Michael S. Duke and Josephine Chiu-Duke are to be commended for translating the first half of Ge Zhaoguang’s 中國思想史 Zhongguo Sixiang Shi, one of the most renowned recent surveys of Chinese thought. The book is extraordinary for its richness and its depth. While the best-known surveys in Western languages end with the Han 漢 dynasty (e.g., A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China [La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989]; Benjamin I. Schwartz, The World of Thought in Ancient China [Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1985]), this volume continues the story till midway through the Tang 唐— and remember that this is only the first volume! The second volume, which was even longer in Chinese, brought the narrative down to the end of the 19th century. In the front matter, Duke and Chiu-Duke state that they plan to translate the second volume as well. That will be a major accomplishment.

Ge has revised his magnum opus several times over the years, and, as far as I can tell, this translation does not correspond precisely to any of the editions published in Chinese (1998–2000, 2001, 2009, and 2013, all of which are distinct). The translators state: “The original text ran to just over 1,400 pages. This translation represents Professor Ge Zhaoguang’s abbreviation into a little over 660 pages of Chinese text. Volume One of this two-volume translation covers the first 371 pages of the Chinese text” (xi). This is confusing for two reasons. First, it was only the 1998–2000 edition that contained as many as 1,400 pages; the widely distributed 2001 edition had reduced this to 1,226 pages, even though it included new sections. Second, Duke and Chiu-Duke do not state whether the new 660-page version was ever published in Chinese, and I suspect that it has not been, since I cannot find it in any library catalogue. Thus they are translating a version that is unavailable to the general public in its original
form, and the consequence is that reading this translation next to any of the published Chinese editions can be frustrating. Though I was usually able to find the original passages when I felt I needed to check them, it sometimes required some flipping back and forth. Readers might have been aided by a sentence or two about the substantial material (over 500 pages’ worth) that has been cut.

The footnotes are one area where there have been unmistakable deletions, and sometimes the lost information makes the text difficult to follow. For example, on 85 we read: “After the male sex became the dominant force in society, the word for ancestor (zu 祖) representing the progenitor of humanity through birth and reproduction, actually referred to the male sex.” In Ge’s original (2001 edition: I, 24n.1), there was a footnote discussing the theory that qie 且, that is, the right-hand side of zu, is a pictograph of a phallus. The passage is nearly incomprehensible without this explanation.

Here and there one finds simple translation errors (e.g., 59: “apocrypha” for weishu 僞書, which means “forged books”—evidently Duke and Chiu-Duke were thinking of weishu 纖書; and on 222 they have mistaken the title Lüshi Chunqiu 呂氏春秋 for Chunqiu Fanlu 春秋繁露, rendering it as Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals), but overall they have translated an inherently difficult text into smooth and accurate English.

As constraints of space preclude a detailed consideration of this huge work, in the remainder of this review I shall emphasize the areas where Ge’s discussion departs methodologically from the usual practice of Western scholars. This is, after all, a book that no Westerner could have written, and the most charitable way to digest it in English may be to ask wherein it differs.

Ge stands out among Chinese historians for his familiarity with Western scholarship, as is particularly apparent in the methodological preliminaries (1–67), where he cites figures such as R. G. Collingwood (1, 22, and 66), Jacques Le Goff (12 and 52), Mircea Eliade (23), and Marcel Granet (54). Here Ge offers some refreshing comments on revisionism (41) and a valuable overview of nonorthodox sources (58–65). Nevertheless, his thoughts on how to write intellectual history might have benefited from fuller engagement with Western theories. One example: Ge has useful observations about the inadequacy of “influence” as a historical explanation (39 ff.), but these would have been strengthened by considering notable Western criticisms of the concept (e.g., Michael Baxandall, Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985]: 58–62)—and it is puzzling that Ge himself suddenly appeals to “influence” just a few pages later (47–49).

Two other concepts that emerge from Ge’s methodological sketch seem to me to have been anticipated by Western discourse. The first is “thought that is used every day without thinking” (10; more fully “riyong er buzhi” 的普遍知識和思想 in the 2001 edition, 14), which will immediately make any reader think of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (most fully explicated in The Logic of Practice, trans. Richard Nice [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990]: 52–79). Second, I was struck by the correspondences between Ge’s “three possible forms used to write intellectual histories,” namely “establish-the-fact,” “value-assessment,” and “trace-a-journey” (30 f.), and the three modes of historiography limned by Bernard Bailyn: heroic, whig, and tragic (Bernard Bailyn, The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1974]: viiiif.). All these