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The thirteenth century scholar and teacher Xu Heng began as a peasant and a refugee from the chaos of war, but rose to the highest levels of the Yuan dynasty court. He helped to facilitate the translation of neo-Confucian ideas for the Mongol rulers, a translation that had to be carried out on multiple levels of language and culture. In particular, he advocated the universality of Confucian models across both ethnicity and class. In so doing, he helped to set a cultural pattern that would persist beyond the Mongol rule and become a foundational aspect of traditional China's legacy.

The philosophical milieu of the Southern Song 宋 dynasty (1127–1229) was complex and contentious. In addition to challenges from intellectually fertile varieties of Buddhism and Daoism, Confucian thought was internally divided along numerous axes and among strong and incompatible personalities. The school of thought promoted by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who is now regarded as a towering figure in the history of Confucianism, was merely one among several actively thriving scholarly lineages. The eventual dominance of his teachings would not have seemed a foregone conclusion either during Zhu Xi's lifetime or even in subsequent decades: Zhu's teachings were actually banned by the Song court at the time of his death, and while political and ideological reversals brought signs of official respect in the 1220s and 1240s,[1] it could just as well, had things been otherwise, have served to damn them by association with the failing regime.[2]

The Mongol conquest, first of north China (in 1234) and then of the south as well (1271), threw the philosophical landscape into great uncertainty, and also altered the fate of many Chinese intellectuals of the day. Those who might well have risen to the highest echelons of power, if the Song had continued, instead retired to private life, while those who did rise to prominence in the Mongol court included not only minor officials of pre-conquest north China, like Yao Shu 姚樞 (1203–1280) and Liu Bingzhong 劉秉忠 (1216–1274), but also men who would

1 Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 90. Many thanks to Sahar Amer and Hélène Sirantoine for organizing the exciting conference that led to this paper, and also to three anonymous assessors for their detailed and thoughtful comments.

2 John W. Dardess, 'Did the Mongols Matter? Territory, Power, and the Intelligentsia in China from the Northern Song to the Early Ming', *The Song–Yuan–Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. by Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 111–34 (p. 130).

have been highly unlikely to have official careers at all, such as the acupuncturist Dou Mo 竇默 (1196–1280)[3] and the subject of the present study, Xu Heng 許衡 (1209–1281). Xu Heng's passionate adoption of Zhu Xi's teachings, together with his willingness to use the vernacular language, was a crucial combination of factors that made this unlikely figure one of the key players in shaping the intellectual landscape of China even down to today.

Xu Heng was born into a Chinese peasant family, apprenticed to a fortune-teller, captured as a prisoner of war, and, late in his life, was called upon to advise Khubilai Khan (1215–1294), fifth Great Khan of the Mongol empire and first Emperor of the Yuan 元 dynasty (1271–1368). Xu Heng is best-known in Chinese history for his pivotal role in promoting Zhu Xi's particular version of Confucianism; in the estimation of Igor de Rachewiltz, 'he contributed perhaps more than anyone else to the eventual triumph of Neo-Confucianism during the Yüan dynasty'.[4] He did this in large part through his sincere dedication to the profession of teaching, engaging his students with gentleness and compassion unusual in his time: according to his official biography, 'even when speaking with young children, he was [so gentle] it was as if he feared doing injury to them' (雖與童子語，如恐傷之).[5] His reputation is considered to be somewhat tarnished by the accusation that he was a collaborator, someone willing (as so many of his peers were not) to serve his Mongol conquerors. Alternatively, though, he could be seen as someone who put aside ethnic and cultural prejudices in the belief that the moral and practical truths he was imparting were (or could become) human universals.

Xu Heng was also a translator, though there is no indication that he was proficient in any foreign language. He translated the ossified, esoteric written language of the educated Chinese elite into the living language of the common people. He translated profound moral insights from a tenuous text-based transmission into living, bodily practice. And finally, he translated his culture for the benefit of those who had little natural sympathy for it: he tried to convey the best it had to offer and also its most urgent needs. This study will discuss Xu Heng's life and work, and then introduce two issues that form an essential background to an understanding of Xu Heng's cultural translation project: the history of Chinese literary and vernacular languages, and the background of the neo-Confucian movement. Finally I will analyse some examples of Xu Heng's neo-Confucian 'translations' and consider how they might have been shaped by and for their non-Chinese audience.

3 Reiko Shinno, *The Politics of Chinese Medicine Under Mongol Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 26–27.

4 Igor de Rachewiltz, 'Introduction', in *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200–1300)*, ed. by Igor de Rachewiltz and others (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), pp. vi–xxxviii (p. xxx). On the term 'neo-Confucianism', see below.

5 *History of the Yuan* [*Yuan shi* 元史], ed. by Song Lian 宋濂 ([1370]; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 158.3729. In the foregoing citation, the first number refers to the chapter and the second number refers to the page. Depending on the edition, pagination may or may not restart with each chapter. This notation will be used henceforth for citations from pre-modern Chinese texts.

I. The Life and Times of Xu Heng

In the biographies of talented writers or scholars can often be found the lament of hindsight: that their greatness went unrecognized or unrewarded in their own lifetimes. Xu Heng was not a man who suffered such neglect. Although frequently in and out of official employment, the recognition he received during his lifetime was of the best kind: surviving comments by his contemporaries imply that he was seen as a good person who earnestly and forthrightly devoted himself to a worthy cause, who gave clear, sensible advice, and who remained unswayed by considerations of ambition or personal gain. His biography in the standard history of the Yuan dynasty is even more laudatory, and reads like hagiography. Though Confucianism is not a religion that tends to recognize evangelists as such, Xu Heng's contribution to the propagation of its teachings—through a delicate and uncertain period of its history—could certainly be interpreted as playing a functionally similar role. Most surviving sources, including Xu Heng's biography, are at least to some extent influenced by later awareness of Xu Heng's role in the history of neo-Confucianiam and should be seen in that light.

Traditional Chinese biography often begins by relating an incident 'to show how the character of the subject was already evident in childhood'.[6] Regardless of their literal truth, such incidents are meant to provide a window into the essence of a person's moral character, foreshadowing how this moral character would become important in the person's rise to prominence. As mentioned above, Xu Heng was born into a peasant family. Whether because his family was relatively well off or because (as his biography notes) 'as a child he had a most unusual nature' (幼有異質), he was given a formal education. He began his study at around seven years of age.

> Being taught chapter-and-verse commentary, he asked his teacher, 'What is the purpose of reading books?' The teacher said, 'To take the examinations and get an official rank!' [Xu Heng] said, 'Is it only for that?' The teacher was greatly amazed at him.
> (授章句，問其師曰：「讀書何為？」師曰：「取科第耳！」曰：「如斯而已乎？」師大奇之。)[7]

For much of China's history before and after Xu Heng's time, success in the civil service examinations promised fame, fortune, and a chance to change the world. Generations of elites devoted their childhoods and even the prime of their lives to a rigorous course of preparation that often included memorizing the excruciatingly detailed 'chapter-and-verse commentary' mentioned above. Depending on the vagaries of circumstance, the outcome of this arduous training was far from

6 Brian Moloughney, 'From Biographical History to Historical Biography: A Transformation in Chinese Historical Writing', *East Asian History*, 4 (1992), 1–30 (p. 10).

7 *History of the Yuan*, 158.3716.

certain, and failure took a terrible emotional toll;[8] success, meanwhile, could earn one a place among the great luminaries of the state.

Xu Heng lived during a time that was later characterized as 'a barbarian break', when traditional Chinese institutions had fallen under the control of non-Han peoples for whom 'the millennial civil bureaucracy sometimes became expendable' and at best 'was always compromised by the dual political system that evolved to cater to the conquering outsiders and their Han subjects'.[9] Specifically, he was born in the final decades of the Jin 金, or Jurchen, dynasty (1115–1234), which in 1126 had so spectacularly defeated the ethnically Chinese Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279), and taken control of north China. The defeated Song court fled its fallen capital at Kaifeng 開封 and crossed the Yangzi river, leaving behind the former emperor and his heir as captives of the new Jurchen rulers.

In governing north China, the Jin employed in modified form many Chinese institutions inherited from the Northern Song as well as hybrid forms developed by their sinicized non-Han neighbors, the Liao (Khitans). The Jin instituted their own civil service examinations in 1123. Over time, 'degrees were conferred and offices bestowed in such numbers that both were somewhat devalued'; perhaps the intention was to 'pacify the Chinese population without having to curtail the numbers of Jurchen in major offices'.[10] By the time the young Xu Heng was beginning his unwilling study of chapter-and-verse commentary, however, the Jin dynasty was weakened by financial troubles and severely threatened by the explosive Mongol conquest. The Mongols, under the command of the great Chinggis Khan, had devastated the former Jin capital of Yanjing (near present-day Beijing) in 1215, around the time Xu Heng first began his studies. The Jin court had retreated south and re-established their regime at Kaifeng, but their final defeat would soon come at the hands of Chinggis Khan's third son Ogödei in 1234. Whether or not the fall of the Jin would have seemed inevitable to the young Xu Heng and his family, it certainly was for those who compiled early drafts of Xu's biography after his death in 1281. So it was that against a background of violence and political fragmentation, Xu Heng came to be portrayed as an exponent of true learning in opposition to careerist manoeuvring, establishing a background for his lifelong conviction that the true purpose of study went beyond mere politics.

In the chaos that preceded the fall of the Jin state, Xu Heng was captured by Mongol forces. He regained his freedom[11] and dedicated himself to study and

8 Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Late Imperial China*, trans. by Conrad Schirokauer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

9 Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 20. Elman argues that the notion of a 'barbarian break' might at least in part be a myth of later invention, but then the same could be said for Xu Heng's biography.

10 Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, 'An Overview of Chin History and Institutions', in *China under Jurchen Rule: Essays on Chin Intellectual and Cultural History*, ed. by Hoyt Cleveland Tillman and Stephen H. West (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 23–38 (pp. 32, 33).

11 See Hok-lam Chan, 'Hsü Heng (1209–1281)', in *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 416–47 (p. 418).

teaching, first in Shandong, then in Hebei. It was from around this time that his biography gives a second anecdote to illustrate his character. It is noted in the narrative that though it was a time of great military unrest, Xu Heng

> invariably applied [to himself] to the strictest moral standard before speaking any word or taking any action. Once in mid-summer, crossing Heyang, [everyone] was thirsty in the extreme. By the roadside there was a pear tree, where a crowd of people scrambled desperately for [pears] and gobbled them down. Only Xu Heng remained kneeling under the tree, completely composed. Someone asked him about this and he said, 'One cannot take something that does not belong to one.' Someone else said, 'It is a time of chaos! and these [pears] have no master.' [Xu Heng] said, 'Though the pears have no master, does that mean my heart has no master?'
> (言動必揆諸義而後發。嘗暑中過河陽，渴甚，道有梨，眾爭取啖之，衡獨危坐樹下自若。或問之，曰：「非其有而取之，不可也。」人曰：「世亂，此無主。」曰：「梨無主，吾心獨無主乎？」)[12]

This level of self-control and personal restraint was to be a permanent feature of Xu Heng's character. As is noted by his biographers, he preferred to live 'a simple, frugal life' and even when he became famous, he remained poor; he gave away to 'his clansmen and needy pupils any money or grain that he could spare'.[13] While teaching his students about an ancient Confucian ideal practice of land use known as the 'well-field system', he 'bought a piece of land to plant mulberry trees in support of charitable works'.[14] Despite his early doubts about the value of the civil service exam, Xu Heng did take and pass the first Mongol civil service examinations in 1238. Most likely his purpose was not to obtain any official position but rather to have his occupation listed as 'Confucian scholar' in the household registration system of the time.[15]

Of far greater significance is an event that occurred in the early 1240s, when Xu Heng was first introduced to the strand of thought variously known as 'the Learning of the Way' (*Daoxue* 道學) or 'the Learning of Principle' (*Lixue* 理學), generally referred to in English as 'neo-Confucianism'.[16] More background on

12 *History of the Yuan*, 158.3716–17.

13 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 422.

14 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 424.

15 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 419.

16 Elman advocates avoiding the term 'neo-Confucianism' in referring to 'orthodox, Zhu Xi-oriented trends in classical learning from 1000 until 1700', which he refers to as the 'Learning of the Way'; Elman, 'Rethinking "Confucianism" and "Neo-Confucianism" in Modern Chinese History', in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, ed. by Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002), pp. 518–54 (pp. 529–30). See also Wm Theodore de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. xv–xvi. For more detailed discussion, see Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), pp. 1–9. For

this complex movement will be given below, but here it is sufficient to describe its effect upon this mature man who had already established his reputation as an erudite teacher and thinker. Having encountered the core texts of this movement while visiting a colleague,

> He read them, and something deep within him silently and fully assented to [their message]. And so, he copied out each and every character with his own hands before returning [home]. He gathered his students and said to them, 'All my past teachings were exceedingly negligent. It is only now that I have come to understand how to properly structure the process of learning. If you insist on remaining with me, you will have to discard all the commentary that you recited and practised in former days. We will devote ourselves to the *Elementary Learning*: we will consider "sprinkling and sweeping, and response to inquiries"[17] to be the foundation for our advancement of virtue. If you disagree, you should find a different teacher.' The crowd of students assented. [Xu] proceeded to burn all their notes and tablets from before, and decreed that there be no hierarchy among them. They would all begin anew from the *Elementary Learning*. The teacher himself also chanted with great sincerity, unceasingly, day and night. His will was sincere, his practice forceful, and he led them by his own personal example.
> (讀之，深有默契於中，遂一一手寫以還。聚學者謂之曰：「昔所授受，殊孟浪也。今始聞進學之序，若必欲相從，當悉棄前日所學章句之習，從事於小學，灑掃應對，以為進德之基。不然，當求他師。」眾皆曰：「唯。」遂悉取向來簡帙焚之，使無大小，皆自小學入。先生亦旦夕精誦不輟，篤志力行，以身先之。)[18]

Though the language of sudden conversion is not unknown in Chinese discourse, it is rare enough among Confucian scholars to be rather striking here. Nor is it likely that this is purely hagiographic invention: in 1266, Xu would write an anguished letter protesting his son's failure to study these works with appropriate diligence. Its opening line reads, 'I revere the *Four Books* and the *Elementary Learning*, and believe in them as if they were divine' (小學、四書，吾敬信如神).[19] As Chan Hok-lam described it, 'the fundamentalist approach of the *Elementary Learning* and the *Four Books* struck a deep chord in [Xu's] down-to-earth peasant soul'. Or

recent re-examination of the term 'Learning of the Way' in particular, see Cheung Hiu Yu, 'An Examination of the "New Learning" Usage of *daoxue* in Northern Song China', *Philosophy East and West* (forthcoming). Although more nuanced terminology is often appropriate, the present article retains the more general and familiar 'neo-Confucianism' as it is more accessible to an interdisciplinary audience.

17 A quotation from Zhu Xi's preface to the *Elementary Learning*; see Zhu Xi 朱熹, 'Preface to the *Elementary Learning*' (*Ti xiao xue* 題小學), in *Imperial Compilation of the Complete Works of Master Zhu* (*Yu zuan Zhuzi quan shu* 御纂朱子全書), ed. by Li Guangdi 李光地 and others (1713; Nei fu 內府, Qing Kangxi 清康熙 52), 56.13a–b.

18 Su Tianjue 蘇天爵 (1294–1352), *Abbreviated Account of Famous Ministers of the [Yuan] court* (*Guo chao [Yuan] ming chen shi lüe* 國朝[元]名臣事畧), ed. by Wang Yunwu 王雲五 (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1979), 8.22b–23a.

19 *History of the Yuan,* 158.3727; trans. adapted from Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 421.

in the words of Wm Theodore de Bary, he was 'a rare case of a Confucian with a mission who served as a missionary in the more typical religious sense'.[20]

Xu Heng continued to live a simple life and devote himself to teaching and scholarship until 1254 when he was persuaded to take up a position at the district school in Jingzhao 京兆, the area around the old Han and Tang capital of Chang'an. This territory had recently been added to Khubilai's holdings by Mönke (b. 1209, r. 1251–1259), who held the position of Great Khan at that time. Xu's success in Jingzhao led to a promotion that he was desperate to reject, apparently because he was unwilling to become involved in politics. In 1260, Khubilai succeeded Mönke as Great Khan and began scouring his new empire for talented people to serve in his administration. Xu Heng had several audiences with Khubilai and, because of his ties to other neo-Confucian scholars, was drawn into factional politics, gradually and much against his will. For the next few years he was appointed to and resigned from several education-related posts, clearly torn between his desire to further the neo-Confucian cause and his distaste for politics. Finally, in 1266, he had his eighth audience with the Great Khan and finally consented to express his political views at length. His words were favourably received, and he was ordered to compile his advice into a formal written memorial that is preserved under the title, 'Five Measures Required by the Times' (時務五事).[21] Although scholars debate the degree to which the bureaucratic expertise of Chinese advisors was required to compensate for ignorance and inexperience of the Mongol rulers,[22] one clear result of the 'Five Measures' was that Xu Heng was brought into the inner circle of Khubilai's top Chinese advisors.

In 1269–1270, Xu assisted other Chinese colleagues in administrative reform of the bureaucracy, which had become bloated and disorganized.[23] Several Chinese officials expressed concern that the reorganization suggested by Xu Heng might offend the Mongol imperial relatives who were serving as high officials.

> [Xu] Heng said, 'My argument is concerned only with state institutions. How does it have anything to do with personalities?' When the substance of his remarks was [translated] for the emperor, the emperor said: 'Heng's words are correct; my intentions are also like this.'

20 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 421; de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, p. 61.

21 Xu Heng 許衡, *Collected Writings from the Studio of Lu* (*Lu zhai yi shu* 魯齋遺書), *Complete Books from the Four Treasuries* (*Si ku quan shu* 四庫全書), vol. 297 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, repr. 1973), 7.1a–21b. A detailed summary of this piece can be found in Chan, 'Hsü Heng', pp. 428–30; excerpts have been translated in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, ed. by Wm Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 765–67.

22 Such inexperience is presumed by de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, p. 132; for a contrasting view, see Morris Rossabi, 'Chinese Myths About the National Minorities: The Case of Qubilai', *Central and Inner Asian Studies*, 1 (1987), 47–81.

23 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', pp. 431–32.

（衡曰：「吾論國制耳，何與於人。」遂以其言質帝前，帝曰：「衡言是也，吾意亦若是」）[24]

Perhaps Xu Heng was able to speak so bluntly because his commitment to the human universality of his ethical system was so obvious. It has been observed that a strand of harsh ethnocentrism runs through Confucianism, but Xu Heng was well-known for rejecting those aspects of the system.[25] He would go on to serve as personal tutor to the sons of Mongol and Central Asian officials, showing his commitment to the importance of the project.[26]

Although, Xu Heng also worked on a series of ritual reforms involving court procedures, music, and the court robes worn by officials, the issue nearest his heart was always education. True to his early inclinations, he was more concerned with the founding of community schools than he was with advocating the resumption of the civil service exams. It is possible that he even opposed a move (in 1269) to re-institute the civil service examination system along a traditional literati model that favoured intellectual virtuosity and aesthetic style rather than the more ascetic moral concerns of neo-Confucianism.[27] The emperor did attempt to implement some of Xu's ideas,[28] but even more, continued to respect and value his counsel. Xu was even promoted to high office in the Secretarial Council.

In that position, however, Xu ran afoul of Ahmad Fanākatī (*c.* 1240–1282), Khubilai's Persian-Muslim Minister of Finance, who was 'invested with supreme authority in fiscal matters'.[29] Xu Heng, who (as mentioned above) lived simply and austerely even at the height of his official career, was deeply concerned about Ahmad's tendency to enrich himself and accrue ever more power. Expressing himself in his usual forthright manner, he was said to have warned that Ahmad had the potential to carry out a coup. In so doing, he earned Ahmad's great enmity, while at the same time failing to check his power. Xu Heng therefore resigned, pleading ill health.[30]

In 1271, we find him being given yet another new appointment: as a senior academician at Jixian Academy and Chancellor of the National College.[31] The enrolment of the College was around one hundred students, about half of them Mongol (from royal household and prominent clans), one-quarter *semu* (other non-Han ethnic groups, mostly Central Asian), and one-quarter Han. The curriculum

24 *History of the Yuan,* 158.3726–27; trans. adapted from Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 432.

25 Sor-hoon Tan, 'Cultural Crossings against Ethnocentric Currents: Toward a Confucian Ethics of Communicative Virtues', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 45.4 (2005), 433–45; de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, pp. 134–35.

26 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 434.

27 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', pp. 433, 439.

28 De Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, p. 48.

29 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 433. Ahmad himself is a fascinating case study in Yuan dynasty historiography, since he figures in both Persian and Chinese records; a detailed biography can be found in Herbert Franke, 'Ahmad (?–1281)', in *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 539–57.

30 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', pp. 433–34.

31 Su Tianjue, *Abbreviated Account*, 8.20a–b.

was lovingly designed by Xu Heng himself and included an education in Chinese cultural norms and basic Confucian ritual behaviour as well as textual studies. Xu also hand-picked the instructors from among his own best students, and student-teacher ratio was an impressive 7:1. Having set up the system with great care and thoughtfulness, he retired only two years later. It is possible that the reason was his opposition to Khubilai's intention of accomplishing the final defeat of the Song. It is also said that he was still being persecuted by Ahmad, who struck at him via the College by reducing the stipends of its students.[32] Even in partial retirement, he continued to be called upon by the emperor, but his health was genuinely deteriorating, and he passed away in 1281.

II. Languages of China: Literary, Vernacular, and Beyond

For most of Chinese history, the dominant form of written language has been literary Chinese (*wenyanwen* 文言文), an extremely concise and elegant form of communication that was only accessible via a demanding educational process.[33] It is so different to modern Chinese that there presently is an entire industry devoted to creating and publishing translations from literary Chinese into the current vernacular. The difference between original texts and their modern translations might be compared to that between the original *Beowulf* and its translation into modern English, though with more similarity in lexicon and less in grammar. Victor Mair has suggested the analogies of Latin versus Italian, or Sanskrit versus Hindi.[34]

Full access to this literary language was (and still is) mostly limited to elites. Multiple vernacular languages or dialects would have existed in parallel, a picture in some ways comparable to the role of Latin versus various vernaculars in medieval Europe. The major difference is that literary Chinese cannot function, and perhaps never could have functioned, as a spoken language. It is so much abbreviated that it resembles a shorthand, and is not comprehensible when read out loud unless the listener is already deeply familiar with the text. This difficulty is not purely a phonological one, although the frequency of homonyms in modern standard Chinese pronunciation does add to the complexity. Even an educated reader of literary Chinese, confronted with an unfamiliar written text of any sophistication, might need to read it more than once before grasping its meaning, and preferably with a teacher or a commentary for an appreciation of its finer points. Some theorize that texts in literary Chinese were intended less to communicate new ideas than to function as *aides-mémoires*. This is probably the source of the saying, passed down from classical Chinese teacher to student through the generations: 'Classical Chinese is easy—as long as you already know

32 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 440.

33 An earlier stage of this language is often marked off as 'classical Chinese', which is generally taken to refer to the version of the language broadly in use through the end of the Han 漢 dynasty (205 BCE–220 CE).

34 Victor H. Mair, 'Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 53.3 (1994), 707–51 (p. 707).

what it says.' Or as Victor Mair puts it, literary Chinese and the modern written vernacular 'belong to wholly different categories of language, the former being a sort of demicryptography largely divorced from speech and the latter sharing a close correspondence with spoken forms of living Sinitic'.[35]

So dominant was literary Chinese in the written record that, for earlier periods, it is difficult even to guess at the nature of the spoken language(s) in which people conducted the business of everyday life. The development of a written version of vernacular Chinese occurred very gradually, and always incompletely until the end of imperial China in the twentieth century.[36] Victor Mair, for example, has identified a few early instances of vernacular traces in the pre- or non-Buddhist textual record: depositions of lower-class witnesses in legal cases, a recorded contract for the services of a young man, and a hostile exchange between two semi-barbarian generals.[37] But for the most part, the larger-scale rise of written vernacular Chinese seems to be associated particularly with the introduction of Buddhism (*c*. 200–500 CE).[38] Mair entertains multiple theories about the nature of the association—none of which are mutually exclusive—but two of the most compelling are as follows.

First, Buddhism was philosophically and doctrinally committed to inclusion of all social strata, not merely the elites. Literary Chinese 'was clearly identified with the literary establishment' while the vernacular could be seen as 'a kind of demotic empowerment […] opposing itself to a privileged, hieratic, classical script'.[39] Second, translation of Buddhist scriptures tended to be collaborative. On one side, there were foreign (i.e., non-Chinese) translators who would have been able to master the relatively simple spoken Chinese but, due to the special difficulty of acquiring literacy in Chinese (which has neither alphabet nor syllabary), would have been wholly or partially illiterate in that language. On the other side, there were Chinese scribes who would not necessarily have been well-versed in the source languages nor familiar with the content of Buddhist doctrine. Depending on their competence and degree of literary pretension, some scribes appear to have

35 Mair, 'Buddhism', p. 708. For a discussion of dissenting views, see Don Snow, 'Diglossia in East Asia', *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 20.1 (2010), 124–51 (pp. 126–27).

36 Victor H. Mair, 'Reflections on Book Language and the Vernacular Prompted by a Passage in the *History of the Sui*', in *Studies on Chinese Historical Syntax and Morphology: Linguistic Essays in Honor of Mei Tsu-lin*, ed. by Alain Peyraube and Sun Chaofen (Paris: École des hautes études en Sciences sociales, Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie orientale, 1999), pp. 119–29 (pp. 123–26).

37 Mair, 'Reflections', pp. 120–21. See also a number of proposed vernacular usages in early historical texts, as argued in Barbara Meisterernst, 'Vernacular Elements and Literary Language in Han Period Chinese: A Linguistic Comparison of Corresponding Chapters in the *Shìjì* and the *Hànshū*', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 164.1 (2014), 207–33.

38 Mair, 'Buddhism', pp. 709–10.

39 Mair, 'Buddhism', pp. 719–20.

simply been taking dictation, while others seem to have substantially reworked their material; the results tend to be a hybrid of literary and vernacular Chinese.[40]

Whatever the reasons behind this association between Buddhism and the written semi-vernacular language in China, the popularity of Buddhism at all levels of Chinese society subsequently led to the spread of this hybrid written language in the subsequent centuries. It can be found across a wide range of medieval Chinese genres, most notably short stories and dramas in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907) and—particularly relevant for present purposes—philosophical writings from the Song dynasty movement often described as neo-Confucianism.[41]

Coming into the Yuan dynasty, the language situation had become even more complex. The Mongol elite who conquered first north China, then south China as well, initially knew little Chinese. They deliberately employed interpreters and translators recruited from elsewhere in the Mongol imperium, known in China as 'people of various categories' (*semu* 色目). These intermediaries tended to be 'linguistically more versatile' than either Mongols or Chinese: their native languages varied, but included 'Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Turkic, Tungus, Hsi-Hsia, Tibetan and even French and Italian'. Thus the Yuan rulers presided over 'a multiracial and multilingual society', but one in which 'the two languages that really mattered in the administration were the rulers' tongue, Mongolian, and the language of the subjects, Chinese'.[42] The ability levels and linguistic profiles of these interpreters and translators varied greatly; it is likely that translation was frequently a two-stage process similar to the one described above for Buddhist texts.

Under the Mongols, however, 'the Chinese version was not polished and turned into literary form, as […] customary in China, but it was promulgated in its original [vernacular] form'. De Rachewiltz suggests two possible reasons for this, which are not mutually exclusive. First, the overlords distrusted their recently conquered subjects and employed non-Chinese to verify the accuracy of the translations—a task more easily done in the relatively straight-forward vernacular than in the 'demicryptographic' literary form. Second, 'the adoption of the classical language would have implied yielding culturally to China' while 'the official use of the Chinese vernacular imposed by them may, in effect, be regarded as a deliberate and effective blow to the Chinese cultural tradition which [the

40 Mair, 'Buddhism', pp. 715–17.

41 For discussions of the latter, see Daniel Gardner, 'Modes of Thinking and Modes of Discourse in the Song: Some Thoughts on the *Yulu* ("Recorded Conversations") Texts', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 50.3 (1991), 574–603; Robert Hymes, 'Getting the Words Right: Speech, Vernacular Language, and Classical Language in Song Neo-Confucian "Records of Words"', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 36 (2006), 25–55.

42 Igor de Rachewiltz, 'Some Remarks on the Language Problem in Yuan China', *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, 5.1–2 (1967), 65–80 (p. 66). Claims that Chinese were specifically forbidden to learn Mongol, repeated here by de Rachewiltz, are exaggerated: such an order was given, but it was short-lived; see John Dardess, 'Shun-ti and the End of Yüan Rule in China', in *Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 561–86 (p. 570).

Mongols] sincerely believed to be weak and inferior'.[43] The Mongols themselves were culturally predisposed toward oral forms. It was only in the early thirteenth century that they had begun using written script, an adapted version of the Uighur script, to write their own language. An improved version based on Tibetan was promulgated in 1269. Both script forms had various failings and neither managed to fully supplant the other. Government documents, according to an order by Khubilai Khan, were to be written bilingually in the new script and in vernacular Chinese.[44]

The text I will be focusing on the latter part of this paper, *Essentials of the Great Learning*, is written in an extremely conversational form of written vernacular Chinese. (This is difficult to convey in English, but it is only about as distant from modern Chinese as the dialogue in eighteenth-century English novels is from modern English.) Xu Heng's deliberate adoption of a colloquial mode of expression was obviously designed to suit the linguistic conditions of the Mongol court. At the same time, it allowed him to portray himself as someone flexible enough to operate in the linguistically and culturally complex environment of the Yuan court. Although de Bary repeatedly describes him as seeking 'the lowest common denominator',[45] philosophically and pedagogically, this characterization might be to some extent underrating Xu's flare for using the language of story-tellers. Vernacular language, compared to the literary form, offered access to a different repertoire of potential examples and a different implied relationship with the listener.

III. Texts of Confucianism, Old and New

There is an old tale, recorded in the histories but not in the canonical Confucian writings. In it, Confucius, besieged and starving in the wilds, asked of his disciples whether they thought his teachings were somehow in error. Otherwise, how had he (and his students with him) been brought to such a pass? As is typical of didactic pseudo-history, the master asks three times and receives three different answers. The third time, Yan Hui 顏回 (*c*. 521–481 BCE)—the perfect disciple—speaks the perfect words, affirming the correctness of the master's teachings and praising him for holding firm even in adversity. Of interest here, however, is the answer given by the second disciple, the pragmatic Zigong 子貢 (520–446 BCE).[46] 'Zigong said, "The master's way is exceedingly vast, and thus none in the realm are able to accommodate it. Perhaps the master could trim it down a bit?"' (子貢曰：夫子之道至大也，故天下莫能容夫子。夫子蓋少貶焉？).[47] Naturally, the master

43 De Rachewiltz, 'Language Problem', p. 68.

44 De Rachewiltz, 'Language Problem', pp. 69, 71–73.

45 For example, de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, pp. 38, 57, and elsewhere.

46 Commonly referred to merely by his courtesy name, Zigong, he is more formally known as Duanmu Ci 端木賜.

47 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Historian's Records* (*Shiji* 史記) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 47.1931.

reprimands Zigong for his lack of faith. The careful reader will note, however, that after the master's spirits have been restored by the perfect disciple's perfect response, it is *Zigong* whom he despatches to the neighbouring state of Chu, and it is Zigong who successfully persuades the king of that state to send the army that rescues the beleaguered group. Thus do the histories acknowledge the importance of quiet compromise.

The way of Confucius, whether conceived as a religion or a philosophy, grew in vastness and complexity in the millennium after the death of its master. With its early emphasis on the expensive particulars of ritual practice, and later on moral cultivation through mastery of a voluminous textual tradition, many aspects of it were accessible only to elites. In addition, there was a strand of cultural chauvinism in Confucianism, even if this was not typically the dominant attitude.[48] Both of these aspects left it vulnerable to threats from popular religious movements loosely classifiable as Daoist, and later to the multi-faceted challenge of Buddhism.[49] Such conflicts rarely rose to the level of outright violence. Still, at various points in its history a sense of crisis was felt among Confucian intelligentsia, together with the belief that in order to survive, Confucian tradition would have to overcome its fundamentally conservative nature and adapt to changing conditions. Those who did this most successfully quietly incorporated elements of Buddhism and Daoism, while effectively taking Zigong's advice with regard to the canonical tradition: they 'trimmed it down a bit'.

Five Classics had been canonized as 'Confucian' in the Han dynasty (205 BCE–220 CE). They came to be regarded as Scripture by virtue of the belief that Confucius had edited them. What was enshrined thereby proved to be a complex and heterogeneous body of knowledge from antiquity, including poetry, political pronouncements, chronicles, ritual lore, and divination.[50] These Classics also required a great deal of explanation and elaboration to make them meaningful to later readers. As a result of this and other changes in the needs of its audience, the canon grew from five to twelve separate texts by the mid-ninth century and to thirteen by the end of the eleventh.[51] One thing for which Confucius had been most

48 A common example comes from the *Analects*, the sayings of Confucius: 'The Master said, "The Yi and Di [barbarians] that have rulers are [still] not as good as the Xia [Chinese states] that lack them"' (子曰：「夷狄之有君，不如諸夏之亡也」); see *The Analects with Commentary and Subcommentary (Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏), in *The Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary* (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏), ed. by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), pp. 2453–2536 (III.5, p. 2466).

49 For Confucian attacks on Buddhism and Buddhist counter-arguments see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill 2007), pp. 254–85.

50 For an overview and discussion of the Han dynasty canon, see Michael Nylan, *The Five* 'Confucian' *Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

51 For a concise description of this process and the subsequent development of the alternative *Four Books* canon, see Daniel K. Gardner, 'From Five Classics to Four Books', in Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the* Ta-hsüeh (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 5–16.

revered was his skill as a teacher, but now the teaching tradition he had founded faced a complex pedagogical challenge: amidst all this welter of textual detail, how best to select and impart basic core principles to students who might not yet (or might never) be ready for greater sophistication?

Teachers over the centuries attempted to solve this problem in a variety of ways, but the solution of Zhu Xi proved most influential. Zhu Xi occupies a towering position in Confucian tradition. His elementary curriculum, which came to be known as *The Four Books*, was published in 1190. It included *The Great Learning* (formerly a chapter of one of the ritual classics), the sayings of Confucius and Mencius, and *Centrality and Commonality* (also translated as *The Doctrine of the Mean*, another chapter excerpted from the ritual classics). Of these, *The Great Learning* was intended to be studied first and to provide a framework for all later study.[52] As Daniel Gardner suggests, Zhu Xi found in it 'a brief but eloquent summary of Confucian ideals—personal self-cultivation and the ordering of society'.[53]

Zhu Xi's legacy extended beyond his elementary curriculum. It also included a complex metaphysics and a penchant for minute textual analysis of the Classics. His power to inspire is demonstrated by the fact that the intellectual revolution he helped to inspire and guide was faithfully transmitted by devoted disciples. After his death, it was briefly proscribed by the Southern Song court but that only set the stage for a dramatic come-back.[54]

There is some debate among scholars as to whether and to what extent Zhu Xi's thought was known in the north, which during and after his lifetime was held by the Jurchen Jin dynasty and then later by the Mongols. The conventional picture is that, although the seeds of the neo-Confucian movement were sown during the Northern Song by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), the overall orientation of northern thinkers had been more influenced by the so-called 'belletristic' intellectual style inspired by the rival faction of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) and his followers, which put more emphasis on literary expression. Hoyt Tillman has argued that neo-Confucian thought did continue to develop in the north,[55] but it developed somewhat differently since there was a relative lack of intellectual exchange between the north and south; it was also not as prevalent, at least according to surviving accounts. All accounts agree that Zhao Fu 趙復 (*c*. 1206–1299) played a key role in bringing the thought of Zhu Xi to the Yuan court. Briefly, the story goes that Zhao Fu was captured and on the brink of suicide, when Yao Shu 姚樞 (1203–1280), one of the top Confucians of Khubilai's court, persuaded him to continue living and teaching his version of neo-Confucianism.

52 John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*, Harvard East Asia Monographs, 228 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), pp. 179–81.

53 Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, p.42.

54 Tillman, *Confucian Discourse*, pp. 133–44.

55 Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, 'Confucianism under the Chin and the Impact of Sung Confucian *Taohsüeh*', in *China under Jurchen Rule*, ed. by Tillman and West, pp. 71–114.

Yao Shu himself ended up being much inspired by Zhao Fu's teaching, and it was Yao who loaned Xu Heng the books that inspired his conversion.[56]

Xu Heng and his circle were deeply inspired by the new learning they encountered though the texts and teachings of Zhu Xi and his followers, there were decided differences in orientation between northern and southern neo-Confucianism. The latter had 'spread among literati in local society and came to depend on private patronage' while in its northern incarnation, neo-Confucianism 'looked to the state'.[57] Being oriented toward the centre—with its complex cultural make-up and multilingual environment—in part explains the particular need for vernacularity in the transmission of this form of learning. This need explained the rise of people like Xu Heng, whose lack of literary sophistication became an asset rather than a deficit under such circumstances.

IV. Translating Chinese Civilization through Neo-Confucianism

As mentioned above, Xu Heng had converted to neo-Confucianism and any student who wanted to remain with him was to destroy all records of his previous lectures and begin using the basic texts of the core neo-Confucian curriculum. When Xu found himself employed by the Yuan court and responsible for the education of many non-Chinese students, he proceeded to develop further materials at an even more basic level. Fascinating details of this process are preserved in a text compiled by one of his former students, Yelü Youshang 耶律有尚 (1235–1320), a Khitan and distant descendant of the Liao ruling house. 'Events at the National University' (*Guo xue shi ji* 國學事蹟) preserves numerous anecdotes and recollections centred on Xu Heng and his teaching methods. For example:

> [Our] teacher wanted to practise arithmetic calculations with the Mongolian students. So he compiled a text listing generation and successive years. It began with the first year of the sage-king Yao and stretched down to the *renshen* year of the [Mongol] Zhiyuan reign [i.e., 1272], three thousand six hundred and fifty years in all. He had the students chant the year numbers and also add and subtract them.
> (先生欲以蒙古生習算術，遂自唐堯戊辰距至元壬申間的三千六百五年，編其世代歷年為一書，令諸生誦其年數而加減之。)[58]

While giving his Mongolian students a text with which to practise their arithmetic, Xu Heng was also influencing them to contemplate the long history of Chinese civilization, to think of the past as organized in terms of Chinese sovereigns and calendrical cycles. By continuing the chronology all the way down to the Mongol conquest, he was encouraging his students—heirs of the Mongol ruling elite—to think of themselves as inheritors of that ancient tradition. Although this might appear to have little to do with neo-Confucianism, it does connect to an

56 Chan Hok-lam, 'Yao Shu (1201–1278)', *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 22 (1980), 17–50 (pp. 19–20); see also de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, pp. 21–22.

57 Bol, *Neo-Confucianism*, p. 93.

58 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 13.43a.

important project of Zhu Xi's: he had re-written the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑), a massive chronological history compiled by the Northern Song statesman Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) at the court of Song Emperor Shenzong 宋神宗 (Zhao Zhongzhen 趙仲鍼, b. 1048, r. 1067–1085). Zhu Xi's version, *Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zi zhi tong jian gang mu* 資治通鑑綱目) drastically abridged the text and did away with Sima Guang's systematic effort to treat historical events with a certain even-handedness. Instead, Zhu Xi gave the 'morally correct' version of Chinese history.

Xu Heng's chronicle, preserved under the name *Sing-along Chronology* (*Bian nian ge kuo* 編年歌括), is more abbreviated still, mainly just giving the number of years in each dynasty and sometimes the total number of rulers. Still, even in its sparse annalistic account, it encodes certain traditional historical judgements. For example, Xu refers to the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty 秦始皇 (b. 259 BCE, r. 247–210 BCE) as Lü Zheng (呂政) and says that 'the Ying [royal line] of Qin came to an end' (贏秦亡) when he took the throne. The source of this is a rather scandalous story about this monarch's supposed illegitimate descent from the high minister Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (292–235 BCE); the story most likely dates from the subsequent Han dynasty and seems to represent a somewhat tasteless attempt to discredit the previous regime.[59] Such stories would have been readily called to mind as the students chanted the text and practised their addition and subtraction across the rises and falls of dynasties.

In this same essay, Yelü Youshang provides a rare insight into Xu Heng's mentality vis-à-vis ethnic and cultural difference. He wrote,

> [Our teacher] once said that the substantial simplicity of the Mongol students had not yet been dispersed, that in observing and listening they were very focused, and that if one were to put them in good teams of five to keep them under control for a few years, then they would certainly in the future be of use to the state.
> (先生嘗謂，蒙古生質朴未散，視聽專一，苟置之好伍曹中，涵養數年，將來必能為國家用。)[60]

Though this might strike the modern reader as slightly condescending, for its time it should be counted as a thoughtful reflection on cultural difference and its influence on the task of education. In some contexts, the term 'substantial simplicity' (*zhi pu* 質朴) has quite a positive connotation. *Pu* 朴 (simplicity) is associated with the image of the uncarved block in the ancient texts of Daoism, suggesting the limitless potential that a child is born with. The Daoist *Classic of the Way and Virtue* contains multiple passages praising its positive qualities, but the one to which Xu Heng might be alluding here has it that 'when simplicity is dispersed, one becomes a tool' (朴散為器), an outcome that has rather a negative

59 Sima Qian, *Historian's Records*, 85.2508–09.

60 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 13.44a.

connotation in the original context.[61] *Zhi* 質 (substance, solidity) is a quality that connotes unpretentiousness and a lack of ornamentation: the Confucian *Analects* contains a famous statement about the need for a balance between substance and culturally acquired refinement.[62] The end of the above-quoted passage suggests that Xu's aim was indeed to transform his students into tools of the state, but his way of describing their initial state connotes a level of appreciation.[63] Seeing the value in substance and simplicity was consonant with Xu Heng's version of neo-Confucianism, given its strong emphasis on returning to fundamentals. It also fits well with Xu's patient use of the vernacular language to explain the neo-Confucian message in the simplest possible terms. Depending on how one interprets the connection among the descriptive clauses, it may be possible to conclude that he hoped to preserve the positive aspects of simplicity and focus, and that the main work to be done was a matter of appropriate socialization.

As mentioned above, *The Great Learning* was an ancient text that had been rearranged and supplemented by Zhu Xi. It is also accompanied by his commentary, into which he put a great deal of time and energy, revising and rewriting multiple drafts over the course of his entire adult life.[64] Xu Heng's lecture, *The Essential Outline of the Great Learning* (*Daxue yao lüe* 大學要略), may well have been prepared for the imperial seminar series known as 'the Classics Mat' (*jing yan* 經筵), a Song dynasty institution that was revived during the Yuan.[65] In its written version, Xu's lecture appears to be based on Zhu Xi's commentary but departs from it in interesting ways. One notable aspect is that portrays Confucianism and its values in a way that seems designed to appeal to a non-Han audience—these can be seen as forms of cultural translation.

First, in the very opening lines, Xu Heng departs from Zhu Xi's preface by giving a brief description of the biography of Confucius:

> The text of *The Great Learnin*g is the words of Confucius. At that time, he was not employed by the ruler of Lu, and thus he left Lu and travelled around the seven states of Qi, Yan, Zhao, Song, Chen, Chu, and Wei.

61 *Laozi Collated and Explained* (*Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 28.114.

62 *Analects*, VI.18, p. 2479.

63 Su Tianjue (*Abbreviated Account*, 8.32a) gives a variant version of the story that yields a very different interpretation. There we find that the Mongol students 'are substantial and simple, not yet able to focus their observing and listening' (質朴，未能視聽專一). Such difficulties in interpretation are common in classical Chinese, but this one seems consequential: did Xu Heng believe his Mongol students to be unspoiled and possessed of excellent focus in their perceptions, or did he merely think them wild and undisciplined? Another parallel, in Shao Yuanping 邵遠平, *Topical History of the Yuan Dynasty* (*Yuanshi leibian* 元史類編) (Nansha Xi shi Sao ye shan fang, 1795) gives a further variant, 'their great simplicity is not yet carved' (太樸未雕; 31.12a). This variant undermines the general thrust of Su's interpretation but shows that there is a fair degree of textual instability at this point.

64 Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, pp. 27–45.

65 For an in-depth study of the Classics Mat and its origins in the Northern Song, see Marie Guarino, 'Learning and Imperial Authority in Northern Sung China (960–1126): The Classics Mat lectures' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1994).

> The rulers of those seven states also didn't employ him. When he came [back] to Lu, though, he taught three thousand disciples.
> (大學之書是孔夫子的言語。當時孔子為魯君不用。就魯國便去周流齊、燕、趙、宋、陳、楚、衛七國。那七國之君也不用。孔子却來魯國教三千徒弟。)[66]

There is nothing surprising about this, other than that it seems to go out of its way to emphasize an aspect of Confucius's vitae that in other texts might be downplayed or excused: the fact that the master was forced to wander from state to state in search of employment. But if we take it out of the context and value system of sedentary Chinese society and look at it with nomadic eyes, this description might have been intended to *raise* the status of Confucius. We see a Confucius who is independent rather than being employed (literally 'used') by any lord, a man who succeeded in circulating through a large amount of territory, and who upon his return assembled a moderately large 'army' of followers—though of course they were scholars instead of fighters.

Second, following Zhu Xi's commentary but translating it into a vernacular idiom, Xu Heng describes how the legendary sages of high antiquity took great care to set up an education system. He does not take it for granted that appeals to these sages alone will serve as a persuasive argument in favour of the system. Rather, he points out to his reader that these sage rulers all enjoyed very long reigns: 'Fu Xi ruled for 164 years; Shennong ruled for 145 years; the Yellow Emperor ruled for 100 years; Yao ruled for 110 years; Shun ruled for 50 years' (伏羲在位一百六十四年。神農在位一百四十五年。黃帝在位一百年。堯在位一百單一年。舜在位五十年).[67] Even for someone whose value system was not aligned with Chinese tradition, the idea of such long regnal periods would likely have had its appeal.

Having set up, in very simple terms, the origin of the text with one of Confucius's disciples and its supposed place in the traditional system of education, Xu Heng moves on to the canonical text, which begins: 'The way of the Great Learning lies in letting luminous virtue shine' (大學之道，在明明德). According to Zhu Xi's commentary, 'Luminous virtue is what man acquires from Heaven; it is unprejudiced, spiritual, and completely unmuddled […] At times it will become obscured. Never, however, does its original luminosity cease' (明德者，人之所得乎天，而虛靈不昧……有時而昏；然其本體之明，則有未嘗息者).[68] In the base text, virtue (*de*) is a category unto itself, a quasi-mystical form of charismatic power. In Xu Heng's explanation, though, it should probably be translated in the plural ('the virtues'), since the parallelism in his discussion shows that he glosses 'virtue' or 'virtuous nature' (*de xing* 德性) as being comprised of five different

66 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.4b–5a.

67 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.5a.

68 Trans. by Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, p. 89; Zhu Xi 朱熹, *The Four Books Chapter and Verse with Collected Commentaries* (*Si shu zhang ju ji zhu* 四書章句集注) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), p. 3.

aspects: 'the benevolence, duty, ritual propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness that heaven bestows on people' (天與人的仁、義、禮、智、信).[69] Zhu Xi had given a similar list in his preface to the commentary, but the qualities in the list were not explicitly associated with the term 'virtue'; instead, they were merely said to be aspects of human nature received from heaven.[70] Compared to the list given by Zhu Xi in the earlier commentary, Xu Heng has added one ('trustworthiness'). The reason is probably that he will proceed to connect these virtues with processes of nature via a tradition of Chinese thought known as 'correlative cosmology', elaborated (and perhaps invented) during the Han dynasty.[71] In that system, which Xu Heng is adopting from earlier sources, each of the virtues is correlated with the one of the five elements. As Xu Heng explains it, 'Wood is benevolence, fire is ritual propriety, earth is trustworthiness, metal is rightness, and water is wisdom' (木是仁，火是禮，土是信，金是義，水是智).[72] The virtues (via their associated elements) are also correlated with the directions, the seasons, and so on. The point seems to be that Confucian ethical categories are being presented as an innate part of a natural system. This is to say that the virtues are not only applicable to Chinese, but in fact are universal.

The five virtues listed by Xu Heng would be familiar to anyone who had studied even basic Confucian philosophy, but he goes on to define them carefully and in the simplest terms of everyday life. He then makes his universalizing position even more clear by illustrating four of the five Confucian ethical relationships with examples from the animal world:

> It's like how bees have a boss bee, being naturally able to understand the principle of ruler and minister. Or like how tigers and panthers don't eat their own young, being naturally able to comprehend the principle of parent and child. Geese both big and little follow one another and form a line in flying, being naturally able to understand the principle of older and younger brotherhood. A dog recognizes its master, being naturally able to understand the principle of gratitude and duty.
> (便如蜜蜂兒有箇頭兒，便自理會得那君臣的道理。大蟲豹子不喫他孩兒，便自省得那父子的道理。雁大的小的厮隨着成行飛呵，便自省得那兄弟的道理。狗認得主人，便自省得那恩義的道理。)[73]

'Virtue' of the base text is rather abstract and vague; it is just a word. Xu Heng wants to ground it in everyday life and also to persuade his listeners that these categories are not invented but rather are empirically observable by anyone who knows what to look for.

69 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.6a, 6b.

70 Zhu Xi, *The Four Books*, p. 1.

71 For background on this system of thought, see Wang Aihe, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–22, 129–72.

72 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.6a.

73 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.6a–b.

To return to the base text: 'The way of the great learning lies in letting luminous virtue shine, and in reforming the people' (大學之道，在明明德，在親民).[74] Unsurprisingly, for someone devoted to education, Xu Heng sees this reform as being carried out by 'teaching and guiding' (教道).[75] His lecture differs from earlier discussions in that it goes into considerable detail on the reasons why people fail to act upon the virtues he has enumerated above. It makes sense for him to do this, since he has just made the argument that these virtues are inherent in nature. It is empirically obvious, however, that people do fail to act virtuously and fail very often. Xu Heng explains:

> They only want fine sights for their eyes to see. They only want fine music for their ears to hear. They only want fine tea and food for their mouths to taste. They only want fine aromas for their noses to smell. They only want to live happily. And so their entire heart-mind goes toward these types of ends. They don't ask whether it fits moral principle or not. They just pick what they like and do it. Although this type of person has a human form, they are really about the same as birds and beasts.
> (眼中只要見好顏色，耳中只要聽好音樂，口中只要喫好茶飯，鼻中只要聞好香氣，只要快活。一就把那心都使得這上頭去了。不問道理合與不合。只揀他愛的便做。此等人，雖有人形，便與禽獸一般了。)[76]

This passage is worthy of note because it strikes a fine balance between empathy and chiding. Dwelling in such detail on the sensual desires that motivate people shows Xu's audience that he understands them. For cosmological reasons, his lecture is overall structured using sets of five, so here there are four ordinary desires corresponding to four senses, and a fifth overarching desire: to live happily. Xu Heng does not necessarily condemn any of these desires, but identifies the real problem as arising when people become fixated on these desires and as a result fail to take morality into account. (The organ of this fixation, which I have translated 'heart-mind', would ordinarily be rendered as 'heart'; however, it was understood to perform cognitive as well as emotive functions.) Xu implies that it is this disregard of morality, not the desires themselves, that causes the phenomenon of 'beasts in human form'.

The first major section of the original text of the *Great Learning* is quite tightly structured, a chain of cause and consequence advocating first a multi-stage process of self-cultivation and then regulation of the family as necessary preconditions to effective rule. The above examples come from Xu Heng's commentary on that first section. In the original text, the second major section is a sort of embedded commentary on the first. It goes back through each stage of the argument, offering authoritative quotations and illustrative examples to expand on the points being

74 Zhu Xi, *The Four Books*, p. 3.

75 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.7a.

76 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.7a–b.

made at each stage, often at the level of terminology. In the *Essential Outline*, Xu Heng selects and discusses a few examples from this commentary section, but leaves most of them out. (They are treated with great thoroughness in Xu Heng's much longer vernacular commentary on the *Great Learning*, where no familiarity with the Chinese classical tradition is assumed.) The dense patchwork of canonical quotations or allusions, so familiar and authoritative to the educated elite Chinese reader, might well come off as tedious or at worst alienating to an audience entirely unfamiliar with them. The few examples Xu does select for the *Essential Outline* tend to be those that make the best stories, and he expands on them in his down-to-earth colloquial style, as much a story-teller as a scholarly lecturer.[77]

In addition, he adds cases from everyday life that have no counterpart in the original. A good example of this can be found in the section on regulating the family. It is important to begin by noticing that the classical Chinese term generally translated 'regulating the family' (*qi jia* 齊家) actually employs a character that is also translatable as 'to make equal, even, or uniform'. This term is used broadly in classical Chinese texts, for example in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, a foundational text of Daoism that dates to the Warring States (476–221 BCE) or early Han dynasty. There one finds the term as part of the chapter title 'Discussion on Making All Things Equal' (*Qi wu lun* 齊物論);[78] the chapter so titled is often understood to take (either sincerely, or for rhetorical purposes) a position of extreme relativism; it argues that the entire project of affirming or denying propositions should be called into question.[79] Xu Heng's position is not nearly so extreme. He does, however, make a strong plea for impartiality at all levels of social existence, including family life. One might go so far as to say that this is a dominant theme of his lecture.

In relation to the family, he explains the need for impartiality with particular detail and care. He emerges from a discussion of self-cultivation in which 'uprightness' (*zheng* 正)—another term related to impartiality and fairness—plays a key role. After ensuring that you yourself are morally upright,

> then your family can be set in order. [The key to] setting your family in order is in cultivating yourself. The self is the ruler of the entire family. When our very own selves act in an upright manner, the people in our families, both old and young, both nearly related and unrelated, will avoid bringing disorder to the rules of the family. What if, however, you

77 A good example is the discussion of sage kings versus tyrants in his explication of a *Great Learning* quote he attributes to Confucius (Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.10b).

78 *Zhuangzi with collected explications* (*Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋), ed. by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 and Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (Beijing: Zhonghua zhuju, 1985), pp. 43–114; translation of the chapter title taken from Burton Watson, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 31.

79 A concise review of scholarly positions on Zhuangzian relativism can be found in Brook Ziporyn, 'How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things and I? Relativism, Mysticism, and the Privileging of Oneness in the "Inner Chapters"', in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses in the Zhuangzi*, ed. by Scott Cook (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), pp. 33–63 (pp. 33–34).

> yourself are biased toward loving, or biased toward hating, or biased toward fearfulness, or biased toward veneration, or biased toward pity, or biased toward belittlement? If you love inappropriately, then you also love someone's flaws. If you hate inappropriately, you even hate someone's good points. Let's give an example: dad and mum loving their kids [too] fondly, not realizing that [as a result] their kids aren't going to amount to anything. If those on top have any kind of biasing tendency, then they'll not be able to 'regulate the family'.
> (家便可齊。齊家又在脩身。身是一家的主。自己一身。既是做得正。咱一家人大的小的。親的不親的。家法自然不亂了。若是自己有偏愛的。有偏嫌的。有偏怕的。有偏敬重的。有偏可憐見的。有偏小覷的。愛的不合將那歹處也愛。嫌的不合將那好處也嫌。更説比喻。爺娘愛孩兒好。不知孩兒每不是處身。上有一件偏向。便是不會齊 家。)[80]

On the one hand, this sort of advice is quite universal and would not be out of place in the parenting books of today. On the other hand, Xu Heng's own political context gave him good reason to place particular emphasis on this point. One can imagine him delivering this lecture not only for the emperor but also his sons, semi-mature Mongol princes who most likely had young families themselves, and who were accustomed to being treated as the absolute uppermost stratum of society.

What can be described as the third major section of the *Great Learning* is quite miscellaneous. Technically, it could be seen as part of the second section, since it is just the commentary on the very last link in the chain of cause and effect, that is, 'only when the state is governed will the whole realm be peaceful' (國治而後 天下平).[81] However, it goes on at great length with different types of advice regarding how one in fact ought to govern the realm.

Some of these were obviously more relevant than others to Xu Heng's contemporary situation. He lavishes particular care on a short section of the text dealing with finances. In the original, it reads: 'There is a great way to produce wealth: let producers be many and consumers few, let production be speedy and use gradual, and then wealth will always be sufficient' (生財有大道：生之者眾，食之者寡，為之者疾，用之者舒，則財恒足矣).[82] It then goes on to quote a person named Meng Xianzi 孟獻子, who says in part: 'A minister who collects excessive revenue from the people—rather than such a man it would be better to have a minister who pilfers the household treasury' (畜馬乘不察於雞豚，伐冰之家不畜牛羊，百乘之家不畜聚斂之臣，與其有聚斂之臣，寧有盜臣).[83]

As background for Xu Heng's explication of this passage, it is useful to mention a story found in the *History of the Yuan*. A Mongol official serving under Chinggis Khan (allegedly) said, 'The Han [i.e., northern Chinese] people

80 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.9b–10a.

81 Zhu Xi, *The Four Books*, p. 4 (original statement), and pp. 10–14 (commentary).

82 Zhu Xi, *The Four Books*, p. 12.

83 Zhu Xi, *The Four Books*, p. 12; trans. by Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, p. 123.

contribute nothing to the state. Why not just get rid of the people and use it as grazing land?' The Khitan official Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材 (1190–1244) argues that the Chinese could be useful; one just had to know how to tax them effectively. Genghis Khan listened to this debate and approved Yelü's approach.[84] On the one hand, the northern Chinese subjects were saved from extermination. On the other hand, it was in some sense out of the frying pan and into the fire, as they were then treated as (merely) a source of income to be exploited. Officials on the fiscal side of Khubilai's administration did this with gusto, and none more successfully than Xu Heng's political enemy, the Muslim finance minister Ahmad. Xu Heng must have known that he was treading on thin ice on this issue. It was a place where his interests (and the interests of his people) could certainly be seen as diverging from the interests of his audience. Perhaps this is why he singles out for particular criticism a *Chinese* official from the preceding Song dynasty:

> The Song Prime Minister the Honourable Lü Zhengxian[85] once said, 'Being a prime minister is merely a matter of understanding money'. This is not a good thing. The common people are the foundation of the state. Wealth is the very heart of the common people. Seizing a lot of their wealth in taxes is certain to harm the common people. Harming the common people is certain to harm the state. Petty scoundrels squeeze out a lot in taxes and rents in order to make rulers happy with them. Rulers don't realize that the common people's situation is unbearable, but instead say that the state is turning a profit. Rulers also say that they are willing for these [scoundrels] to incur the resentment of the realm, but do not realize that the resentment of the realm actually falls on the rulers themselves.
> (宋宰相呂正獻公曾説：「做宰相只理會錢呵。」不是好事。百姓是國之本，財是百姓之心。多取斂錢財，必損著百姓。損著百姓，必損著國家。小人多收斂錢財，教君王見喜。君王不覺百姓生受，却道國家有利益。君王又道此人肯受天下怨，却不知天下怨氣只在君王處。)[86]

Xu Heng's task is to persuade his audience that ruling China should not merely be a project of extracting resources, not 'merely a matter of understanding money'. Instead, he exhorts his audience to consider the human cost of the extraction. Departing from the typical Confucian tendency to downplay the importance of material possessions, he attempts to convey (perhaps based on his own experience) just how crucial material assets are to the common people, that it is their 'heart'. Xu Heng must also convince his audience that it is even worth caring about the suffering of these people, which he does by asserting a connection between their

84 *History of the Yuan*, 146.3458.

85 An honorific title for Lü Gongzhu 吕公著 (1018–1089), a partisan of the aforementioned Sima Guang who took over the position of prime minister after the latter's death in 1086 but was forced out of power in 1088 by the bitter factionalism that would continue to plague the dynasty until its fall.

86 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.11b–12a.

well-being and the overall health of the state. By contrast, Zhu Xi's commentary on the same passage is able to assume a shared concern for the common people, and merely reminds the reader to maintain correct priorities: 'The humane man disperses his wealth, thereby gaining the people. The inhumane man ruins himself to increase his wealth' (仁者散財以得民，不仁者亡身以殖貨).[87]

The rest of Xu Heng's comment outlines the dire consequences of letting 'petty scoundrels' impose excessive taxes upon the people. As Chan Hok-lam also suggests, Xu must have been thinking of Ahmad, whose ability to extract resources from the conquered Chinese had so enriched not only the imperial household but also Ahmad's own.[88] Xu Heng's line of argument, echoing the base text but with more poignancy and urgency, is that employing such an official reflects poorly upon the ruler himself, and that incurring 'the resentment of the realm' is not something to be done lightly.

Near the end of the lecture, Xu Heng mentions another highly colourful figure from the repertoire of Chinese historical and philosophical examples, the infamous 'Robber Zhi'. The most vivid early account of Robber Zhi can be found in one of the later chapters of the above-mentioned *Zhuangzi*, a classic text of Daoism. There we find an allegorical account of Confucius going to visit the notorious villain who

> had a following of nine thousand fighting men, and rampaged across the realm, violently attacking the lords of the land, tunnelling into people's houses and breaking down their doors, seizing their cattle and horses, enslaving their wives and daughters, so greedy that he ignored his kin, not caring for father, mother, or brothers, nor even sacrificing to his ancestors.
> (從卒九千人，橫行天下，侵暴諸侯，穴室樞戶，驅人牛馬，取人婦女，貪得忘親，不顧父母兄弟，不祭先祖。)[89]

Despite Robber Zhi's monstrosity, which was said to extend even to the consumption of human livers, the tale has it that Confucius visits him with flattering words. He attempts to ingratiate himself by suggesting himself as a diplomatic envoy and proposing the construction of a grand capital city; clearly the long-range goal is to convert Robber Zhi from an unruly bandit into a more conventional (and manageable) ruler. In the original tale, Robber Zhi sees right through Confucius's ploy and berates him at length, arguing that morality only does harm to those who practise it, and that success and hedonistic pleasure are the only ends worth pursuing. Confucius loses his composure and retreats in disgrace.[90]

Generally interpreted as an allegorical critique of Confucianism, this story might seem a strange choice of example for the Confucian Xu Heng. Descriptions

87 Trans. by Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, p. 122; Zhu Xi, *The Four Books*, p. 12.

88 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 437.

89 *Zhuangzi*, 29.990.

90 *Zhuangzi*, 29.990–1002.

of Robber Zhi's cruelty and disregard of cultural norms might well have resonated with those who had lived through the Mongol conquest: like Robber Zhi, Mongols did not practise ancestor worship and had distinctly un-Chinese views of how to carry out family relationships. But the context in which Xu Heng raises this example shows that he is not directly thinking of the Zhuangzian Robber Zhi. Instead, he draws on Sima Qian's use of the *Zhuangzi* tale as seen in the Han dynasty *Records of the Historian*. There, as in Xu Heng's lecture, Robber Zhi is juxtaposed with Yan Hui. Yan Hui was mentioned above as 'the perfect disciple' who comforted Confucius in his time of crisis. Many instances of Confucius praising Yan Hui are preserved in the records of his sayings. In several cases, Confucius even implies that Yan Hui is superior to himself. But while some of Confucius's disciples went on to have illustrious careers, Yan Hui not only comes from an impoverished background but also dies young. Thus in Sima Qian's history, Robber Zhi and Yan Hui are placed in direct contrast to one another: the evil monster who enjoys great success and long life, versus the moral exemplar who dies young and penniless.

Sima Qian juxtaposes the two in order to bring into sharp focus the problem of evil as he understood it: 'Is this how heaven requites a good person? […] I am so deeply confused about it. This thing we call "the way of Heaven": is it right or is it wrong?' (天之報施善人，其何如哉……余甚惑焉，儻所謂天道，是邪非邪？)[91] Sima Qian's version of theodicy involves recourse to the judgement of posterity. Though Yan Hui's brief life might have seemed unfortunate, because of Confucius's praise he has enjoyed the most brilliant posthumous reputation. And (implicitly) people like Robber Zhi are 'punished' with posthumous infamy, even though they might in their lifetimes have enjoyed the fruits of their evil deeds. Sima Qian, as a historian, saw himself as playing a key role in setting the record straight; at the same time, he also clearly hoped that future generations would reward *him* with posthumous glory despite his own humiliating misfortunes.

Xu Heng's lecture smooths over the ancient historian's anguished doubts. He introduces the example by returning to the theme of having an 'upright' heart-mind: 'This type of person, whose heart-mind is upright: if he encounters some sort of good work, then he's willing to go right ahead and do it; if he encountering some sort of bad business, he's *not* willing to go right ahead and do it' (這般心正的人，見那好勾當，便肯向前去做，見那歹勾當，便不肯向前去做).[92] As an example of 'good work', he points to Zhu Xi and all the time and effort he put into re-organizing the Confucian educational curriculum. Robber Zhi is his example of 'bad business':

91 Sima Qian, *Historian's Records*, 61.2124–25; for an extended study of the problem of evil in the early Chinese philosophical context, see Franklin Perkins, *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane: The Problem of Evil in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

92 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.12b.

> He was exclusively focused on pillaging, beating, and seizing. He ate human hearts and livers, and was indeed a black-hearted person, not a person whose heart-mind was upright. All he did was evil deeds, making later people speak badly of him. We'll take Yan Hui to make a contrast, so as to be able to see the badness of that Robber Zhi, and the goodness of Yan Hui. Yan Hui was a person who was able to make his heart-mind upright. Robber Zhi was a person who was not able to make his heart-mind upright.
> (專一要做賊打劫。喫人的心肝也是一箇昧心。不是那正心的人。都做得歹了。教後人道不好。將那顏回來比呵。便見得柳盜跖歹。顏回好。顏回是能正心的人。盜跖是不能正心的人。)[93]

The underlying message must have been clear enough, even when filtered through the words of an interpreter: the kinds of things you and your ancestors have been doing are only done by people who have not properly cultivated themselves. If you want to be successful rulers, you will have to change your ways.

One wonders what Khubilai Khan and his family made of this lecture. They were Mongols, after all, recent descendants of proud conquerors who had dominated Eurasia through the use or threat of violent terrorist tactics.[94] Here they faced an earnest elderly Chinese man who exhorted them to take as role models a bookish scholar and an impoverished student, and furthermore to revile the conduct of a robust and successful nomad warrior. Yet Khubilai had long been receptive to philosophical discussion and cultural alternatives. A well-known instance of this openness, and a testament to its thoughtful and critical bent, was court debate between Buddhists and Daoists for which 'there were present as jurymen more than two hundred Confucian scholars'.[95]

It is also clear from the way Khubilai treated Xu Heng that the khan was largely unruffled by, and even admired, the latter's bluntness. In some respects, the humble scholar-teacher must have seemed quite unthreatening. He had no craving for wealth or material comfort, and had so little interest in worldly power that he resigned from or declined every substantive position he was offered. He made no secret of the fact that his highest ambition was to establish village schools throughout the realm, schools that would teach the curriculum to which he was so fervently devoted. Taken out of context, Xu Heng's *Essentials of the Great Learning* is simplistic in the extreme, amply justifying the somewhat dismissive verdict of later scholars that Xu Heng was an unoriginal thinker. His genius, however, lay in his ability to suit the message to the moment, to select

93 Xu Heng, *Collected Writings*, 3.12b.

94 Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (London: Reaktion, 2013), pp. 131–33.

95 Kubo Noritada, 'Prolegomena on the Study of the Controversies between Buddhists and Taoists', *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo bunko*, 26 (1968), 39–61 (p. 47).

the most needful lessons and translate them into words that would resonate with his audience.[96]

V. The Legacy of Xu Heng's 'Translations'

In the long run, Xu Heng was perhaps not so harmless after all. He was able to operate effectively in the multi-cultural environment of Khubilai's court, wielding soft power in the cause of a movement that was superficially universalizing but ultimately pro-Chinese. Just one year after Xu's death, his nemesis Ahmad was murdered in a sensational semi-coup. The driving force behind the plot was a man named Wang Zhu 王著 (1254–1282), who hailed from Shandong not far from where Xu Heng had begun his teaching career. Wang Zhu was 'said to have despised material wealth and cared nothing for trifles', and apparently had no other purpose or ambition other than that he 'considered Ahmad a criminal and wished to destroy him, even at the cost of his own life'.[97] It would be far-fetched to imagine any direct connection between the scholar and the vigilante, but they shared in common their asceticism and their implacable opposition to Ahmad. Who is to say whether something of Xu Heng's influence had not lingered on in Shandong even when the teacher himself had departed? More directly relevant, however, was the court's reaction to Ahmad's fall. The unravelling of his far-reaching network, the execution of his heirs and punishment of his corrupt followers[98]—all of this could be interpreted as a backlash against the entire approach of maximum extraction and exploitation while taking a cut oneself, something Xu Heng had loudly and consistently opposed in both word and deed. Although Xu Heng himself was already dead by this time and so played no direct role in this rectification, his frank and courageous criticism of Ahmad and his way of doing business contrasted starkly with the many censors and academicians who were punished for having 'praised the merits of Ahmad while he lived […] but [who] joined the chorus of detractors after his death'.[99]

Xu Heng's pedagogical legacy continued more directly at the National College, from which he retired in 1273. His successor was Wang Xun 王恂 (1235–1281), a mathematical genius now remembered for his astronomical expertise. Wang was an admirer of Xu Heng's, and was much influenced by his views on education.[100] The foundation that Xu Heng had so carefully laid for the state education system was preserved and even extended by the academically gifted

96 See Chan, 'Hsü Heng', pp. 443–47. De Bary also points out the power of 'even secondhand ideas' in particular reference to Khubilai Khan's court (de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, p. xi).

97 Franke, 'Ahmad', p. 550.

98 Franke, 'Ahmad', pp. 551–53.

99 Franke, 'Ahmad', p. 553.

100 See, for example, Wang's biography in the *History of the Yuan*, where he repeats a saying he attributes to Xu Heng about the mind being like a printing block, whence one's speech and actions come forth like printed pages that would clearly reflect any error (164.3844). For Wang Xun's career as an astronomer, see Nathan Sivin, *Granting the Seasons: The Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280, With a Study of its Many Dimensions and a Translation of its Records* (New York: Springer, 2008), pp. 156–58.

Wang,[101] who would later go on to work with Xu on the calendar reform of 1280. After Wang came Xu's own student Yelü Youshang, whose conscientious record of Xu's practices was cited above. Overall, Xu Heng was influential in establishing 'a simplified version of Daoxue [neo-Confucian] national orthodoxy through state-provided education and the civil service examination system, an arrangement that continued, under the Ming and Qing, to the turn of the twentieth century'.[102]

Finally, beyond the realm of academic institutions, Xu Heng came to stand for a particular attitude toward ethnicity and the translation of culture. This is shown most clearly in the way Xu Heng is referred to in later debates. He stands in opposition to the pure principles of his contemporary Liu Yin 劉因 (1249–1293), who refused to serve the Mongol conquerors. As the story goes, Xu Heng defended his decision by saying simply, 'Were I to behave otherwise, then the Way would not be practised' (不如此則道不行). Liu Yin's response was, 'Were I to behave otherwise, then the Way would not be honoured' (不如此則道不尊), certainly a pithy expression of the two possible positions in the debate.[103] A darker and more troubling successor to the ideology of Liu Yin can be found in the writings of the maverick scholar Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), who in protesting yet another foreign conquest of China said of 'barbarians':

> If you annihilate them, it is not inhumane; if you wrest [things] from them, it is not unrighteous; if you bait them, it is not unfaithful. Why is this? Because faithfulness and righteousness are the ways of human intercourse. They are not to be extended to alien kinds.[104]

Nothing could be further from the inclusive and universal view of human nature to which Xu Heng was so passionately devoted. It is appropriate, then, that when Wang Fuzhi launched his ethnocentric attack on 'barbarians', he also attacked Xu Heng. Wang characterized Xu's strategy as 'employing Chinese methods to transform the barbarians', and he argued that it was tantamount to 'violating Heaven and destroying the human ultimate' (違天而毀人極).[105] Xu himself would have characterized his project rather as using the methods of Zhu Xi to transform humanity. Doing so required multiple levels of translation, and a lifetime of effort.

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101 Chan, 'Hsü Heng', p. 440.

102 John W. Dardess, 'Did the Mongols Matter? Territory, Power, and the Intelligentsia in China from the Northern Song to the Early Ming', in *The Song–Yuan–Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. by Smith and von Glahn, pp. 111–34 (p. 130).

103 John D. Langlois, Jr., 'Chinese Culturalism and the Yüan Analogy: Seventeenth-Century Perspectives', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 40.2 (1980), 355–98 (p. 358). Langlois casts doubt on the authenticity of the exchange.

104 Langlois, 'Chinese Culturalism', p. 364.

105 Langlois, 'Chinese Culturalism', p. 363.