“This collection of essays about East Asian great books, by outstanding scholars in the field, addresses the issue of why these books are classics. Wm. Theodore de Bary’s essays offer approaches to reading these books that are essential to understanding them. Scholars and advanced students in Asian studies will find this book very valuable.”

Gertrude Gress, St. John’s College, Santa Fe

Finding Wisdom in East Asian Classics is an essential, all-access guide to the core texts of East Asian civilization and culture. Essays address frequently read, foundational texts in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese, as well as early modern fictional classics and nonfiction works of the seventeenth century. Building strong links between these writings and the critical traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, this volume shows the vital role of the classics in the shaping of Asian history and in the development of the humanities at large.

Wm. Theodore de Bary focuses on texts that have survived for centuries, if not millennia, through avid questioning and contestation. Recognized as perennial reflections on life and society, these works represent diverse historical periods and cultures and include the Analects of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Xunzi, the Lotus Sutra, Tang poetry, the Pillow Book, The Tale of Genji, and the writings of Chikamatsu and Kaibara Ekken. Contributors explain the core and most commonly understood aspects of these works and how they operate within their traditions. They trace their reach and reinvention throughout history and their ongoing relevance in modern life.

With fresh interpretations of familiar readings, these essays inspire renewed appreciation and examination. In the case of some classics open to multiple interpretations, de Bary chooses two complementary essays from different contributors. Expanding on debates concerning the challenges of teaching classics in the twenty-first century, several pieces speak to the value of Asia in the core curriculum. Indispensable for early scholarship on Asia and the evolution of global civilization, Finding Wisdom in East Asian Classics helps one master the major texts of human thought.

Wm. Theodore de Bary is the John Mitchell Mason Professor Emeritus and provost emeritus of Columbia University and past president of the Association for Asian Studies. He has written extensively on Confucianism in East Asia and is the coeditor of Sources of East Asian Tradition, Sources of Chinese Tradition, Sources of Japanese Tradition, and Sources of Korean Tradition.
FINDING WISDOM IN
EAST ASIAN CLASSICS
1 Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate

- This represents the Supreme Ultimate and the Indeterminate. That is, it gives rise to yin and yang, but this indicates that in its fundamental substance there is no admixture of yin and yang.

- This represents how yin moves and produces yang, quiets, and produces yin. The circle in the center represents their fundamental substance. is the root of ; is the root of .

- This represents how yang by its change and yin by its union therewith produces water, fire, wood, metal, and earth.

- The production and transformation of all creatures

- Represents how the Indeterminate and yin and yang and the Five Elements wonderfully unite and are without separation.

- This represents how the transformations of material force Ch'ien becomes the male and K'un becomes the female.

Male and female each have their own natures, but are the one Supreme Ultimate.

- This represents how all things evolve and are produced by transformations of form. Each thing has its own nature but all are the one Supreme Ultimate.