second text is the *Teng Hsi-tai t'ung-k'u chi* 登臺慟哭記

(Record of ascent to the Western Terrace and of our wailing there) by Hsieh Ao (1249-1295) and includes twenty-three colophons and poems as addenda. The focus of the bizarre ceremony as well as of the "Record" itself (which Huber dates to the winter of 1290/91) is a "chant in the manner of Ch'u, calling the souls" (p. 49). Wen becomes in this "chant" the "symbol of the cosmic spiritual forces of the 'South'" (p. 50), thus embodying the idea that he "by the cosmic spiritual forces of the South, might be able even under foreign rule to transform the empire into a true utopian empire of Sung" (p. 52). In this context the author emphasizes two facets of "vicarious experience": firstly, the almost religious character of these "mimetic perceptions" or "mimetic realizations"; and secondly, the effect of "vicarious experience" on the self-consciousness of the "dependents of Sung," i.e. an approximation of their *i-min* existence to a loyalist's life which they lead in their minds. The colophons with their main purpose of putting Wen T'ien-hsiang and Hsieh Ao in relation to each other elucidate this effort in "linking something like an *i-min* ethos to loyalism" (p. 60).

The third text is the biography of Wen presented by the (T'ieh-han) *Hsin shih* (鍾隱心史) by Cheng Ssu-hsiao (1241-1318). On the whole the biography correctly reflects the historical details, though sometimes fictionalizing them. In addition, it adds considerably to the growth of legends about the time from Wen's imprisonment until after his death. Huber's interpretation of the *Hsin shih* presents it as a syncretistic patchwork of philosophical concepts taken from the "Three Teachings." In such "crisis ethics" of Cheng, "Wen becomes the Archimedean point of an ethical self-salvation" (p. 80). In the course of

⁴ In my view an important point in this context is a new definition of "filial piety" as piety toward those who care for someone, i.e. toward the adoptive mother instead of toward the natural mother; see Hu Yin 胡寅, "Chi Ch'in Kuei chih" 齊臣歸志, in: *Fei-lan chi* 飛鵲集, Ssu-k'u ch'uan-shu chen-pen, Ser. I, vol. 291, 17/1a-4a. The relevancy of this new definition within political theory is shown for example by the so called P'u-debate during the 1060s.

discussion, the author also touches on two key problems about the *Hsin shih*: the meaning of the title; and the authenticity of the work. He translates the title as "Subjectivity (as manifested) in history" (p. 75), but he would have done well to consider an even wider range of Sung Confucian discussions of the term, *hsin*.⁵

The second chapter discusses eight anecdotes about Wen's ideology and character, four about friends and opponents in politics, and five about loyalty in the face of foreign enemies.⁶ The author believes these anecdotes "can reveal the perspectives which determine official, yet not exclusively state-controlled, biographies" (p. 4). In the discussion of the anecdotes, sometimes a wider historical context should have been taken into account: the broader ideological background of the question of legitimacy (following p. 128); the attitude of orthodox Confucian literati since the Sung toward games and social amusements in light of Wen's passion for playing chess (pp. 96-97); or the terminological history of the terms *ts'ung-jung* 從容 and *k'ang-k'ai* 慷慨.⁷ Perhaps, such issues would have been beyond the scope of the present study. The original intention to gain an "understanding of the situation" and to approach "Wen's personal problems and conflicts" (p. 4). This intent is consistently pursued throughout the first half of the dissertation in spite of the often detailed discussion.

The general conception of the dissertation changed during its long period of composition (p. 140). This shift probably explains why the second part, a translation of the *Chi-nien lu* 紀年錄 (Chronological Records) that is found in chapter III, pp. 140-241, appears disconnected from the previous two chapters. The *Chi-nien lu*, the first autobiographical *nien-p'u* in Chinese literary history, is totally different kind of text from those discussed in the first half of the dissertation, and there is no internal linkage between the two parts. The nearly one-hundred-page translation is carefully done and richly annotated. The translation should have been followed by a discussion of the text pointing out its literary and historical significance as well as analyzing its importance for Wen's biography, but Huber reserves these matters for future study (p. 140). That publication here announced would have been the more appropriate place for this annotated translation. A glossary and supplemental references to the original text should be added then.

There are a number of smaller and more technical matters about which one could complain. Endnotes (pp. 245-488) instead of footnotes impede the reader from convenient reference. Although often providing rich reference material, the frequently long explanations and comments do on occasion stray far from the line of

⁵ A thorough translation should have taken as its base the definitions of *hsin* given by Cheng in the "general postscript" (*Tsung hsu hsü*) of the *Hsin shih* and its connotations within Sung Confucianism; see the material provided in Hsia Chun-yü 夏春宇, *Sung-hsueh kai-yao* 宋學概要, Taipei, Hua-shih ch'u-pan-she, 1976, p. 337-418.

⁶ We wonder why the author did not use the convenient collections of anecdotes in the *Sung-jen i-shih hui-pien* 宋人軼事彙編, comp. by Ting Ch'uan-ching, 3 vols., Peking, Chung-hua shu-ch'u, 1981 reprint of 1935 edition. See 19/1029-35 about Wen.

⁷ For an understanding of the term *k'ang-k'ai* in pre-Sung times, see the article by Goto Akio 後藤 秋生, in *Chugoku bun shi tetsu gaku ronshu Kaga Eiji Hakusei taikan kinen* 中國文哲學論集 加賀博史追悼紀念 (Studies on Chinese Literature, History and Philosophy (Commemorative Volume for Dr. Kaga Eiji)), 慷慨の軌跡—書讀の康平から院政へ, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979, pp. 269-284.

argument (i.e. p. 280, n. 25). Chinese characters throughout the bibliography and a separate glossary should have been included. There are typing errors and random orthographical errors ("Grabmal" [sepulchre] instead of Grabmahl" [funeral banquet], p. 25). Such deficiencies raise the reader's hopes for a careful revision within the scope of further studies—as the author himself promises in the dissertation (i.e. pp. 6, 22, 99, 102, 107-108, 113, 140).⁸

Huber restrains himself from judging Wen's intellectual oeuvre because it has remained fragmentary. With the same argument, we can also refrain from a final judgment of the dissertation at hand. But without doubt, we can conclude that it points in a new and unconventional direction; thus, it assures an interesting and very stimulating reading—something which cannot be said of many usual biographies. Unfortunately, the dissertation in its present form will not receive its due attention. This is most regrettable in regard to the highly scholarly and skillfully elaborated translation of the *Chi-nien lu*.

Joachim Mittag, München, Germany

⁸ For this future research, Huber might be interested in four recently rediscovered poems by Wen T'ien-hsiang and seven by Hsieh Ao in the *Yung-lo ta-tien*; see Iuan Kuei-ming 袁貴明, "Wen T'ien-hsiang Hsieh Ao shih shih-1" 文天祥謝翱詩拾遺, in *Hsueh-lin man-lu* 雪林漫錄, vol. 8 (1983), pp. 134-137.