THE PRINCIPAL FIGURES OF "CONFUCIANISM"
IN MEDIEVAL AND LATE-IMPERIAL TIMES
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A. T'ANG (TANG) 唐 DYNASTY CONFUCIAN THINKERS

Han Yü 韓愈 (768-829):
Critiqued Buddhism, classical Taoist texts, and Hsün-tzu (Xūnzi 荀子).
Praised Mencius (Mengzi 孟子).
Used the Ta-hsüeh (Daxue 大學) and Chung-yung (Zhongyong 中庸).
Instigated later Confucians' antipathy toward the other Chinese value-systems.

Li Ao 李翱 (ca. 772-833):
Author of the "Book on Returning to Our True Nature"--Fu-hsing shu (Fuxing shu 複性書).
Thought: based on the Chung-yung.
Also influenced by T'ang Taoist thought and by T'ien-t'ai 天臺 Buddhist theory.
In T'ang times, Li was typical of Confucians' views.

B. EARLY SUNG (SONG) 宋 DYNASTY CONFUCIAN THINKERS (11th Century)

Shao Yung 邵雍; 1011-1077; Not "recognized" by Chu Hsi:
Cosmological theory: the universe evolved out of shen 神 ("Spirit"/"spiritual consciousness")
and shu 數 ("enumerative principle"); greatly influenced all the theorists below

Chou Tun-i 周敦頤; 1017-1073: The "official" beginning of "Neo-Confucianism":
Cosmological theory: Tai-chi 太極 ("the Great Ultimate"), then yin/yang 阴陽 and
the "5 Forces" 五行 (like the Han Confucian Tung Chung-shu / Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒)
Deeply influenced by Hua-yen (Huayan 華嚴 Buddhism).
The goal of practice: "tranquility" (ching / jing 靜) and union with the cosmos.

Chang Tsai 張載; 1020-1077:
Author of "The Western Inscription"; much in common with Chou, but emphasized that
everything shares one essence (ch'i / qi 氣: from Mencius and the Nei-yeh / Neiye 内業);
"enlightenment" comes through "sincerity" (from Chung-yung); "universal love" ("would not
cut the grass beneath his window").

Ch'eng Hao 程顥; 1032-1085) and Ch'eng I 程頤; 1033-1107):
Brothers; nephews of Chang Tsai; students of Chou Tun-i; government officials.
No interest in cosmology: the universal principle (Li 理, not = li 礼, "propriety") is within
our heart/mind (hsin / xin 心), not outside of us.
Later Analysts: Self-cultivation is either rational (Ch'eng I) or moral/intuitive (Ch'eng Hao).

C. THE LATER SUNG DYNASTY CONFUCIAN THINKERS (12th Century)

Chu Hsi 朱熹; 1130-1200:
Very conservative rationalist; followed Ch'eng I with minor changes; virtually no original ideas.
To 20th-Century Confucians and 20th-Century Sinology: Chu was hailed as the
founder of "the Ch'eng/Chu (Chengzhu) 程朱 School" (traditionally called Li-hsüeh / Lixue 理學; AKA "the School of 'Principle'" in 20th-Century Sinology). Glorified by
Westernized Confucians (e.g., Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷) and the convert Wm. T. deBary—a highly partisan devotee of Chu Hsi whose highly tendentious Sources of Chinese Tradition, etc., dishonestly diminished Westerners’ appreciation of others, including medieval and modern Taoists and Buddhists; Confucians who rejected the Ch’eng/Chu Orthodoxy (e.g., Li Ao, Lu Hsian-shan, Kao P’an-lung); and all women. To Chan and deBary, Chu Hsi was the norm of “Neo-Confucianism” (a category completely alien to Chinese thought and tradition). 

Reason for Historical Importance: During the 13th-century Mongol Conquest of North China, a scholar from the Ch’eng/Chu tradition was captured and taken to the Mongol capital (modern Beijing), where a follower persuaded the Mongols to set up a “national academy.” In 1313, the Mongol regime established Chu Hsi’s Commentaries on “The Four Books” (the Analects, Mencius, Ta-hsüeh and Chung-yung) as the curriculum for all Chinese schoolboys, thus establishing a government social-control system to subjugate the conquered Chinese populace (with similar use by later rulers in Japan, Korea, Singapore, etc., as well as by later Chinese emperors). 

Lu Hsiang-shan / Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (also called Lu Chiu-yuan / Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵; 1139-1193): Debated Chu Hsi at the Goose Lake Temple (1175). Denounced as “crypto-Buddhist” by Chu. Followed Ch’eng Hao: the human heart/mind is “the Tao heart/mind.” Regarded as founder of the lesser-known “Lu-Wang 陸王 School” (traditionally called Hsin-hsüeh / Xinxue 心學; AKA “the School of ‘Mind’” in 20th-c Western Sinology).

D. MING 明 DYNASTY CONFUCIAN THINKERS

Ch’en Pai-sha (Chen Baisha 陳白沙; 1428-1500) 
Little-known critic of Ch’eng/Chu orthodoxy; followed Lu Hsiang-shan.

Wang Yang-ming (Wang Yangming 王陽明; 1472-1529; AKA Wang Shou-jen / Shouren 守仁): A great statesman and general. Had “an enlightenment experience” suddenly one night in 1508, then another a year later. Followed Ch’eng Hao and Lu Hsiang-shan. Taught extending our innate knowledge of good (from Mencius) into moral action. So the individual practitioner is responsible for cultivating what is innate—an idea that was fundamental to Mencius’ thought but caused alarm among Ch’eng/Chu thinkers, who feared what individuals might do if left to themselves to cultivate themselves, rather than simply study the classics, as Chu Hsi (and oppressive rulers) wanted. In reality, Chu Hsi pretended to agree with Mencius but actually believed Hsün-tzu (Xunzi 荀子); the people who truly followed Mencius were Ch’eng Hao and Lu Hsiang-shan.

Lin Chao-en (Lin Zhaoen 林兆恩; 1517-1598): 
A teacher, healer, and community leader who added terms from Taoist self-cultivation and Ch’an (Chan) 禪 Buddhism (known in the West as “Zen”—the Japanese pronunciation) to construct a program of "heart/mind-cultivation" designed to feel comfortable to other literati. Had more social influence among “the middle classes” (e.g., merchants, artisans, well-to-do agriculturalists) than among “the elite” at the imperial level or in Confucian schools.

Kao P’an-lung (Gao Panlong 高攀龍; 1562-1626): Criticized Wang, but Emphasized meditation ("quiet-sitting": ching-tso / jingzuo 靜坐). Later Confucians who advocated meditation denied the undeniable fact that "quiet-sitting" is simply Ch’an meditation by another name. Totally ignored by Wing-tsit Chan, deBary, etc. The only Western scholar to publish studies about practitioners of "quiet-sitting" is Prof. Rodney Taylor, who not only translated writings by
Kao P’an-lung but also interviews with practitioners in Japan today, such as the Confucian scholar Okada Takehiko 岡田武彦.

E. CH’ING 清 DYNASTY CONFUCIAN THINKERS

Ku Yen-wu (Gu Yanwu 顧炎武; 1613-1682): Stressed empirical knowledge and practical affairs
Tai Chen (Dai Zhen 戴震; 1723-1777): Stressed “evidential analysis” of classical texts (k’ao-cheng / kaozheng); Tai’s approach was “academic” in a rather modern sense.
K’ang Yu-wei (Kang Youwei 康有為; 1858-1927): Experienced enlightenment during meditation. Influenced by Western thought, but wanted to restore Confucianism and Chinese tradition. Was given control of the government for “100 Days.” Sought to modernize China and achieve a universal utopia.