

XUNZI: THE COMPLETE TEXT. Translated and with an introduction by ERIC L. HUTTON. pp. 440. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014.
doi:10.1017/S1356186315000024

The *Xunzi* is a major early Confucian text, a product of enormous intellectual vitality of the late Warring States era (475–221 BCE), when seven major kingdoms fought with one another to unify China and establish the first empire. In spite of its significance within the history of early Confucian thought, the *Xunzi* has suffered many centuries of undeserved neglect. There are two reasons for this. One is that the putative author, Master Xun, was said to have been the teacher of several figures closely associated with the extremely unpopular Legalist government of the first empire of Qin. The second major reason for this text being overlooked is that it represents a strand of thought opposed to the *Mencius*, which was to form a corner-stone of the orthodox Confucian tradition sanctioned by the government for much of the imperial era. Indeed in the chapter entitled “Against the Twelve Masters,” the *Xunzi* specifically criticises Mencius for his failure to grasp the true legacy of the sage kings of antiquity. It is therefore only within the last century that this important text has begun to receive the scholarly attention that is its due.

Eric Hutton’s elegant translation represents the second time this text has been translated into English—the *Xunzi* was first translated in full by John Knoblock in 1988–1994. However, where Professor Knoblock’s translation (published by Stanford University Press in three volumes) was aimed at an advanced academic audience, and therefore includes lengthy introductions to each chapter discussing issues of intellectual affiliation and dating—not to mention extremely detailed footnotes for every contentious passage—Eric Hutton’s translation is intended for a general reader. This has determined the structure of the book: this translation is published in one volume and minimal explanation is included in the footnotes, so as not to disrupt the flow of reading. Only the most problematic passages merit further discussion in the textual notes at the back of the book. The merits of this approach are considerable. Since this volume is intended to be of use to a wide variety of readers, including those who do not necessarily have the ability to read the original classical Chinese, or who are unfamiliar with the conventions governing ancient works of philosophy, it is important that the translation should be both consistent and accessible. Anyone interested in exploring further is guided to Professor Knoblock’s earlier publication.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of this translation is Eric Hutton’s insistence on demonstrating quite how much of the *Xunzi* was originally written in verse. The decision to translate Chinese verse into rhymed English poetry no doubt significantly increased the difficulty of the translation; however, the flavour of the original text has generally been extremely successfully preserved. This aspect of many early Chinese writings was usually ignored by earlier translators, with the exception of quotations from classical compilations like the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), nevertheless, in recent years it has become increasingly common not just for the quotations to be marked, but also that the verse sections of early philosophical texts should be separated out from the rest of the text. This has served to transform our understanding of these writings, even though it is not known why so many important philosophical texts—such as the *Annals of Lü Buwei* (*Lüshi chunqiu*) which was translated by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel for Stanford University Press in 2000, and the *Book of the Master of Huainan* (*Huainanzi*) which was translated by John S. Major, Sarah Queen, Andrew Meyer and Harold D. Roth for Columbia University Press in 2010—were written in this style. The decision by Eric Hutton to translate the verse sections as poetry means that this book can be appreciated not only as an important work of early Confucian thought, but also as a literary text. Whoever the principal author was (and the historical existence of Master Xun remains highly contentious, even though some basic facts concerning his biography have been asserted since the Han dynasty), his book was intended to merit reading on many levels.

The introduction and the annotations to this volume stress one particular aspect of thought developed in the *Xunzi*, which is crucial for understanding this text in opposition to the *Mencius*. The *Xunzi* consistently emphasizes the performative nature of virtuous actions—it is not necessary to achieve some very advanced level of enlightenment or the wisdom of the sage kings of antiquity in order to undertake good deeds. Where the *Mencius* represents an esoteric tradition in which self-cultivation allows the individual to do good deeds with a conscious understanding of their deepest meaning, the *Xunzi* consistently states that the rationale is unimportant. Virtuous actions are to be applauded in and of themselves, both in terms of achieving an intrinsically desirable result and inculcating a pattern of behaviour which will encourage the individual to continue in the same way. Understanding of the deeper meanings of these actions and their moral significance is something which can develop slowly over time, without affecting the value of the act in the first place. Although Professor Hutton does not particularly consider this point, it is here that one of the crucial connections between the *Xunzi* and the later works of Legalist philosophers can be found. In the *Book of Master Han Fei (Han Feizi)*, a text compiled by one of Master Xun's supposed students, it repeatedly recommends that government authority be asserted through a well-established and reliable system of rewards and punishments. Legalists such as Master Han Fei were not interested in people's motives for compliance—once the government had explained what was required of its subjects, the most important thing was that it should be carried out. It is the association between this doctrine and sheer tyranny that would eventually serve to taint study of the *Xunzi*, which represents an early stage in the development of this school of statecraft. mi_oumin@yahoo.co.uk

OLIVIA MILBURN
Seoul National University

A PORTRAIT OF FIVE DYNASTIES CHINA: FROM THE MEMOIRS OF WANG RENYU (880–956). By GLEN DUDBRIDGE. pp. xii, 272. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.
doi:10.1017/S1356186315000085

Some books seem misplaced in time: of these some are late, some are far ahead of their time, and yet others are timeless. This book by a pundit of Chinese literature and Sinologist in the best sense of that word, Glen Dudbridge of Oxford, falls into the last category. *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China* takes its reader into the *Lebenswelt* (live world) of Wang Renyu 王仁裕 (880–956), a scholar-official who lived through one of China's most turbulent eras, the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 五代十國 (907–960).

Wang was born under the Tang 唐 Dynasty (618–907) and spent his youth in Qinzhou 秦州, a prefecture in the Southeast of modern Gansu 甘肅, a frontier zone between the pastoralist cultures of Central Asia and a sedentary culture to its Southeast. Putting aside the simplistic dichotomy of pastoralists and farmers, this region has always been a place where religions and cultures met. This was the place where, in the fifth and sixth centuries, the mingling of Xianbei 鮮卑 (sometimes called *Sārbi* in the past) and Chinese had given birth to the ruling elite of the Tang. It had fallen into Tibetan hands in the wake of the Rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 (755–763), and in Wang's time, its inhabitants were still considered 'barbarian' or tainted by non-Chinese culture. Wang himself relates that, while there was substantial agriculture in its East, farmers often supplemented their diet with yak hunted in the prefecture's 'Wild West', and he may well have ended up as a local ruffian, observing camel trains and hunting yaks for the rest of his days, had he not discovered the joys of learning at the rather mature