Understanding the *Analects* of Confucius

A New Translation of *Lunyu* with Annotations

Peimin Ni

Copyrighted Material

Understanding the *Analects* of Confucius

A New Translation of *Lunyu* with Annotations

PEIMIN NI

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Copyrighted material

A volume within the general plan of Shanghai Academy of Confucian Studies
and the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University.

Calligraphy on the cover and in the book, Peimin Ni

Published by
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS, ALBANY

© 2017 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever
without written permission. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system
or transmitted in any form or by any means including electronic, electrostatic,
magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise
without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Production, Laurie D. Searl
Marketing, Kate R. Seburyamo

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Confucius, author. | Ni, Peimin, translator.
Title: Understanding the Analects of Confucius : a new translation of Lunyu
with annotations / by Peimin Ni.
Other titles: Lun yü. English
Description: Albany, NY : State University of New York, 2017. | Series: SUNY
series in Chinese philosophy and culture | Includes bibliographical references
and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016031413 | ISBN 9781438464510 (hardcover : alk. paper) |
ISBN 9781438464527 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: Confucius. Lun yu.
Classification: LCC PL2478.L58 2017 | DDC 181/.112—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016031413

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyrighted material

Contents

Preface xi
Conventions xix
Acknowledgments xxi
Introduction 1
Historical Background 1
Life of Confucius 4
Confucianism before and after Confucius 8
The Formation of the *Analects* 14
English Translations of the *Analects* 18
The *Gongfu* Orientation 22
Key Terms 31
Ren 仁—Human-heartedness 32
Xiao 孝—Filial piety 35
De 德—Virtuosity, virtue, kindness 36
Xing 性—Human nature 38
Tian 天—Heaven 40

Copyrighted material

Tianming 天命—Mandate of heaven 42
Dao 道—the Way 45
Ming 命—Destiny 46
Yi 义—Appropriateness/rightness 48
Li 礼—Ritual propriety, ritual 49
Zhengming 正名—Rectification of names 51
Wuwei 无为—Action by non-action 53
He 和—Harmony 55
Yue or *Le* 乐—Music/joy 56
Wen 文 and *Zhi* 质—Refined form and substance 58
Quan 权—Discretion 60
Zheng 政—Governing 60
Shi 士—Educated person 62
Junzi 君子—Exemplary person 63
Sheng 圣—Sage 64
Zhong 忠—Wholehearted devotion 65
Shu 恕—Reciprocity 66
Xin 信—Trustworthiness 68
Zhi 直—Uprightness 69
Xue 学—Learning, studying 70
Zhi 知—Knowing, understanding, wisdom 72
Zhongyong 中庸—Hitting the mark constantly 73
论语 *Lunyu*–The *Analects* 77
学而第一 Book 1 79
为政第二 Book 2 94
八佾第三 Book 3 113
里仁第四 Book 4 131
公冶长第五 Book 5 148

Copyrighted material

雍也第六 Book 6 168
述而第七 Book 7 189
泰伯第八 Book 8 215
子罕第九 Book 9 229
乡党第十 Book 10 246
先进第十一 Book 11 260
颜渊第十二 Book 12 279
子路第十三 Book 13 299
宪问第十四 Book 14 322
卫灵公第十五 Book 15 351
季氏第十六 Book 16 376
阳货第十七 Book 17 389
微子第十八 Book 18 409
子张第十九 Book 19 418
尧曰第二十 Book 20 435
Notes 445
Bibliography 457
Index of Names and Terms in the Analects 469
General Index 475

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

Preface

Like Socrates, Jesus, the Buddha, and Muhammad, Confucius is among the few individuals who have exerted the most profound and enduring influences on human civilization. His philosophy is instrumental in shaping the traditional culture of China and its neighboring countries, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. For a while overshadowed by the Enlightenment ideas of the modern West, it is now reviving and increasingly recognized as a valuable resource for cross-cultural dialogue, for inspiration about human life, and for envisioning the future of the world.

As the New Testament is to Christianity and the Qur'an to Islam, the *Lunyu*, known in the West as the *Analects*, has served as a principal canon of the Confucian tradition. Despite controversies about the authenticity of some specific chapters or passages, it is the single most respected record of Confucius' teachings. In traditional China, this is a book that schoolchildren would learn to recite by heart before they could even understand the words, and emperors would receive remonstrations if they behaved contrary to its teachings. In the recent wake of the spiritual quest after the full-scale economic reform that has transformed China, the revival of Confucianism has been indicated by the renewed popularity of the *Analects*. A book that draws practical moral insights from the *Analects* sold four million copies in the country within one year!

However, the *Analects* is also a very difficult book to read. Encountering it for the first time, readers may feel like they are reading random "fortune cookie" slips. Each passage is typically a short aphorism recorded

Copyrighted material

with no context (presumably because the context was too obvious to the authors). The text is often so vague to modern readers that it makes little sense to them, or it allows multiple and sometimes contradictory interpretations. Furthermore, there are often controversies surrounding the authenticity of the text—doubts about whether certain passages are original or later interpolations. For those who do not read Chinese, there is an extra layer of difficulty due to having to rely on a translation. Not only can translations give people a misleading impression as if words in one language have exact matches in another, but in trying to make the text read well, translators often insert words that are not present in the original, consequently eliminating possible alternative interpretations. In other words, readability and comprehensibility are often obtained through obscuring the original text!

Indeed, this new translation and annotation started from the reading notes taken for the sake of my own understanding and teaching of the text, particularly on the parts and dimensions where the existing English versions fall short of being satisfactory. I found that in order to understand the *Analects* better, I had to paradoxically hold back the temptation to make it clear too quickly. In other words, I had to preserve the vagueness and ambiguity of the original text as much as possible in my translation. Only then can I retain the possibility of alternative interpretations that have emerged from history and consequently understand how the Chinese philosophical tradition has developed in part through continuous commentaries to classics such as the *Analects*. The various interpretations of the *Analects* are no less about the commentators' ideas than about the classics that they commented upon.

To accommodate the paradoxical need to retain the original vagueness in order to understand the text better, I chose to translate the text with minimal interpretation, on the one hand, and placed annotations below each passage of the *Analects*, on the other hand, in which major alternative readings are noted. The annotations are therefore simultaneously elaborations of the original text and a continuation of the tradition of treating it as a living text by offering and inviting further reflections. To put it alternatively, the annotations serve to help the reader access the richness of the original, and through this, engage in the practice of dialoging with the text through which the text continues to be alive and relevant today.

With this approach, the current version aspires to be both more faithful to the text and more informative about the historical and up-to-date scholarship of the text. More concretely, this aspiration is carried out through the following three choices. First of all, as we shall see in more detail in the introduction, the formation of the *Analects* took a very long

Copyrighted material

time, and the version we use here—the so-called "received version" with twenty "books" in it—had gone through the editing hands of generations of people. Although the enigmatic historical origin of the text is important to explore, and sometimes we have to speculate about it when apparent inconsistencies or other signs of oddity are found in the text, the received version has been read as a unified whole since it took shape in Han dynasty (roughly two thousand years ago). The "Confucius" represented in this version is the one who has exerted unparalleled influence on Chinese culture for two millennia. This Confucius has had such a powerful presence in history that, in comparison, the "real Confucius" who might not have actually said the sayings in this book becomes less important (although this does not mean that the "real Confucius" would not be interesting to historians). If the result of tracing the original *Analects* would lead to a total annihilation of the text and the Confucius known to us through this text, we might as well say that that is not the *Analects* and Confucius that the current version is about.

Second, in translating the text, I try to strike a balance between readability and faithfulness to the original text. When it is impossible to have both, I give priority to faithfulness. I hope that, through the Chinese "accent" of my translation and the ambiguity and vagueness that I deliberately retain from the received text, readers can get a closer feel for how the text looks to most Chinese, modern or ancient. Although it is impossible to entirely separate translation from interpretation, I resist the temptation to add words that are absent in the original. Due to the vagaries of the English language, sometimes I have to add words in the translation that would favor one interpretation over others, or else the English sentence would simply not make sense. In those cases, the annotation provides explanation and justification, if any, for the choice.

Third, given the fact that even ninety-nine percent of the Chinese, today or in the past two thousand years, would have to read the text with the aid of annotations and commentaries, it would be like giving English readers the mere skeleton if a translation of the text were not accompanied by adequate supporting materials. Informed by the traditional commentaries and contemporary scholarship, the annotations in the current English version provide context, suggest alternative interpretations, link passages to related passages within or beyond the *Analects*, and offer reflective comments. This arrangement leaves much of the power of choosing and evaluating different interpretations of the text with the reader. More for helping contemporary readers to *understand* the ideas of the text than for providing a source book of traditional scholarship, the annotations contain only a

Copyrighted material

small amount of selected quotes from the huge library of over three thousand commentaries of the *Analects* accumulated throughout the past two thousand years. My principle for selecting what to include in the annotations is to highlight alternative readings or particular thought-provoking points in traditional commentaries to facilitate better understanding of the thoughts of Confucius and to inspire further philosophical reflections, especially when they are relevant to our present-day life. For this purpose, I have regrettably left out huge amounts of materials that historians and philologists may find interesting.

To be honest, one additional function of including the annotations is to slow down the reading. At a time when everything happens quickly and information "explodes" through all kinds of media, one wants the answer and wants it now. Western readers often search for exotic and esoteric "Eastern wisdom," expecting its riddle-like wit to jump out right before their eyes. Reading the *Analects* with such a mindset is bound to disappoint. Aphorisms in the *Analects* are like compressed computer files: they need to be unzipped to appreciate their rich content and implications. The annotations are not intended to do all the explanatory and reflective work for the reader. They offer pausing moments and guideposts for inviting the readers' own reflections into a conversation with the text. Of course, readers who want to have uninterrupted reading of the original text can still easily skip the annotations, as they are printed in a smaller font.

In addition to the annotations, the translation of the text is accompanied by the Chinese original and embedded between an extensive introduction and glossary of key terms at the beginning, indexes at the end, and cross-references throughout the book.

The inclusion of the Chinese text offers a connection to the original against which readers can conveniently get a corrective influence. Even for those who do not read Chinese, it serves as a reminder that, as Ludwig Wittgenstein says, the limit of one's language is the limit of one's world, and translations should always be taken with a grain of salt.

The introduction provides a background upon which the *Analects* (*Lunyu* in Chinese) has unfolded as a classic associated with the teachings of Confucius and his close disciples followed by a long commentary tradition rich enough to warrant the term "Lunyuology," which strove to articulate and apply those teachings. It also contains a brief review of previous English translations of the *Analects* to illustrate how the book has found expressions in Indo-European languages, which will in turn offer a glimpse of the intricacies related to translating the text.

Next comes a set of twenty-seven short essays on key terms that highlights the core values of Confucius' teaching. This section serves multiple

Copyrighted material

functions: as a handy reference tool for the most essential concepts in the *Analects*; as explanation of their various translations and clarification of their basic meanings, with warnings about subtle differences between the Chinese concepts and their popular English translations; and, more importantly, as a summary of the most basic tenets of Confucius' philosophy, it weaves together the basic ideas of the *Analects*, articulates their mutual connections, and shows how the ideas were developed.

The glossary of the twenty-seven key terms, however, has to be taken as such. It is not meant to be a full articulation and discussion of these concepts, much less replacement for reading the text of the *Analects* itself. Although the lack of any apparent logical order in the *Analects* can be disturbing and puzzling for its modern readers, to impose a logical order to the text lays too heavy a hand on the received text.[1] It not only takes away the reader's right to see the text as it has been handed down but also risks imposing the translator's own categorization onto the text. Actually, Confucius' thought does not submit to the linear, logical order we often find in Western philosophical texts. It is more like a crystal, with each side reflecting all the other sides. It does not really matter which side one begins with. Sometimes one saying in the *Analects* reveals as much about the Master's views on spirituality as it does about his views on politics or education, and his approach to education reflects his philosophy as much as it reveals his personality. Deep understanding of Confucius is dependent on seeing the connections among the multiple dimensions.

This does not mean we leave it to the reader to do all the connecting work. Beside the assistance from the section on key terms and the cross-references throughout the book, readers are encouraged to take advantage of the indexes at the end of the book to navigate and see the connections between the ideas and the passages. I have also added references to additional reading materials on relevant matters in case interested readers want to explore further. As the primary audience of this book is English readers, the references are also mainly selected from English sources.

The most important help a reader needs, however, may be a reminder: What you get from the *Analects* is heavily dependent on yourself. Different readers may pick up the book for different reasons and with different mindsets. These play a key role in what one perceives in the book. Entering a warehouse, a retailer may be disappointed to find no supplies for his business, a criminologist may find evidence of a crime, and a movie director may find an ideal space for shooting an episode. Similarly, although one may be disappointed if one looks for philosophy in the *Analects* according to the mainstream Western conceptual framework, China studies scholars find in it important genetic roots of Chinese culture and the country's modern

Copyrighted material

fate. Now as more people are turning their eyes to the *Analects* for resources for addressing current problems in human life and society or for expanding their horizon of philosophy, they find in it an almost inexhaustible source of inspiration, no less philosophical than it is practical.

My personal journey of studying the *Analects* had an important turning point when I came to see that the distinctive value of Confucius' teaching is in his *gongfu* (aka *kung fu*) orientation, rather than in how much it resembles the intellectualist- and moralist-orientated philosophies in the West. When I discerned this *gongfu* orientation—an orientation toward cultivation and transformation rather than only conceptualization—and used it as a general approach to understand Confucius' teachings, it was like a strong beam of light cast through a shining crystal; everything in it suddenly makes better sense. What is even more exhilarating is that the light projected from the crystal makes things around it also look clearer and more distinct.

If there is anything that can be claimed as my contribution to the continuous living tradition of interpreting the *Analects*, it would be this *gongfu* approach. You can find a sketch of the approach at the end of the introduction. Using a Zen Buddhist expression, this is a "finger" that points toward "the moon." It seems to me that interpreting the *Analects* merely from the intellectual and moral perspective is like looking at a reflection of the moon in a pond and mistaking it for the moon itself. While the "finger" provided here is mine, I think it is pointing to the real moon that is missed in many other readings. Of course, what you will find, whether following my finger or not, is the moon that *you* see. China's great poet Li Bai (aka Li Bo 李白, 701–762) once wrote,

> People today have no access to seeing the ancient moon,
> The moon today used to cast light on ancient people.

If this is a lament that we can never truly see the "original *Analects*," a slight variation of Li Bai's line turns it around:

> Ancient people had no access to seeing the moon today,
> The moon today used to cast light on ancient people.[2]

Although the *Analects* has existed for over two millennia, its unfolding modern significance that we will see is what the ancient people could not have anticipated.

It would be presumptuous if I were to say that my translation of the *Analects* is better than previous translations, much less that it will be

Copyrighted material

the final "right" translation. Yet, it would be ironic if I did not hope so. Given the advantage of studying previous translations, I have learned from their merits and tried to avoid their shortcomings. I have tried my best to provide what I think is the most appropriate reading of the *Analects*. As Confucius says, "It is humans who can broaden the Way, not the Way that can broaden humans" (15.29). Readers are advised to take my reading of the *Analects* as a continuation of the long tradition of reading and rereading the work, the practice of an art of life originated from an ancient time that has kept evolving in the context of changing historical conditions, allowing "the moon today" to keep unfolding its new significance, and as an invitation to you, the reader, to join the practice with me to interact with the text and broaden the Way for each one of us.

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

Conventions

Chinese names, unfamiliar as they are to the Western reader, are difficult to keep straight. The problem is exacerbated because while the *Analects* mentions many people whose characters are relevant to understanding the text, the same person may be referred to by different names. In order to avoid confusion, most English versions of the *Analects* simply unify the names (i.e., use just one of the names for a person). This makes it easier to keep track of who is who, but it violates the traditional rituals associated with addressing people, which contain cultural and historic information. From the way a person is addressed, we can get important clues about the context and the history.[1] For the sake of retaining that information, I will keep the names as they are in the original but add in brackets a unified name of each person to compensate for the difficulty.

The Chinese traditionally put their family name first. Consequently, many students and occasionally even scholars would, for instance, mistakenly address ZHU Xi as "Xi," which is no different from calling David Hume "David," or calling Kant "Immanuel." To avoid this confusion, I will use small capital letters for the Chinese family names when the traditional order is preserved. For instance, "ZHU Xi" means that "Zhu" is the family name and "Xi" is the given name. Otherwise I will still use the Western convention of given name followed by family name.

One more note about names in order here is that ancient Chinese names often come with "Zi." It could be an honorary way of addressing the

Copyrighted material

person as a "Master" (e.g., Lao Zi, Xun Zi, Mo Zi), or as part of a person's name (e.g., Zigong, Zilu, Ji Kangzi). Since practically no Chinese have "Zi" as a family name and no one uses *zi* alone as a personal name or style name, it is safe to assume that, when it stands alone, it means "Master," as Xun Zi means "Master Xun."

Throughout the book I use simplified Chinese characters and the Pinyin system for their romanization. The choice between using simplified or traditional characters is a difficult one because the issue is very complicated and, unfortunately, politicized.[2] There are strong reasons for staying with the traditional, especially because we are dealing with a traditional text that has been passed down in the traditional form. The straw that tipped the scale toward using simplified characters is purely a pragmatic consideration: to make the inclusion of the Chinese text more useful for the maximum amount of readers. Specialists in the field today should be able to read both simplified and traditional characters, whereas today's nonspecialists who learn the Chinese language typically and increasingly start with the simplified. After all, it is not difficult for interested readers to find a copy of the book in traditional Chinese characters.[3] As for the Pinyin system, it is now the international standard, and although not perfect, it is overall better than the Wade-Giles system that it replaced. In order to reduce inconsistency, I have converted the Wade-Giles in the works I quote into Pinyin, except for names widely known in Wade-Giles or titles of books and articles. In special cases I also use tone marks to help mark the difference (as in differentiating Zhou 周 and Zhòu 纣).[4]

Since the book makes frequent references to the *Analects*, citations or references to it are given simply in parentheses with their relevant book numbers and section numbers. For example, "(2.1)" means book 2, section 1 from the *Analects*.

Translations of Chinese texts other than the *Analects* are either my own or based on their English versions listed in the bibliography at the end of the volume, sometimes with modifications.

Finally, I want to explain that my choice of using gender-neutral ways to handle third-person pronouns is not an attempt to cover up gender bias for Confucius. Living in a male-dominated time, he may very well have had gender bias. However, third-person pronouns (such as *ren* 人, *qi* 其) in the Chinese language are themselves gender-neutral. Thus there is no reason for us to impose gender bias on the language simply because the society was dominated by males.

Copyrighted material

Acknowledgments

What makes this book worthwhile is of course fundamentally the amazing quality of the text it treats, namely, the *Analects* of Confucius. Few texts in human history are able to continuously inspire people for thousands of years, always living, being present and relevant, like inexhaustible fountains. This book is therefore first and foremost a work owing its value to the wisdom of Confucius and those who recorded and edited the teachings into a book. Along with them, it owes much to the long list of scholars throughout the history, all the way to the present day, who have contributed to the extraordinary stock of commentary literature of the text. What I have done is not much more than presenting the text and some most notable commentaries to its readers in a way that will hopefully help readers to access the text more easily and rewardingly.

Of the others whom I must acknowledge, first are the most special ones to whom this work is dedicated—my mother Jiang Yi 江怡, my father Ni Fusheng 倪复生, grandmother Tu Linxian 屠林仙, and nannie Ruan Hehua 阮荷花. They looked after me throughout my childhood, all with deep yet distinctive ways of love. This lays the foundation of my firsthand experience of what Confucian values mean. Coming next to mind are my early mentors Henry Rosemont Jr. and Joel J. Kupperman. Studying under them allowed me to gain a renewed appreciation of the Confucian philosophical tradition and its modern relevance. Next comes Stephen Rowe, Geling Shang 商戈令, and Jianchu Chen 陈建初, who have long become parts of my extended family, the importance of which to my spirit

Copyrighted material

is comparable to oxygen to my body—one becomes so comfortable in and dependent on it that one would not notice its presence until it comes short.

The formation of this book greatly benefited from the helpful comments, suggestions, and moral support from Karen Kupperman, Donald J. Munro, Roger T. Ames, Stephen C. Angle, Dong Ping 董平, Huang Yong 黄勇, and Wang Huaiyu 王怀聿. Their enthusiasm and encouragement, along with their knowledge and insights, have all contributed to the quality of this work. Special acknowledgment must be dedicated to Bonnie Smith of Rutgers University and my colleagues Kelly J. Clark and Patrick Shan 单富良. They spent countless hours reading through the manuscript and offering innumerable valuable suggestions ranging from the general direction of the project all the way to specific details. The book also benefitted from many long conversations I had with my brother Ni Peihua 倪培华, whose rich experiences in practicing traditional Chinese *gongfu* is always a source of inspiration.

I am indebted to the students who took Confucianism classes from me at Grand Valley State University, the University of Hawai'i, and the University of Hong Kong. Their readings and responses to various English versions of the *Analects* helped me to see the need for a new version and how it could be an improvement or supplement to the existing ones. Among the students with whom I tested the manuscript of this book as a textbook, many have given me useful feedback. Among them Alexa Nord-Bronzyk and Sarah Dahlstrom deserve special mention, as they both offered careful proofreading that markedly reduced the number of small errors.

I must thank the anonymous readers of the manuscript not only for recommending publication of the book but also for their insightful suggestions that gave me the chance to see how the work could be improved before it was put into print. Of course, I remain solely responsible for all lingering imperfections.

Finally, I would like to thank the late senior acquisitions editor at SUNY Press, Nancy Ellegate. Nancy took my submission and navigated it through its approval by the editorial board with genuine care and professionalism. It saddens me deeply that she passed away right after she congratulated me for the book's acceptance for publication.

—P. N.

Copyrighted material

Introduction

Historical Background

Confucius (551–479 BCE) was born during the late period of the Zhou dynasty known as the Spring and Autumn 春秋 (770–476 BCE), when China had already had a developed civilization for over two thousand years. Knowledge about China's remote antiquity was passed down in legends and songs, which contained rich moral and cultural messages. Confucius and many others quoted stories about ancient sage-kings, Yao 尧, Shun 舜, and Yu 禹, as if there were no question about their reliability. The sage-kings were believed to be morally exemplary and to have produced a harmonious society. Both Yao and Shun selected their successors according to moral integrity and wisdom. Succession of power by kinship (direct descendants) began after Yu passed away and his son Qi 启 took the throne, which marked the beginning of the Xia 夏 dynasty (ca. twenty-first to seventeenth century BCE). While the existence of Xia is still questionable, the history of the succeeding Shang 商 dynasty (ca. seventeenth to eleventh century BCE, also known as Yin) has been confirmed by abundant archeological evidence. Written records show that during the Shang, China had a sophisticated written language, ritual customs, along with techniques of agriculture and pottery, bronze, and silk production.

The Shang dynasty lasted for six hundred years until it was overthrown by the revolt of the Zhou 周 people in the Wei River valley in today's Shaanxi Province. In contrast to the last king of the Shang, who was

Copyrighted material

notoriously cruel, the founders of the Zhou dynasty (founded in 1122 BCE), King Wen 文王 and his son known as the Duke of Zhou 周公, laid the foundation of a humanistic government. In emulation of the ancient sage-kings, they refined the traditional ritual system and justified their overturning of the Shang as a revolution to liberate the people from their wicked oppressors. This revolution, so they claimed, was carried out under the *tianming* 天命, mandate of heaven, and was therefore not only legitimate but also sacred. The victory of the Zhou reinforced the claim that the new rulers had a special tie with heaven, and this religious dimension played an important role in allowing subsequent rulers to control their vassals across the vast territory of central China for centuries. It added a sacred aura to their conferring limited sovereignty over portions of the land to members of the royal lineage, which made the tie between the central power and the vassals both religious and familial.

Moreover, the Zhou maintained traditional ritual services to natural and ancestral spirits and developed new forms of rituals to honor heaven and to regulate human life. The music and dances performed in ceremonies started to gain a special significance for maintaining social order, so much so that gradually the spirits themselves often became secondary in importance. The rituals themselves became exemplifications of the order of heaven. Together with the belief that heaven's mandate is reflected in proper political and moral conduct rather than in lavish offerings to deities, the emphasis on rituals began to be associated more with moral undertakings of the people than with extra-human deities. From this tradition, Confucius developed his own account of human well-being and ritual propriety, which heavily influenced Chinese culture for over two millennia.

If this profound change was still hardly perceptible during the early Zhou, by the Spring and Autumn period it became increasingly obvious.[1] During the Spring and Autumn, the sociopolitical order of the Zhou was crumbling. Since the possession of the mandate of heaven is supposed to be displayed through manifestation of virtues, it would not automatically belong to a single dynasty forever. The edicts of the kings during this period were less and less effective as they were decreasingly concerned for the good of their people. The feudal lords became increasingly disobedient to their kings and hostile to each other, swallowing up territories of weaker neighbors and thus making boundaries of states shift constantly. The kings eventually became little more than puppets manipulated by powerful vassals.

Similarly, some clans of principal ministers inside the vassal states grew stronger and in turn threatened the power of the state rulers. Confucius' home state of Lu, for instance, was largely controlled by "The Three

Copyrighted material

Houses," Meng 孟, Shu 叔, and Ji 季—the descendants of three sons of Duke Huan of Lu 鲁桓公 (r. 711–697 BCE). They were involved in murdering two heirs of the ducal throne and setting up one of their own favor in 609 BCE, and in 562 BCE, they divided the state, leaving the Duke of Lu only a fraction of the revenues.

At a time when might equaled right, the lives of the people were often extremely unstable and miserable. The "law" was little more than the whim of the mighty. Subordinates risked their lives in remonstrating their superiors, friends and relatives became enemies, assassination was a flourishing profession, and rulers of states were frequently detained by other states. In 593 BCE, the capital of the state of Song was under siege for so long that the residents had no choice but to "exchange their children to eat," since they could not bear to eat their own (see *Zuo Zhuan*, Duke Xuan, Year 15).

Even though there were sporadic stories of fidelity, loyalty, courage, and respect for dignity, questions arose as to how these virtues could be justified and prevail. People began to question whether in such a society these were virtues or mere stupidity. Questions about the right way of life and the search for solutions to profound social problems occupied the most reflective minds of the time.

It was during these difficult times that China started to enter its most glorious era in philosophy. In the following few hundred years, the rich cultural soil mixed with chaotic and harsh social reality stimulated many great thinkers, giving birth to a golden age of Chinese thought known as the period of the "hundred schools of thought." Confucianism, Daoism, Moism, Legalism, and many other schools of thought emerged and competed with each other. This era remarkably coincides with the golden age of ancient Greek philosophy, the rise of Buddhism and the development of the Upanishads in India, and the work of the prophets in the Middle East. It is comparable to all of them, both in terms of their importance to their respective civilizations and in terms of their philosophical and spiritual profundity.

Among the "hundred schools" that appeared during the time, Confucianism and Daoism became the most influential. While Daoism remained an undercurrent of Chinese culture, Confucianism turned out to be mainstream for roughly two thousand years. It dominated the scene of Chinese politics, religious orientation, education, art, and life in general from the early Han dynasty until the early twentieth century. To a large degree the name of Confucius became synonymous with traditional Chinese culture, although his role in the culture should never be understood in isolation from the diverse strands of thought that he interacted with.

Copyrighted material

Life of Confucius

"Confucius" is a Latinized term for "Kong fuzi 孔夫子," which was made popular by the early European Jesuit missionaries in China to refer to the ancient Chinese sage. In his homeland, he is more commonly known as Kong Zi 孔子, although both terms mean "Master Kong."[2] Kong is his family name. His given name is Qiu 丘, and in addition, he has a style name, Zhongni 仲尼.[3]

In comparison to other early Chinese philosophers such as the legendary Lao Zi, we have much more information about Confucius' life. Yet much of this information has to be taken with a grain of salt. The first biography of Confucius was written by the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian 司马迁 (145–86? BCE). Naturally, it would not be easy to collect biographic information about someone who lived more than three hundred years ago. There are sporadic anecdotes about Confucius scattered in other texts such as the *Zuo Zhuan* 左传, a narrative history book dated around the fourth century BCE, and the *Mencius*, a book attributed to Mencius (372–289 BCE), but they are not to be trusted entirely either. It is worth remembering that the ancient Chinese had little curiosity about the reliability of ancient legends; in fact, they often freely made up new legends if it would serve a good purpose. With these warnings in mind, let us construct the Confucius of legend and reality (conceding the impossibility of separating legend from reality).

Confucius' birthplace, Qufu (in today's Shandong Province), belonged to the state of Lu, which was known for its preservation of early Zhou rituals and music. According to the *Zuo Zhuan*, Confucius was a descendant of a noble family from the state of Song, which, fearing political persecution, fled to Lu. It is said that his family line could be traced all the way back to the royal family of the Shang dynasty. Scholars have disputed whether the story is grounded on historical facts or on the assumption that a great man like Confucius must have had a noble ancestry. According to Sima Qian, Confucius' father was a low-ranking military officer named Shuliang-He 叔梁纥 (Shuliang is his style name, and He is his given name) or Kong He 孔纥. Since he had nine daughters but no son with his first wife, he obtained a concubine, who subsequently bore him a crippled son, Mengpi 孟皮. Wishing to have a healthy son, he married, again in his sixties, the youngest of the three daughters of the Yan family, Yan Zhengzai 颜徵在. After they went to Mount Ni 尼山 to pray for a son, Yan became pregnant, resulting in the birth of a boy with a forehead like a small hill. This is how Confucius received the given name Qiu and his style name Zhongni:

Copyrighted material

as *qiu* 丘 means hill, *zhong* 仲 entails that he was the second son, and *ni* 尼 for Mount Ni. Confucius' father died when Confucius was only three. He was brought up by his mother, who died when he was about seventeen. Presumably, again because a sage must have noble ancestry, his mother was also said to be a descendant of the Zhou royal family, all the way to the Duke of Zhou!

Confucius, however, never mentioned his "noble" ancestry. "I was poor when I was young, and that is why I acquired many humble skills" (9.6), says the Master. The *Mencius* tells us that "Confucius was once a minor keeper of stores, and he said, 'All I have to do is to keep correct records.' He also served as a minor official in charge of sheep and cattle, during which, he said, 'All I had to do was to see to it that the sheep and cattle grew up to be strong and healthy' " (*Mencius*, 5B:5). Confucius' family ancestors may have been some sort of low-level aristocrats, because even though his family was poor, he was able to get some education and learn arts such as archery and music.

At the age of fifteen, Confucius set his heart on learning (2.4), and at around thirty, he had already attracted a group of young people to study with him. His disciples looked at him as a sage beyond comparison and followed him with loyalty and devotion. The record shows that when he was thirty-four, a senior official of Lu and a member of the powerful "Three Houses," MENG Xizi 孟僖子, on his deathbed told his two sons to study with Confucius (*Zuo Zhuan*, Duke Zhao, Year 7). Confucius is alleged to be the first in the history of China to set up a school and offer education in an institutional way, but the word "first" is best taken to mean "foremost," for according to the *Mencius*, there were schools long before Confucius' time (*Mencius*, 3A:3). First or not, the Master has been revered as China's foremost teacher.

According to a likely exaggerated account, Confucius had over three thousand students throughout his life, and seventy-two of them became conversant with the "Six Arts" that he taught—ritual, music, writing, arithmetic, archery, and charioting. He taught them how to be *junzi* 君子, "exemplary persons." Some of his disciples played significant roles in politics. Among the twenty-two disciples mentioned in the *Analects*, at least nine became officials of some importance; three of them served successively as stewards to the Ji House, which was in control of Lu. This was the highest position in the state that could be attained without relying on inheritance.

Like Socrates, Confucius himself never seemed to have written any books. His major teachings were passed on in written form by his students,

Copyrighted material

forming the basis of the *Analects*. Confucius considered himself a transmitter of a tradition rather than a creator of a new form of thought (7.1). He claimed that the wisdom he taught was already contained in the ancient traditional rituals, history, music, poetry, and the limited written works that were, though decimated through the turmoil of the ages, available at his time. Nonetheless, he is broadly recognized as an innovative thinker who creatively reconstructed and reinterpreted his tradition. He rationalized the humanitarian spirit of the early Zhou culture and its ritual tradition, brought them to a new level of significance, and succeeded in passing them on to his followers.

The Confucian tradition has long held that Confucius edited some of the most basic Chinese classics, including the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Music*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the *Book of Changes*. According to Sima Qian, Confucius selected 305 songs from the 3,000 known at that time and organized them into the *Book of Songs* (*Shi Jing* 诗经). The extent to which Confucius edited this or the other books is questionable, but the *Analects* itself claims him to have worked on editing the *Songs* (see 9.15). From the way that Confucius quoted and interpreted the *Songs*, as the *Analects* informs us, we can see that he sees the book to be full of moral implications.

Similarly, though the *Spring and Autumn Annals* apparently contains nothing but brief records of individual events, it is believed that Confucius artistically embedded praises and condemnations in the book through his use of words, arrangement of sentences, and selection of details to subtly convey moral messages. The book is therefore more of an ethics primer than a book of history. The *Mencius* tells us that "Confucius completed the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and rebellious subjects and undutiful sons were struck in fear" (*Mencius*, 3B:9). Whether it was written by Confucius as a covert ethics primer, or whether it is a poorly composed historical record, the very oddity and the poor quality of it as an apparent history book served as evidence that it was not primarily a history book!

Even though Confucius was temperamentally more suited to be a scholar and teacher, he took political reform as his lifelong pursuit. With a strong sense of mission and ambition to bring the world into harmonious order, the Master spent a considerable amount of his time trying to implement his visions in the political sphere.

It was said Confucius was once appointed as the Magistrate of Zhongdu, and that he managed to bring the area to peace within one year. Subsequently, he was promoted to be Minister of Justice at Lu, during which he successfully defeated Duke Jing of Qi's attempt to coerce Duke Ding of

Copyrighted material

Lu with an armed force in a summit meeting. Scholars have questioned the reliability of these records since the *Analects* is entirely silent regarding these events.

Analects 18.4 implies that he did hold an office, but he despised the Three Houses for their usurping power from the Duke. When the state of Qi sent as a present a group of female entertainers to Lu, the head of the Ji House accepted, and for three days no state court was held. Confucius left Lu. For Confucius, "When the Way is in the state, one receives a stipend of grain. But when the Way is lost in the state and one still receives a stipend of grain, this is shameful" (14.1).

At the age of fifty-five, Confucius decided to leave Lu to embark on travels from one state to another, seeking a place that would allow him to implement his humanitarian ideas. His disciple, Zigong, once asked him, "Here is a beautiful gem—Should it be wrapped up and stored in a cabinet? Or should one seek for a good price and sell it?" The Master said, "Sell it! Sell it! I am one waiting for the right offer!" (9.13). He visited many states, including Qi, Wei, Song, Chen, and Cai, and met with numerous rulers and their ministers. However, none of the rulers made him "the right offer."

Traveling during that time was neither easy nor safe. More than once he and his accompanying disciples were straitened in life-threatening situations (cf. 7.23, 9.5, 11.23, 15.2). After fourteen years of persistent pursuit with no avail, Confucius returned to Lu at the age of sixty-eight. During his remaining years, his son Kong Li 孔鲤 (also known by his style name Boyu 伯鱼) and his favorite disciple Yan Hui 颜回 died, one shortly after the other. Upon Yan Hui's death, the Master cried, "Alas! Heaven ruins me! Heaven ruins me!" (11.9) The Master himself died in 479 BCE at the age of seventy-three with no anticipation of the later fortunes and misfortunes of his teachings.

Confucius was neither the flawless sage that he was subsequently venerated as, nor was he an impractical conservative, though his critics derided him as such. He was a man of his time with rich sentiments, human desires, and a good sense of humor. He enjoyed good company, music, fine food, and, if certain analects are authentic, he had some eccentric life habits (see book 10 of the *Analects*). He was frank in saying, "If wealth can be pursued, I don't mind doing it even if it means that I should serve as a man who holds a whip," but then he added, "If it cannot be pursued, I will follow my own preferences" (7.12). Although he would not be resentful if he were unrecognized (1.1), he could be frustrated when he could not get a chance to implement his ideals (e.g., 17.7). He loved his disciple Yan

Copyrighted material

Hui so much that when Yan Hui died, he cried heartbreakingly (11.10), and he could get very upset when his disciples made him ashamed (11.17). He was not afraid of admitting his mistakes and correcting himself (17.4, 7.31). When he was suspected to have had an inappropriate interview with a notorious woman, he swore like a child (6.28), but most times when he was unfairly criticized, he responded in good humor (9.2, 5.22).

Confucianism before and after Confucius

Since Confucius did not invent his teachings out of the blue but rather to a significant degree synthesized the ancient wisdom and practice passed down to him, Confucianism curiously predates Confucius.[4] In fact, the term "Confucianism" is a Western invention. In China, it is known as *rujia* 儒家, the school of *ru*, where *ru*, a term originally meaning "soft" or "gentle," refers not to Confucius but to the tradition Confucius aligned himself with and transmitted. This is the tradition that was first associated with a social class that performed various kinds of ritual ceremonies, and then to those who taught the relevant arts including rites, music, and writing, which naturally extends to those learned scholars familiar with the classics that existed prior to but were later edited by Confucius. If in the study of Greek philosophy people have difficulty separating Socrates' ideas from Plato's because they were presented by Plato, we have a comparable situation here: It is sometimes hard to say whether Confucius' teachings were inherited from the ruist practices and texts or that the ruist practices and texts known to us were recreated by Confucius. Indeed, it is difficult to decide whether we should continue to use the somewhat misleading term "Confucianism" or rather to switch to *rujia*, "Ruism." My choice of staying with the former is simply because it has been the accepted convention for long at a global scale, and using the old term with a warning note about its limitations would probably cause less confusion than switching to a totally new one.

After the death of the Master, his teachings were both carried on and developed by the persistent effort of his followers. During the Warring States 战国 period (403–221 BCE), Confucius was already widely influential. The *Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei* 吕氏春秋, a book composed during the late Warring State period, quoted Confucius over fifty times, more than any other thinker quoted in the book. The book of *Zhuang Zi* 庄子, a Daoist work also composed during the Warring State period, used Confucius' name frequently to convey the author's own Daoist ideas, sometimes with sarcasm against Confucius, and other times simply as a mouthpiece for the author's own ideas. The founder of another contending

Copyrighted material

school of thought, Mo Zi 墨子 (Master Mo, ca. 470–391 BCE) included a whole chapter "Against Confucians" in his major work, the book of *Mo Zi*.

At the same time, his teachings also started to be interpreted in different ways. The *Historical Records* states that the school of *ru* had developed into eight branches. One of them was carried on from Confucius' disciple Zeng Zi 曾子 (Master Zeng), who is said to have taught Confucius' grandson Zisi 子思, and through Zisi, reached its peak with Mencius (Latinized name for Meng Zi 孟子, Master Meng, 372–289 BCE), who was later called "the Second Sage" (second only to Confucius in the Confucian tradition). Under the shadow of the Si-Meng (Zisi and Mencius) influence, other branches gradually faded away and most of them left no trace.

During Mencius' time, the teachings of Mo Zi were well known and influential. His most distinctive view is called "love without discrimination." This view was attractive, but in opposition to the Confucian idea of graded love, which basically claims that love should start with and find its most profound expression in one's immediate family and then expand outward. At the other extreme was, according to the *Mencius*, the egoistic philosophy of Yang Zi 杨子, who allegedly claimed to be unwilling to lose a single hair in order to benefit the whole world.[5] Mencius vehemently defended Confucius against these rivals and, in doing so, contributed significantly to the development of Confucianism. His best-known contribution is his idealistic account of human nature, which holds that humans are all born with incipient good tendencies: the heart of compassion, of shame, of courtesy and modesty, and of right and wrong. These four tendencies are the roots of human-heartedness, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom (*Mencius*, 2A:6). A person full of moral integrity will have a strong *qi* 气 or "vital energy" that can fill the space between the earth and heaven. He also contrasted the sage-king who unifies people by moral influence with the militant lord who reigns through physical force and terror. He argued that the former is not only morally superior but also serves his own best interest. Mencius is the first in the Confucian tradition to state that people are justified to stage a revolution if the ruler is morally corrupt. Killing a bad ruler is not a crime of regicide, because by failing the people, the ruler has disqualified himself and became a "mere fellow." His famous claim that "the people are the most important, the spirits of the land and the grain are secondary, and the sovereign is the least" (*Mencius*, 7B:14) is now often quoted as a source from which Confucianism might develop its account of democracy.

Another influential Confucian during the formative epoch of Confucianism is Xun Zi 荀子 (ca. 312–238 BCE). He emphasized publicly

Copyrighted material

observable rituals in contrast to Mencius' emphasis on the internal moral heart-mind. Contra Mencius, Xun Zi argued that humans are by nature bad, although through learning everyone can become a sage. Because humans are naturally inclined toward being bad, the ancient sage-kings created ritual propriety and offered moral teachings to regulate people's behaviors and let them reform themselves.

Ironically, Xun Zi's two most famous students, HAN Fei 韩非 and LI Si 李斯, turned into Legalists, whose ideas served as the intellectual foundation for the most totalitarian regime in Chinese history: the Qin 秦. The state of Qin was located in the far west of ancient China, where a harsh environment was fertile ground for militarism. Constant wars with neighboring states made the Qin people both more disciplined and submissive to authorities. Xun Zi's theory that humans are by nature evil fitted the need for the justification of using external force. His Legalist disciple HAN Fei argued that only an unchallenged supreme authority could bring the world back into order.

The founder of the Qin dynasty (later known as Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, "the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty") embraced Legalist ideas. He consolidated his power over the people by setting up strict laws, breaking up unities of powerful clans, offering rewards to informers, and recruiting talent everywhere. The state of Qin quickly became a military giant and conquered all the other states through bloody wars. By 221 BCE, the Qin succeeded in bringing all seven rival states under its control and "unified China." The Qin emperor applied Legalist ideas to everything: laws and regulations were made uniform, and measures of weights, sizes, written characters, and even the space between cartwheels were all standardized. Following the advice of his Legalist minister, LI Si, he also tried to unify his people's minds by force so that no one would threaten his claim to power. He ordered Confucian scholars to be buried alive and all books in the hands of the people burned, except those on medicine, divination, and agriculture.

Largely due to the overuse of force, the Qin lasted for only fourteen years and was brought down quickly by uprisings. Rulers of the subsequent Han dynasty learned many lessons from the short-lived Qin. During the reign of Han emperor Wu 汉武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), the imperial court established *boshi* 博士 (Scholar of Broad Learning) positions for each of the Five Confucian Classics[6] and provided funding for fifty disciples to study with each of the scholars. Later, the court established an Imperial Academy, *Taixue* 太学, from which government officials would be selected.

Copyrighted material

One of the *boshi*, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), played a key role in turning Confucianism into China's official state ideology. He advised Emperor Wu to "Denounce all other schools and uphold Confucianism only." Through combining Confucianism with the "*yin-yang* and five-agents theory," he created a cosmology in which individual human beings and the cosmos are seen as similar in structure and capable of mutually affecting each other. Natural forces such as *yin* and *yang* were attributed moral significance, on the basis of which norms of human relationships were justified, and natural calamities would be interpreted as warnings sent by heaven to show its displeasure with the ruler.

The early Han was both a great triumph and the beginning of a series of misfortunes for Confucianism. Along with the official endorsement of Confucianism, being a Confucian became a way to gain position and wealth. Differing views were denounced as heresies, and Confucius was deified, though not to the degree of making him literally a god. His teachings increasingly became doctrines to be accepted without question and followed rigidly.

Alongside Confucianism, which as we've noted is not a single, unified view, many strands of thought influenced China, and they have encountered and interpenetrated each other so much that sometimes the labels of "-ism" seem somewhat arbitrary. Among them, the two most prevalent strands of thought or religion in traditional China were Daoism and Buddhism. Daoism emerged at roughly the same time as Confucianism. The legendary author of the *Dao De Jing* 道德经 (the *Book of the Way and Its Power*), called Lao Zi, is commonly acknowledged as its founder. Daoists have typically been seen as hermits living invisibly in remote mountains and forests, enjoying a simple, natural, and spontaneous lifestyle, and reluctant to come forward to public service (although in reality not all Daoists were hermits). Daoist-like hermits are found in the *Analects* a number of times (e.g., 14.38–39, 18.5–7). Around the fourth century BCE emerged another great Daoist known as Zhuang Zi, to whom the landmark book, the *Zhuang Zi*, is attributed. Though Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi differed from each other in many subtle ways, they together shaped the philosophical Daoism that paralleled Confucianism in its influence in China.

Buddhism was introduced into China from South Asia during the first century CE, after Confucianism had already become China's state ideology. It offered sophisticated metaphysical theories about the self, the world, and causation, as well as elaborate ideas about reincarnation and afterlife, which the Chinese intellectual tradition fell short of in comparison.[7]

Copyrighted material

The rapid spread of Buddhism and the renewed interest in Daoism during the Wei-Jin period drastically weakened the dominant position of Confucianism. Facing these challenges, the need for reappropriating the spirit of classic Confucianism on a new level of philosophical sophistication began to rise. After centuries of encounters with its rivals, Confucian scholars initiated another upsurge of Confucianism during the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties.

While it is impossible to capture the richness of this "second epoch" of Confucianism in broad strokes, it is fair to say that its most influential figures were the Cheng brothers, CHENG Hao 程颢 (1032–1085) and CHENG Yi 程颐 (1033–1107), and ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). Their creative interpretation of Confucianism is known as *Lixue* 理学, commonly translated as "the School of Principle." Two other well-known figures were LU Xiangshan 陆象山 (1139–1193) and WANG Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1529), whose names are associated with *Xinxue* 心学, "the School of Heart-mind."[8] Both schools left an enormous amount of literature and sophisticated theories.

The Cheng-Zhu School of Principle developed a metaphysical theory according to which *li* 理, the inherent principle, pattern, or as some scholars put it, "coherence," "creativity," is the heavenly endowed nature reflected in everything as the moon is reflected in all the waters.[9] By cultivating and manifesting one's nature, humans can achieve unity with heaven and become co-creators of the universe. It was mainly due to ZHU Xi's effort that the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, *Da Xue* 大学 (the Great learning), and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Hitting the mark constantly) established their authority as the canonical "Four Books" of the Confucian tradition, replacing the supreme position held by "the Five Classics" (the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*)[10] for centuries. Both the *Da Xue* and *Zhongyong* were chapters from the *Book of Rites*, believed to be authored by Confucius' grandson Zisi. The former talks about the connection between personal cultivation and bringing order to the public realm, while the latter considers the metaphysical ground upon which the Confucian project unfolds. Through a careful reinterpretation of these texts around the doctrine of *li*, Zhu completed a philosophical system with enough metaphysical sophistication to rival Buddhism and Daoism.

The Lu-Wang School of Heart-mind significantly differed from the Cheng-Zhu School of Principle. Pointing out the danger of making principle (*li*) an abstract metaphysical entity external to human subjectivity, Lu and Wang emphasized the point that *li* is nothing but the concrete human

Copyrighted material

heart-mind itself. Their emphasis on the primacy of immediate experience was in turn accused of being Buddhism and Daoism in disguise.

The centuries-long dialogue internally between these different interpretations of Confucianism and externally with Buddhism and Daoism brought Confucianism fresh energy. With renewed sociopolitical prominence, Confucian influence during the time stretched over the entire East and Southeast Asia.

When Western missionaries came to China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and introduced the "Eastern wise man" (Confucius) to Europe, Enlightenment thinkers such as G. W. Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and Voltaire were fascinated with the humanitarian ideals of the Master, which they used as weapons in their attack on the European hereditary aristocracy.[11] Ironically, in its homeland, dogmatization of Confucianism developed to its extremity during the late Ming and the Qing, when the emperors adopted the Cheng-Zhu School of Principle as their state ideology. Formalized rituals became not only mere pedantry but also a hindrance to creativity and anything new. The idea that the Middle Kingdom (*Zhongguo* 中国—what the Chinese call China) is the only civilized world made the imperial court unable to realize the revolutionary changes taking place in Europe. Even though "enlightenment-minded" Confucians such as WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) and HUANG Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–1695) tried to break the overly rigid accretions and bring Confucianism back to its human-friendly core, which was a spectacular new climax of thought comparable in many ways to the European Enlightenment movement, their efforts remained largely inconsequential in affecting social reality.[12]

It was not until the continuous military assaults from foreign powers during the nineteenth century that the Chinese began to feel the impact of the West and to consider the West a rival to their Confucian tradition. Seeing the impractical nature of the conservatives' position, a group of Confucian officials launched a "self-strengthening" movement to retain the Chinese tradition as *ti* 体, "substance," with Western culture as *yong* 用, "function or utility." This slogan was little more than a face-saving self-deception, as the separation of substance and function seemed to be a fallacy to begin with.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals of the "New Culture Movement" launched the largest anti-Confucianism movement since the time of the First Emperor of Qin. Confucianism was criticized as the root of all the problems in China, such as political corruption and repression, the suppression of women, suffocation of new ideas and innovations, and rigid social hierarchy. "Down with the 'Kong family

Copyrighted material

store'!" "Welcome 'Mr. De' (democracy) and 'Mr. Sai' (science)!" were famous slogans of the movement.

Among the new Western ideas and theories introduced into China during the movement, Marxism was the most consequential. In 1949, the Communists took over mainland China and Marxism became the official ideology of the country. During the "Cultural Revolution" (1966–1976), Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976) launched waves of campaigns against Confucianism, which he used to remove many of his rivals, including Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898–1969), the chairman of the People's Republic of China from 1959 to 1968, who authored a small but influential book that portrayed a very Confucian style of being a communist.

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 shortly after Mao's death. Having experienced the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people began to reevaluate Mao's ideas and to modernize the country. Outside of mainland China, a new trend of reappropriating Confucianism developed, called by its leading scholars Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) and others "third epoch Confucianism," and it had gained some momentum long before even the communists took over China. In contrast to the success of the four "small dragons" in Asia where Confucianism retained its stronghold—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—the ever-deepening problems of the modernized Western world triggered critical reflection on Western intellectual traditions.[13] Interest in Confucianism revived, as many contemporary Confucian scholars became increasingly convinced that Confucianism provided valuable philosophical resources for addressing issues in the postmodern world. Fearing a "moral vacuum" after the Mao era and a total acceptance of the "Trojan horse" of Western ideas, the Chinese government also started to reevaluate and appreciate the distinctly Chinese philosophy of Confucianism.[14]

A strong revival of Confucianism is on the rise. How "third epoch" Confucianism is going to unfold, that is, how it can contribute to the dialogues of civilizations and avoid being co-opted by repressive political forces, as happened during the Han and Song-Ming periods, will depend on how people read and reread the Confucian texts, among which the *Analects* is primary.

The Formation of the *Analects*

The book known as the *Analects* is called *Lunyu* 论语 in Chinese. Early in the Han dynasty, however, the book was often referred to as *Kong Zi* 孔

Copyrighted material

子 (Master Kong, or Confucius), like the books of *Zhuang Zi*, *Meng Zi* (the *Mencius*), *Xun Zi*, *Lie Zi*, and so on. It contains Confucius' sayings, short descriptions of his encounters and his personality, conversations between him and his disciples, and the sayings of these disciples.

As John Makeham (1996) and Brooks and Brooks (1998) remind us, the *Analects* is not a unitary book written by a single author. It took shape through the hands of many people, over a long period that may stretch as far as about three hundred years.[15] Among those who have likely contributed to the recording and editing of the *Analects* include Confucius' disciples Zeng Shen,[16] You Ruo, Zhonggong,[17] Ziyou, Zixia, Yuan Xian, Zizhang, Zigong, and the followers of these disciples, such as Chen Kang. Section 15.6 of the *Analects* describes how Zizhang, one of Confucius' major disciples, wrote down the Master's teaching on his sash right after he heard it. There are many unnamed sources that likely wished their views attributed to and attached to the work of the Master.

By the time of Confucius' death, he was already a well-known "Master." It is alleged that the head of the state, Duke Ai of Lu, personally attended the funeral and read his eulogy, saying, "The compassionate heaven grants me no comfort, not willing to leave me the aged man, and leaving the Lonely Me, on my seat, with long-lasting sorrow. Alas! Oh, Ni Fu (Confucius)! No one can be a rule for me now!"[18] It is said that after the Master passed away, many of his disciples mourned him for three years, a ritual that was typically reserved for one's parents. One of them, Zigong 子贡, spent six years of his life mourning the Master by living in a hut next to the Master's grave! It is likely that, with such respect for the death of the Master, the disciples gathered together to share their notes about the Master's teachings, which started the formation of the *Analects*.

During the early Han dynasty, there were two main versions of the book—the "Qi Analects" 齐论 and the "Lu Analects" 鲁论. Around 154 BCE, another version known as the "Old Analects" 古论 was discovered, along with some other texts, in a wall of the home of a descendant of Confucius' family. They were believed to be hidden there by Kong Fu 孔鲋, a ninth-generation descendant of Confucius, to escape the notorious "book burning" of the First Emperor of Qin (213 BCE). These three versions vary in number of chapters (or "books," as they are typically called) and slightly in content. Scholars generally agree that the commonly received version that we have today emerged mainly through the editing hands of Zhang Yu 张禹 (?–5 BCE), and to a lesser degree Zheng Xuan 郑玄 (127–200), and finally synthesized by He Yan 何晏 (190–249). It has since become the

Copyrighted material

authoritative version, so authoritative that even when scholars found errors in it they would point them out in their commentaries but refrained from correcting the text. Indeed, since the received version exercised such great influence over Chinese history, its value is no longer simply a representation of the "original" *Analects*. Without discounting the importance of historical research about the compilation of the *Analects*, this translation treats the received version as a relatively stabilized unity as it has been handed down for the past two millennia.

Despite its subsequent elevation to canonical status, the *Analects* was not initially conceived as the most canonical Confucian text. When Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BCE) promoted Confucian studies, only the "Five Classics" were considered canonical. While Confucius was assumed to have edited or partially written the Five Classics, which lent to them the authority of the Master, his own words were initially treated more as supplementary to the Classics than worthy of being classic in their own right. After Zhang Yu served as the tutor of the Han prince (who later became Emperor Cheng, r. 33–7 BCE) responsible solely for teaching him the *Analects*, the importance of the book began to rise. It became one of the Seven Classics (the Five Classics plus the *Analects* and the *Xiao Jing* 孝经, the *Book of Filial Piety*) during the later Han, but it did not become the most principal text of Confucianism until the Song dynasty, when Zhu Xi placed it as one of the most primary "Four Books" of Confucian thought.

With the rise in status of the *Analects*, interpreting and commenting on the work became a widespread scholarly practice. During the late Han to the subsequent Wei-Jin Period (third to sixth century), there were already more than eighty commentaries of the *Analects*. Among them, He Yan's *Collected Explications of the Analects* (*Lunyu Jijie* 论语集解) and Huang Kan 皇侃 (488–545)'s *Subcommentaries to the Meaning of the Analects* (*Lunyu Yishu* 论语义疏) were the most influential. The ten-volume combination of these two works was treated as the standard text until the Song dynasty, when Zhu Xi's *Collected Commentaries of the Analects* (*Lunyu Jizhu* 论语集注) replaced it as the authoritative interpretation.

Through this commentarial tradition the *Analects* is constantly being reinterpreted. As Cheng Shude 程树德 (1877–1944) says,

> Han Confucian scholars and Song Confucian scholars differ in their ways of studying the *Analects*. Han scholars' focus was on textual examination of names and the things they refer to and the similarities and differences of the words used. Song

Copyrighted material

> scholars are different. They focused on revealing *dayi weiyan* 大意微言—the profound meanings behind the apparently trivial words. (CHENG Shude, 5)

Zhu's influential commentaries, however, sometimes reveal more about his own ideas than what is contained in or entailed by the *Analects*, though his ideas are valuable in their own right. For this reason, his *Jizhu* became an important source for studying Song-Ming Li Xue 理学, the School of Principle, of which Zhu was a major leader.

Up to modern times, thousands of commentaries of the *Analects* have been composed. A rough estimate shows that the total number exceeds three thousand. ZHU Xi alone contributed six. Among the others, LIU Baonan 刘宝楠 (1791–1855) and his son LIU Gongmian 刘恭冕 (1821–1880)'s *Rectification of Meaning of the Analects* (*Lunyu Zhengyi* 论语正义) was a landmark classic. It collected the best interpretations and corrected mistakes found in previous commentaries. A more recent landmark work is CHENG Shude's *Collective Commentaries of the Analects* (*Lunyu Jishi* 论语集释) originally published in 1943. Quoting from 680 commentaries, it offers a handy reference to a rich variety of interpretations of the Confucian classic from the Han dynasty to his time.[19]

The study of the *Analects* has long been of interest to scholars in other East Asian countries such as Korea and Japan as well, and they have contributed many valuable commentaries. In Korea alone, there have been more than 130 commentaries on the *Analects*. Japanese scholar ITO Jinsai 伊藤仁斋 (1627–1705)'s *Ancient Meaning of the "Analects"* (*Lunyu Guyi* 论语古义) and Korean scholar JEONG Yakyong 丁若镛 (1762–1836)'s *Ancient and Modern Commentaries of the "Analects"* (*Lunyu Gujin Zhu* 论语古今注), for instance, are notable ones. They contain many insightful observations, some of which inform the annotations of the current English translation.

Although the *Analects* has long been considered a principal text of the Confucian tradition, controversies regarding the proper order and the authenticity of various passages within the book have never stopped. Alongside the *Analects*, there are sayings and anecdotal records of Confucius' life scattered throughout various other books, such as the *Zuo Zhuan* (the *Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals*), the *Mencius*, the *Xun Zi*, *Shuoyuan*, *Li Ji* (the *Book of Rites*), the *Zhongyong*, and the *Kong Zi Jiayu* (*Confucius' Family Discourse*), among others. They are generally considered less reliable, and indeed, though their reliability is usually judged according to how consistent they are with the sayings in the *Analects*,[20] they

Copyrighted material

nonetheless provide valuable references. The study of the *Analects* often leads to these texts, and in turn, informs the study of them. In addition, important archeological discoveries in the last few decades have shed new light on our understanding of the *Analects*. Among them, the silk script dated around 150 BCE discovered in Mawangdui 马王堆 (in Changsha, Hunan Province, China) in 1972, the bamboo scripts of some Confucian texts dated around the third to fourth centuries BCE found in Guodian 郭店 (in Jingmen, Hubei Province, China) in 1993, and two fragmented versions of the *Analects* written on bamboo strips dated around 50 BCE, known as the Dingzhou 定州 *Analects* (discovered in Dingzhou, Hebei Province, China, in 1973) and Pyongyang *Analects* (discovered near Pyongyang, North Korea, in 1992) have led to new waves of interest in reexamining the formation and interpretation of the *Analects*. All these are but parts of what the study of the *Analects* has to consider. Indeed, the whole study of the *Analects* is broad and complicated enough to warrant the term "Lunyuology," an interdisciplinary academic field of study of *Lunyu* that deals not only with a fixed, received text as its subject but also with a living tradition of interpretation.

English Translations of the *Analects*

Lunyuology today can no longer confine itself to the study of the *Analects* in the Chinese language. While Lunyuologists, Chinese or otherwise, are expected to read the original text, non-Chinese readers, including scholars who are not specialists in this field, depend on translations of the text for understanding Confucius. For them, the reliability of a translation is a basic expectation. Yet translation is by its very nature a double-layered filter—it is interpretation of a text through a culturally specific person who is bound to be affected by his or her background, including education, life experience, religious orientation, and personal taste. Furthermore, one translates into a language that has different vocabularies and syntax; this inevitably brings in different connotations and assumptions. The translator has to struggle with this dilemma: The purpose of a translation is to make the text accessible to the modern, the foreign, the unfamiliar reader, yet at the same time it has to stay as close as possible to the ancient, the native, the strange, and the original text. In addition, there are different groups of readers—specialists in the field, students who are interested in the subject matter, and the general public. The approach a translator takes is often dependent upon which group is targeted. Different ways of dealing with all of these difficulties make each translation a re-creation of the *Analects*.

Copyrighted material

Since the first translation of the *Analects* into Latin by Matteo Ricci appeared in 1594, the book has been translated into many different Indo-European languages, and in the case of English, there have been about forty complete versions; among them about a dozen or so have had significant influence. If we add translations of selected passages of the *Analects*, the total number would be around fifty, and more are emerging as time goes on. Despite the fact that each translation inevitably risked misrepresentation of the text, they all contributed to the dissemination of the book to a worldwide readership.

The earliest translators of the *Analects* were mostly learned missionary scholars from Europe.[21] The missionaries admired Confucius because the Master seemed to approximate Christian saints, and his teachings resembled Christian ethics. Their Eurocentric appropriation did not prevent the translators from treating the Confucian text with due respect. Among them, James Legge's[22] version (1861), as Ames and Rosemont put it, "remains, in many respects, the benchmark for all translation work to this day" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 17). It is philologically rigorous and commendably accurate, although Legge's religious agenda affected his choice of words, such as using "God" for *di* 帝, making his version more Christian than it should be,[23] and his overreliance on Zhu Xi's commentary also limited the scope of his understanding.

From the end of the nineteenth century to the 1970s the dominant view in Chinese studies was that traditional Chinese culture was outdated; hence, scholars were more interested in the connections between China's cultural heritage and its modern reality and less in the content of the culture itself. In the minds of most scholars, as Joseph Levenson puts it, Confucianism belongs to history (Levenson, x). Translations of the *Analects*, however, sought to counter this impression. Chinese scholar Ku Hung-ming 辜鸿铭 (1857–1928)'s translation of the *Analects* (1898), for instance, was part of his effort to help Westerners to appreciate the inherent value and modern relevance of Confucius' teachings. In trying to make the text as readable to Westerners as possible, however, his version was tainted by the framework of Western vocabulary and taste as well as additional wordings that were not in the original, or obstructions of things that he thought to be unimportant for Westerners' appreciation of Confucius' thought.[24]

For decades, Arthur Waley (1889–1966)'s translation, which was first published in 1938, stood next to Legge's as the most popular English version of the *Analects*. Less scholarly but more readable, Waley's had a wider circulation than Legge's. His literary talent presented the content in an elegant style. In trying to make it more readable, however, he was also

Copyrighted material

overly liberal in inserting words into the translation that were not in the original text, which sometimes only made the translation wordier than the original but at other times was misleading.[25]

If Ku's and Waley's occasional insertion of their own ideas into the translation was for increased readability, Ezra Pound's "creative" translation (1951) did this deliberately to forward his own ideas. Faced with the crisis of Western industrialized societies, Pound offered Confucianism as the medicine for the ills of European civilization. For him, translation is not philology, because philology cannot provide the translation with the life that the original text had in its social environment; translation is the creation of "a new poem." For his new poem, he freely "appropriated" the text according to his own preferences.[26]

During the 1960s and 1970s, when events such as the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal triggered critical reflection about Western civilization, scholars in Chinese studies more consciously considered alternative cultural resources for inspiration. Some advocated an "internal approach" and "empathy method" to reveal the content of the subject matter from the inside of the Chinese texts, as opposed to the external approach that retrospectively interpreted the texts according to the social reality of modern China (see Cohen, 22). Upon such a background, we find scholars in Confucian studies such as William Theodore de Bary, Thomas Metzger, Herbert Fingarette, to name just a few, who offered careful readings of Confucian classics for understanding China and "discovering Confucius' teaching by taking him at his word" (Fingarette, x).

From that time to the present day, a significant number of relatively high-quality new English translations of the *Analects* emerged, with diverse ways of handling the basic dilemmas mentioned earlier. Based on solid scholarship, D. C. Lau 刘殿爵's translation of the *Analects* has become a classic since its publication in 1979, replacing the position held by Waley's. Using an Anglo-Saxon-style English, Lau retains the color of antiquity. Though Lau adds explanatory words, which sometimes makes the text look wordy, he stayed amazingly close to the original text. Its 1992 edition included the original Chinese text, which added a corrective influence for scholars.

Lau's version, though, has little annotation, which hinders the reader's ability to see alternative ways of reading the text. In comparison, Raymond Dawson's version (1993) retains the vagueness of the original but is otherwise clear enough for the general public. It leaves room for readers to come up with their own interpretations. However, it would be better to handle the difficulty like Chi-Chung Huang 黄继忠's version (1997), which retains

Copyrighted material

much of the vagueness of the original but aids the readers with alternative readings in brief annotations.

Edward Slingerland's version (2003) is exemplary in this regard. Drawing from the rich resource of the long commentarial tradition of the *Analects* in China collected in CHENG Shude's *Collective Commentaries of the "Analects,"* Slingerland added extensive notes under each passage of the *Analects* to an extent unprecedented in any other English version. For the first time English readers are able to read the *Analects* like every Chinese reader did in the past two millennia, that is, to read it together with a fair amount of traditional commentary, without which even well-educated Chinese literati would find the text hard to comprehend. Although he could be more thoughtful in his translation of some key terms[27] and in balancing traditional commentaries with contemporary scholarship, his version is still a landmark contribution to the English translations of the classic.

While adding notes under each passage, one might just as well, as many traditional commentators of the *Analects* did, go beyond textual explanation and offer one's reflections about the ideas and implications of the text. In this regard, Simon Leys' is distinctive among English translations. Leys was motivated, like Pound, by concerns for alarming problems in contemporary life and society in the West. Unlike Pound, Leys balanced his concern for modern relevance with higher respect for the original text. His translation is clear, elegant, and stylish, with less creative distortion than Pound's and less wordiness than Waley's and Lau's. Meanwhile, in the added notes, he draws parallels between Confucius and Western thinkers, from ancient to modern, and brings obscure passages to life with fresh contemporary comments, putting Confucius to work addressing the problems of our own age. In a most recent new edition (Norton Critical Editions 2014), Michael Nylan added to the translation a series of scholarly essays on Confucius, making it more comprehensive as an introduction to Confucius.

Every reader needs to be aware of the subtle ways that even the best translators impose their Western conceptual framework on Confucianism. For example, Leys' rendering of *yi* 义 as "justice" and *zhì* 志 as "free will" introduces concepts that one simply cannot find in the *Analects*. Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, therefore, argue that in translating a text, one has to look not only at each sentence and every word but also at the entire philosophical underpinning on which the statements are made, that is, the more or less systematic ways the authors use their terms and the overall philosophical orientation displayed through them. A language is not a neutral tool; it is laden with culturally specific nuances that may or may not be shared by a different language or in a different culture. Whether

Copyrighted material

one agrees with Ames and Rosemont's processional (vs. substantialist), relational (vs. essentialist), and pragmatic (vs. truth-seeking) translation of the *Analects* or not, after the publication of their translation, no serious translator (or rather, reader in general) of the *Analects*, or any classical Chinese philosophical work for that matter, can take their caution lightly.

While Ames and Rosemont warned us to be sensitive about importing a philosophical framework from the West, Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks (1998) tried to remove layers of late additions added in the history to reveal "the original *Analects*." With their painstaking attention to subtle differences of language use between different parts of the *Analects*, to the political and cultural history of the Warring States period, and to many other texts of the time, they remind us that the book as a whole is compiled over a significantly long period of time by a host of unknown authors, editors, and compilers. Historically speaking, one should not assume the *Analects* to be a coherent entity with unified ideas. Even though many of Brooks and Brooks' conclusions about what the original *Analects* looked like are circumstantial, the book poses a challenging question about how to retain a historical perspective without totally deconstructing the work.

Of course different English versions also emerge in part as responses to the varying needs of readers. Those who like to explore the historical origin of the book will find Brooks and Brooks' valuable, but those who read the book for philosophical inspirations relevant to contemporary life will find Ku's, Pound's, Leys', and Ames and Rosemont's more rewarding. Readers who are keen on faithful presentation of the original text may prefer Dawson's and Huang's, and those who look for help from historical commentaries and other explanatory materials will find Slingerland's and the more recently published Penguin Classics version by Annping Chin (2014) appealing. For the general public to whom readability is a primary concern, perhaps Waley's, Lau's, David Hinton's (1998), and Burton Watson's will be more attractive. While the version I am providing here tries to strike a balance of the most desirable features, I would still recommend reading it together with some other versions, if possible, so that one can maximally benefit from the work done by different translators.

The *Gongfu* Orientation

The brief survey of the existing English renditions of the *Analects* in the previous section is by no means comprehensive. It is intended to illustrate complexities involved in translation and suggest that, instead of expecting one single, perfect English version of the *Analects*, one might want to take

Copyrighted material

each one as an episode of the unfolding of the text in the contemporary context, a process through which the text manifests its life. It is in the spirit of continuing the living tradition of constant reinterpretation of the *Analects* that the present volume has taken its shape.

One might say that a translator should simply present a text to the reader and let the reader come up with his or her own interpretation. Unfortunately, such an idea is too simplistic and idealistic. The brief review of previous English translations of the *Analects* shows that translation is itself a very complicated process of interpretation, not to mention that the original text taken out of its context is like a screenshot taken out of a movie, which would inevitably leave much of the story untold. For this reason, I have presented the reader with introductory information, which I hope will have at least provided a broad background for understanding the *Analects*.

One factor that is often neglected but plays a crucial role in our reading of the *Analects* is the readers ourselves. For those who have a reasonable concern that, when facing a foreign text, readers' own intellectual framework (cultural values and linguistic scheme) may do them a disservice—a concern that, because of this framework, they may inadvertently impose their views onto the text or miss something important in the text—some words of caution and a "finger" that points to "the moon" may prove useful. Let us consider some examples.

Sometimes passages in the *Analects* seem to contradict one another. For example, we find Confucius praising his favorite disciple YAN Hui, saying that he only saw him advance and never saw him stop (9.21), that YAN Hui never repeated the same mistake (6.3), and that his heart-mind (*xin* 心) didn't deviate from human-heartedness (*ren* 仁) for as long as three months (6.7). Yet we also find the Master saying, "I have never seen a person who loved human-heartedness, or one who loathes the contrary to it. . . . Is anyone able, for a single day, to make efforts at human-heartedness? I have never seen a person whose strength would be insufficient. There might be such people; only I have yet to see any" (4.6). The Master also lamented, "Is it all over?! I have never seen anyone who, on seeing his faults, is ready to accuse himself inwardly" (5.27).

Before attributing a facile contradiction to the text, ask yourself: "Am I reading the text without presupposition?" You may be treating 4.6 and 5.27 as descriptions, while in all likelihood the Master was using deliberate exaggerations, like Chinese parents would typically do to their children, to *challenge* his students to prove him wrong by living a life of human-heartedness.

Copyrighted material

Similarly, when we read 7.23 where the Master said, "Heaven has embedded virtue (*de* 德) in me. What can Huantui do to me?" and 9.5, where the Master said, "With King Wen being gone, is civilization not lodged here? If heaven were to let the civilization perish, we latecomers would not have gotten such a relation to that civilization. If heaven does not let the civilization perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" we get an impression that the Master believes that, because he embodies the mandate of heaven (*tianming* 天命), no one can do any harm to him. But then we read in the *Mencius* that he traveled in disguise on his way to escaping the state of Song (see *Mencius*, 5A:8), where the man named Huantui attempted to kill him! If he truly believed that no one could harm him, why would he bother to escape Song in disguise? Why would he escape at all?

Again, if you think the Master is self-contradictory, you are reading his statements descriptively. But notice that the Master never presumed himself as the "chosen one" in normal situations. When Confucius made these remarks, he and his disciples were in life-threatening danger. Given the context, his statements were more likely what British philosopher J. L. Austin calls "speech acts," intended to *declare* his willingness and determination to be the carrier of the mandate of heaven, and to *encourage* his disciples not to be afraid. In other words, the Master was using his words to *do* things such as to *affect* his disciples or *mobilize* their energies. Such a reading would not only resolve the apparent contradiction between his words and action, demystifying the Master's bragging about being the chosen one that is so uncharacteristic of him, but also make these passages more consistent with his partially skeptical and partially pragmatic attitude toward anything transcendental. It shows that the religiosity of Confucius is more a spirituality derived from within the human heart-mind than a system of faith that can be reduced to a set of beliefs about any mystical reality.

We need to be cautious about our tendencies to read the text in one way or another *prior to* our reading. This is where our own philosophical underpinning needs to be brought to light for scrutiny. Too often we assume that we are "transparent" and can see things objectively with our own eyes, whereas in fact our eyes are tinted, and unless we are vigilant, everything we see will automatically be tinged without our realizing it. Virtually all scholars of the *Analects* acknowledge that, unlike his Western counterparts who are strongly preoccupied with the search for objective knowledge,[28] Confucius' primary concern is always how to live a better life and how to become a better person. Reading the *Analects*, it is hard to miss the point that Confucius' teachings are mostly instructions about *how* rather than

Copyrighted material

descriptions about *what* (although this does not mean Confucius would deny the need to have objective knowledge, for this would be contrary to his practical orientation also).

Borrowing a term that has become quite popular through action movies, this orientation aims at achieving *gongfu* (kung fu): the embodiment and manifestation of excellent abilities. In fact, *gongfu* is a term often applied broadly to mean the art of doing everything, and it was frequently used by Song-Ming neo-Confucians in their articulation of Confucianism. Yet even with this general realization, the habit of treating every text descriptively may still be hard to resist, just as a smoker who realizes that smoking is harmful may still have trouble resisting the temptation.

A few more examples are in order. Philosophers have argued about whether human beings are ultimately autonomous choice-makers or relational beings inseparable from their roles within particular communities. As many scholars have pointed out, Confucians characteristically emphasize the importance of relations and roles. However, one can also find acknowledgments of individual subjectivity in Confucian classics (e.g., 9.26 and 15.36 of the *Analects*). From the intellectualistic way of thinking, we tend to presuppose the dichotomy of *either/or* and will feel it somewhat difficult to reconcile these two dimensions of Confucius' thinking. Given Confucius' overall *gongfu* orientation, however, the key issue is not whether Confucius truly believed that we *are* relational or autonomous; it is rather what practical results each of these views will *lead* to. Henry Rosemont is one of the most outspoken advocates of the view that Confucius holds a relational concept of human being and that his ethics should be characterized as role ethics, but he also acknowledges,

> Whether we are ultimately autonomous individuals or co-members of the human community is of course not an empirical question, and I know of no conclusive rational argument for one or the other, a priori or otherwise. Worse, these differing views are in many ways self-prophetic; the more we believe ourselves to be essentially autonomous individuals, the more easily we become such. (Rosemont 2001, 91)

The insistence on getting a conclusive, rational argument for a metaphysical view is itself a philosophical orientation foreign to the Confucius of the *Analects*.

This does not mean that Confucius holds no position about which metaphysical view is better in any given circumstance or that metaphys-

Copyrighted material

ics is useless to our practical life. Confucius seems reluctant to discuss metaphysical views in any detail (or at all, in most cases) or to advocate one over the other; when he does, he may well be simply making a recommendation, or giving instructions about how to live. Our metaphysical outlooks about the world play important roles in shaping our modes of behavior and are hence of fundamental importance to our practical life. But careful evaluation of the practical implications of metaphysical views is an important area that has yet to be adequately treated in Western philosophy. While descriptions and discourses of propositional knowledge should be evaluated as convincing or unconvincing, or true or false, instructions are evaluated as good or bad, effective or ineffective. Propositional views about reality are typically presented with recourse to reasoning; instructional statements, on the other hand, are typically presented authoritatively, as their convincing power ultimately lies not in persuading people to accept conclusions with reason but in the practical experience and efficacious results they generate.

Take still another example, the example of Confucius' statements of the "Golden Rule"—that one should "not impose on others what you would not wish for yourself" (12.2), and "establish others if you want to establish yourself, and unblock others if you want to unblock yourself" (6.30). We notice that while asserting these, Confucius also says, "Exemplary persons . . . are not for or against anything invariably" (4.10) and that one should ultimately aim at mastering the art of using *quan* 权, discretion (see 9.30).

If again you find an inconsistency here, it seems that, whether you are aware or not, you have a presupposition. This time you are presupposing that the Confucian statement of "the Golden Rule" is a moral principle. Taken as a universal and inviolable moral principle, the Golden Rule would lead to difficulties—for instance, for a person who likes to be bribed, the Golden Rule would not only permit him to bribe others, but it would obligate him to do so; for a judge who does not like to be put in jail, the Golden Rule would allow the criminal to dispute the punishment. Confucius never indicated that his statements in 12.2 and 15.24 are "rules," much less "golden." Given his statements about flexibility and his overall orientation, these statements should more plausibly be read as *gongfu* instructions than as inviolable moral principles. As instructions about a concrete method of cultivation, they help people become sensitive to the interests of others but provide no guarantee that following them mechanically would lead a person to the appropriate action every single time. Confucius' "Golden Rule" is more like driving instructions. It is meant to help

Copyrighted material

people to obtain embodied skills rather than to be a restriction one has to obey in all circumstances. Once a driver embodies the skills, she will know when *not* to follow them!

The *gongfu* orientation suggests that a common conception of Confucianism as a system of morality might be misleading. People have obligations to follow moral norms, but not *gongfu* instructions. Moral norms are *imposed* (whether by an external authority or, as in the case of Kantian ethics, by the self) to constrain a person, but *gongfu* instructions are *recommended* for enabling a person to live better. Moral norms allow no exception, but *gongfu* instructions are more like protocols, which can allow flexibility. No doubt Confucius is concerned about morality, but our common conception of morality today is too narrow to capture the Master's aim, which obviously goes far beyond obligations into the realm of mastering the art of living. It does not take much reflection for a philosopher today to realize that this perspective forces us to rethink many fundamental issues in ethics, including the grounding of morality, the relationship between ethics of conduct and virtue ethics, and the line between what is moral and what is amoral.

Finally, if you find some passages in the *Analects* somewhat irrelevant, enigmatic, and unsystematic, ask yourself whether you have presupposed a framework of "relevance," "intelligible," and "systematic" that would exclude things meaningful and significant otherwise. A common assumption today is that everything there is to understand is understandable through the use of reason alone. Much of the book 10 of the *Analects*, for example, is a very detailed record about Confucius' daily conduct—the way he eats, sits, stands, walks, and so forth. The relevance of these to ethics is now easier to appreciate due to the revived interest in virtue ethics, according to which ethics is not merely a matter of using the intellect to decide what is right, but more primarily a matter of cultivating embodied character traits, for which modeling after an exemplar would be the primary method of learning. This not only resembles the process of learning an art, it *is* a process of learning an art (the art of living). Reading the *Analects* this way would enable us to see a lot of significant details that would be eclipsed by an intellectualist framework.[29]

Once we include the practical dimension[30] into our consideration, we realize, as Henry Rosemont succinctly points out in his *A Reader's Companion to the Confucian Analects* (2013), that the aim of Confucius is not to provide an "ism" or a set of doctrines but rather to teach his students to become masters of their own lives. Because his students were not alike and the specific situations in which he gave instructions vary, his instruction

Copyrighted material

could not be uniform and "systematic" in the way that a theory is. But this does not mean that his teaching has no "system" or "logic" of its own. While a theory starts typically from laying out premises and, through reasoning, gradually reaches the conclusion, a *gongfu* system starts from the existing condition of the practitioner and, through step-by-step guidance and practice, gradually reaches higher levels of artistic abilities. Different constituents within a theoretical discourse are linked together through their logical connections, and hence their connection could only be linear, but different constituents of a *gongfu* system are linked together through their practical implications, which is much more dynamic.

We also come to the realization of how often people ignore the fact that there are things that can only be understood through practice. Perhaps what you find enigmatic would be different if you enter into the existential condition of a practitioner. For example, those who have never pursued learning will have trouble understanding what makes Confucius and his disciple YAN Hui happy in their fiscally impoverished life (6.11, 7.16). Those who have pursued learning but have done it only intellectually as theoretical discourse will have trouble understanding what makes YAN Hui so fascinated that he was unable to stop his pursuit even if he wanted to (9.11). This explains why traditionally the *Analects* used to be memorized and followed first before people tried to apprehend it. It takes practical experience and repeated rehearsal to develop the virtuosity required for deeper understanding and appreciation. As Song dynasty Confucian CHENG Yi says: "Nowadays people no longer know how to read. When they read the *Analects*, for instance, they are the same kind of people before they read the book and after they read the book. This is no different from not having read the book" (ZHU Xi 1992, 4). In a short article about how to read the *Analects* and *Mencius*, ZHU Xi says:

> In reading the *Analects* and the *Mencius* one should not merely aim at understanding the theory and the meanings of the texts. One should make careful reflection and put the teachings into practice. . . . If a reader can relate the sages' sayings to his own person and examine them through his own embodied practice, his effort will surely not be spent in vain. Every day will bring him the result (*gong* 功) of the day. If one only takes the books as collections of sayings, it would be merely the learning of the mouth and the ears. (ZHU Xi, "On Methods of Reading the *Analects* and *Mencius*," 3)

Copyrighted material

Cheng and Zhu have both pointed out the difference between two approaches to reading—one is intellectual and the other the *gongfu* approach. The former only requires intellectual understanding while the latter requires self-reflection of what is learned and application of it into practice. The former leads only to bookish knowledge and the latter to embodied understanding and moral growth. Given the difference in orientation between the propositional and the instructional, it might not be too farfetched to say that using the intellectualist approach to read Confucius is like eating the menu instead of the food.

So this is the caution and the "finger" I am offering—a caution not to impose our own familiar frameworks on the text too quickly, and a "finger" that points to the *gongfu* orientation of the Master's teachings. The caution is intended to avoid making Confucius who he is not, and the "finger" is meant to call people's attention so that they do not miss something valuable and characteristic of him because of our bias. About two hundred years ago, Hegel made a famous sarcastic remark after reading the *Analects*. He said that for the sake of protecting Confucius' reputation, "it would have been better if Confucius were not translated" (Hegel, 216). Today, I suppose, no one would be so arrogant, at least not openly. A revealing fact is that most prestigious universities in the West still place the study of Confucianism only in Asian studies or religious studies departments and not in philosophy departments. On the other hand, unfortunate misreadings of the *Analects* have not only been reflected in failures of appreciating its philosophical values but also in the immediate delights that, upon a quick browsing through one's tinted glass, one finds colors familiar to oneself, which could be no less distorted than a picture with unfamiliar colors sympathetically ignored.

Both the cautions and the "finger" I provide here are meant to be suggestions. They are neither all-inclusive nor conclusive. There are implausible readings of the *Analects*, such as the ones I mentioned, but I do not suppose, as I have already noted, that there is one single right way. After all, no one can look at the "moon" from nowhere, nor can one say that my way of looking at the moon is the only way.[31]

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

Key Terms

When a monk came to the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism Hui-neng 惠能 (638–713), asking him why, after reciting the Lotus Sutra continuously for seven years, his mind was still deluded and he did not know where the true Dharma lay, Hui-neng made a thought-provoking contrast between "turning the Lotus" and "being turned by the Lotus" (Yampolsky, 167–168). "Turning the Lotus" means being able to grasp it, make use of it, and respond to it. "Being turned by the Lotus" means being lost in it, having no idea of how to make use of it or how to respond to it. In order to "turn the *Analects*" and not be "turned by the *Analects*," we have to pay special attention to its key terms. Like the leading cords of a net, or guiding posts of a maze, grasping them is crucial for understanding the *Analects*.

The key terms in the *Analects* are, however, not so easy to grasp. In a review of recent translations of the *Analects*, Alice Cheang says, "Examining another culture from the vantage point of one's own worldview is likened to looking through a window; sometimes our vision is so obfuscated by our conditioned perceptions that the window turns into a mirror, reflecting back only what is already familiar to us" (Cheang, 569). To avoid Westernizing Confucius, many scholars have taken caution in translating key Confucian terms. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. went so far even to suggest that we leave some terms untranslated. But obviously, for people who need a translation to read the *Analects*, leaving numerous key terms untranslated has a deterring effect. Perhaps for this reason, they rarely used this strategy in their own translation. What they did in most cases was adding Chinese

Copyrighted material

words in parenthesis next to their English translation and, in addition, providing a glossary.

Following this practice, this glossary tries to piece together important ways in which some key terms are used in the *Analects* and other Confucian classics. Readers will notice that when asked about these key terms, such as *ren*, *xiao*, and *li*, Confucius never offered precise definitions; instead, he always responded by describing how they manifest in a person or in his or her conduct. This fact itself is informative—it would be considered a weakness if Confucianism were primarily a theory aimed at intellectual understanding. Given Confucius' practical *gongfu* orientation, however, it indicates that the terms have to be understood in their contexts and with the way they function in human life. Like guide posts, their significance is in their practical use and not in the essences that definitions are meant to capture. This means that, although this glossary lists the terms separately under their respective headings, they are not meant to be read like dictionary entries. The meaning of each and every post has to be understood in relation to the other posts so much so that, in isolation, none of them can be considered even minimally adequate. It also means that, just like the menu is not the food, reading the glossary will not be the same as reading the text itself. There is so much in the text that cannot be captured by mere explanation of terms. As Amy Olberding points out, "the *Analects* is also a biography of sorts. It is not merely about what Confucius claimed, but also what he did and who he was" (Olberding 2012, 19).

Ren 仁—Human-heartedness

The term *ren* is central to Confucius' philosophy. It appears 109 times in the *Analects*, and, of the 499 sections in the book, 58 are devoted to the subject. Ironically, it is also the most controversial term with regard to how to translate it. Translators have variously rendered it as "nobility" (Graham), "benevolence" (Lau and Legge), "virtue" (Legge), "goodness" (Waley and Slingerland), "humanity" (Chan and Huang), "humaneness" (Dawson), "co-humanity" (Peter A. Boodberg), "authoritative person/conduct" (Ames and Rosemont, in their translation of the *Analects*), "consummatory conduct" (Ames and Rosemont, in their more recent translation of the *Xiao Jing*, the *Book of Filial Piety*, or as they put it, the *Classic of Family Reverence*), and so on. Although the diversity looks formidable to most

Copyrighted material

readers, it has generated stimulating discussions on which my choice of translation is based.

We can start our examination of the term from looking at a peculiar way in which the term is used. In Confucian texts, *ren* is sometimes used interchangeably with its homophone, *ren* 人, which means "human" or "person" (see, e.g., *Mencius*, 1B:15, *Zhongyong*, 20, and, according to one plausible reading, 4.7 and 6.26 of the *Analects*). An obvious explanation for this is that the term signifies some qualities that make a person more fully human. Originally, *ren* (whether written as 人 or 仁) was used by aristocrats to differentiate themselves from the common people (the term for common people in classic Chinese is *min* 民), and that differentiating quality is their being civilized and kind.[1] Confucius inherited the word and transformed it into a quality applicable to all human beings, regardless of their social status.

From this it seems reasonable to translate the term as "humanity" or "humaneness." However, as many scholars (such as Fung Yu-lan 冯友兰, 1895–1990) have noted, the word *ren* has been used in Confucian texts in two senses, one general and the other particular. In the general sense, it stands for all human virtues, including courage, wisdom, filial piety, wholehearted devotion, trustworthiness, and uprightness (e.g., 17.6). In the particular sense, it stands for a caring and loving disposition, or compassionate sensitivity distinct from the other virtues (e.g., 14.28, 17.8). Indeed, it is in the narrow sense that the classic lexicon *Shuowen* defines *ren*: "Ren means affections." Chen Hao also alluded to an ancient Chinese medical text that described the paralysis of limbs as *buren*, literally, "not *ren*."[2] If "humanity" or "humaneness" is an appropriate translation for the general sense of the term, "benevolence" certainly looks closer to the particular sense.[3] If the translator's job is to convey meaning rather than interpreting for the reader, the ideal translation of the term should preserve the ambiguity of the original term and let the reader decide the sense in which it is used in each specific context. For the lack of a better alternative, "human-heartedness" seems close enough for the role, because it captures the root connection with being human (thus differentiates *ren* from *shan* 善, a word that is more suitably translated as "good" or "goodness"), and meanwhile, with an indication of the heart, it is able to better preserve its connection with the particular senses of *ren* than words like "humanity" or "humaneness."

In addition to how the term is used by the *Analects* and other early Confucian texts, the composition of the characters for *ren* also contain valuable clues. The most common character for *ren* consists of two parts:

Copyrighted material

"human 人" and the number "two 二," suggesting that being a human is inseparable from being in relation with others (see Tu 1985, 84). Indeed, many descriptions of *ren* in the *Analects* are about interpersonal relations. *Ren* is to "love people" (12.22), says the Master, and the method to be *ren* is *shu* 恕—reciprocity, or comparing one's own heart with other hearts with compassion (6.30).

Recently discovered bamboo scripts from the early Han reveal that *ren* was also written in a different way. This less commonly known character for *ren* 忎 consists of two parts, a cursive way of writing body (*shen* 身) on the top and the heart-mind (*xin* 心) below. In classic Chinese, the word for body also serves the function of indicating "self." The combination of body and heart-mind suggests that *ren* is not just a subjective feeling; it has to be saturated in the body to become a bodily disposition, which allows the compassionate self to manifest through loving and caring human conduct in the external world and, at the same time, make the external world part of the self.

This is an implicit yet important metaphysical basis from which later Confucians such as Zhang Zai 张载 (1020–1077), Cheng Yi, and Wang Yangming developed the thesis about *ren* that can make the million things one and the same body (*wanwu yiti* 万物一体).[4] The subjectivity, self, and psychological tendency entailed by *ren* or human-heartedness is therefore not dualistically in opposition to objectivity, otherness, and human conduct. To use contemporary European philosopher Jacques Derrida's term *différance*, a word that plays on the fact that the French word *différer* means both "to defer" and "to differ," the Confucian understanding of a person is that one is different from others, and yet one's own well-being is dependent on and defers to one's way of relating to others. In manifesting the subjective psychological self through the conduct of the corporeal body in the objective world, one is also unifying the two sides, or, as later Confucians would like to put it, unifying the human with heaven.

Such a metaphysical outlook underlies concrete instructional teachings in the *Analects*. Extending beyond personal interest and into interpersonal caring, love is a characteristic of *ren*, or the function of *ren*. This is why one of the four things that the Master abstains from is self-absorption (9.4). Whether in daily life or in official business, a *ren* person is always considerate and has others' interests in mind. In running a government, the *ren* ruler "is frugal in expenditure, loves the people, and puts the populace to work at the proper seasons" (1.5). In daily life, exemplary persons "love the multitude broadly" (1.6). They "do not exploit others' fondness of them, nor do they exhaust others' devotion to them" (*Li Ji*, chap. 1). They "do

Copyrighted material

not intimidate others by showing off their own talents, nor belittle others by revealing their shortcomings" (*Li Ji*, chap. 32). Yet this Confucian love should not be equated with altruism, because this love is exactly the Confucian way of caring for and consummating oneself (cf. 14.24). Ultimately there is no separation between self-interest and the interest of others.[5]

Xiao 孝—Filial piety

Being *xiao* or filial means basically to love and respect one's parents. It is described as the root from which human-heartedness (*ren*) can grow (1.2)—the starting point of becoming *ren* and of social harmony.

Even though *ren* is explained as "to love people" (12.22), it is characteristic to the Confucian view of love to nurture it in gradation according to one's relationships and circumstances, beginning with the immediate family and the neediest, and then extending outwardly to the broader community, eventually to be all inclusive, embracing the entire cosmos. For Confucius it is insinuating to put forth one's love without distinction (2.24). Because we owe our parents for life and for their loving care when we were young, we should be grateful to them and pay them with due respect and care prior to loving and caring for others. This point is brought forth most clearly in the debate between Mencius and the Moists who advocated the principle of universal and undifferentiated love (see *Mencius*, 3B:9).

But the Confucian filial piety is not merely about honoring a moral principle for its own sake; it is also about practical implications of the practice: When parents are loved no more than any stranger, the very basis of family relationship collapses. Consequently, the order that is vital to social harmony will cease to exist. Compared to other human relationships, the family relationship has a deep-rooted primacy, and there is arguably no better soil for developing moral compassion and spiritual meaning for life than starting from familial love. It is a common human experience that children at a very early period would have already developed their sense of identity in part through their relationship with their parents, and the mere fact of having children will make parents find meaning for their lives. Through this bond, both parents and children will find their existence extended into the lives of others. This is the basis from which the Confucian relational and this-worldly ideas of identity, immortality, and meaning of life developed. It not only gave birth to the Chinese tradition of ancestor veneration and

Copyrighted material

the tradition of expecting children to bring honor to the family, but it also found expression in more advanced forms known as *san buxiu* 三不朽, the "three immortalities"—by establishing virtue for other people to emulate, achievements for other people to benefit from, and words for other people to follow, one can continue to "exist" infinitely without limit (see *Zuo Zhuan*, "Duke Xiang, Year 24;" Chan 1963, 13). Although Confucius did not explicitly make these points, this is the background against which sayings in the *Analects* such as "exemplary persons dislike not having their names established properly at the end of their lives" (15.20, cf. 16.12) should be read.

There is, however, an asymmetry between parents' love toward their children (*ci* 慈) and children's love toward their parents (*xiao*). Usually there is no need to preach parental love toward their children, but the seed of filial piety exhibited in little children's affection toward their parents can wither away if it is not encouraged and nurtured through education. To counterbalance this, Confucius' emphasis is always on the importance of *xiao*, and seldom does he mention *ci*.

Sometimes Confucius gives the impression that for him, to be filial to the parents is to obey them, and that one should stick to whatever the late father did (1.11, 2.5). This view contributed significantly to the conservative tendency of traditional Chinese culture. When a controversy arises within the Confucian tradition, each side of the debate typically refers to the past and accuses their opponents of deviating from it. The mere fact that "it has been the way of our forefathers" was often taken as an adequate justification for its continuation. However, to have a more complete understanding of Confucius' position, one needs to take account of the points in 4.18, 11.4, 13.15, 13.23, and 14.22, where he either stated explicitly or hinted that being truly filial, a son or daughter has the responsibility to remonstrate, just as a good subject will feel the responsibility to correct the ruler or a good student will help a teacher. Failing to do so is no other than letting the parents err. Meanwhile, he reminds people that there should be a proper way of expressing such disagreements.[6]

De 德—Virtuosity, virtue, kindness

In early times *de* was used to denote a kind of charismatic power or virtuosity bestowed on a person by heaven or spirits, but for Confucians as

Copyrighted material