

# Making a Text One's Own: Reflections on Reading Chinese Philosophy Properly

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## Abstract

If we are going to allow the Chinese texts to speak on their own terms, we have to begin by establishing the interpretive context for reading them—the process cosmology that is made explicit in the *Dazhuan* 大傳 (Great Tradition) commentary of the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes). The argument is that, true to the premises of the text itself, the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects of Confucius) is not only continually reconstructed and made corporate in successive readings, but is in fact reauthored and reauthorized by each reader in every generation and cultural site, including our own. I will argue that this processual understanding of the *Lunyu* highlights the centrality of situated particularity, collateral relationality, temporality, and productive indeterminacy as persistent defining features of a grounding Confucian cosmology, precisely those cultural assets that process philosophers A. N. Whitehead and John Dewey deem threatened in the commitment of the fallacies they have called “misplaced concreteness” and “*the philosophical fallacy*” respectively. I want to use the concrete and continuing “process” of reading the *Lunyu* as a heuristic to support my claim that Confucius is indeed a process philosopher.

**Keywords:** interpretive context, process philosophy, authorship, *Lunyu*

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## 1. An Interpretive Context for Reading the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects of Confucius): Chinese Process Cosmology

The word “proper” is derived from L. *proprius*—to make something one’s own. Hence, “proper” is cognate with words such as “appropriate” and “property.” In this essay I will explore what Mencius (c. 372-289 BCE) might mean in describing the books that we read properly as our “friends in history.” I begin from the claim that the classical philosophical canons in the Chinese tradition need to be located within the process cosmology outlined in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes), and to be read as reflecting these process assumptions. Along the way, I introduce process philosophers familiar in the Western philosophical narrative who provide us with additional points of reference for reading philosophical texts in an open-ended, provisional, and emergent way.

In classical China, with the *Yijing* being the first among the classics, the presumption has long been that knowledge is to be found in what John Dewey has described as “the mutual interactions of changing things”—the omnipresent processes of “generation and transformation.” Chinese cosmology subscribes to an assumption that Alfred North Whitehead has come to call “the ontological principle”—the notion of an ontological parity of finitude that gives all such things an equal claim to being real—what we might alternatively term “a realistic pluralism.”<sup>1</sup> This ontological principle is an affirmation of the reality of any thing as it is constituted by the harmony of its constitutive relations, whether it be each and every thing, each and every kind of thing, or the unsummed totality of things, as experience itself. In the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Focusing the Familiar) we read:

The way of the world can be captured in one phrase: since events are never duplicated, their proliferation is unfathomable.<sup>2</sup>

Such a world of unique particulars is a *kosmoi* rather than a *kosmos* in the sense that construals of order are many, and the totality is not dominated

<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 356. This assumption is addressed explicitly in the “Qiwulun” 齊物論 (Parity Among Things) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.

<sup>2</sup> All translations of Chinese texts are my own. *Zhongyong* 26: “天地之道，可壹言而盡也。其為物不貳，則其生物不測。”

by any one thing. There is no “God” in this pluriverse. Rather, order is the emergent harmony achieved in the contingent relationships among “the myriad things and events” (*wanwu* 萬物 or *wanyou* 萬有), with the closest analogue to God being the spirituality attained by a thriving community living inspired lives. With no assumed “One-behind-the-many” as the ultimate source of meaning, there is no single-ordered world, no “uni-verse,” only an ongoing evolving harmony expressed as the quality of life achieved by the insistent, co-creating particulars.

This radically situated co-creative process is described unambiguously in the *Zhongyong* 25 proposition:

Resolve (*cheng* 誠) is self-consummating (*zicheng* 自成), and its way (*dao* 道) is self-advancing (*zidao* 自道). Resolve references a process (*wu* 物) taken from its beginning to its end, and without this resolution, there would be no things or events. It is thus that, for exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子), it is resolve that is prized. But resolve is not simply the self-consummating of one's own person; it is also what consummates other things and events. Consummating oneself is becoming consummate in one's conduct (*ren* 仁), while consummating other things and events is living wisely in the world (*zhi* 知). It is achieved virtuosity (*de* 德) in one's natural propensities (*xing* 性) and is the way of integrating what is more internal with what is more external. Thus, when and wherever one applies such excellence, it is fitting.<sup>3</sup>

In this world in which things are constituted by their conditioning relations, meaning, instead of arising *ex nihilo* from a single external source—some conception of God or Natural Law or the Platonic Realm of Ideas—is always situational. Meaning arises *in situ* through the cultivation of deepening relations that we have elsewhere called “the art of contextualization (*ars contextualis*).”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, classical Chinese cosmology, like that of A. N. Whitehead and John Dewey, also subscribes to the mantra, “the only kind of creativity is situated co-creativity.” And, in the wake of Whitehead and Dewey, a sustained reflection on the fact that there is no transcendentalism in the classical Chinese assumptions about cosmic order may pay us an important philosophical dividend. This pervasive Chinese assumption about the always emergent nature of order speaks to the more basic question of why Chinese

<sup>3</sup> *Zhongyong* 25: “誠者自成也，而道自道也。誠者物之終始，不誠無物。是故君子誠之為貴。誠者非自成己而已也，所以成物也。成己，仁也；成物，知也。性之德也，合外內之道也，故時措之宜也。”

<sup>4</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 246-249 and *Thinking from the Han*, 39-43.

philosophy might at this particular historical moment provide us with a salutary intervention in the Western philosophical narrative. That is, in this classical Chinese worldview, there is an alternative nuanced and sophisticated processual way of thinking about cosmology that can join the ongoing internal critique of transcendentalism that is taking place within the still Eurocentric discipline of philosophy itself. Simply put, with the present surge of interest in Whitehead and particularly the American pragmatists, this newly emerging Western version of process philosophy, as it matures within our own philosophical culture can, with profit, draw both substance and critique from a Chinese tradition that has been committed to various forms of process philosophy since the beginning of its recorded history.

## **2. A Process Reading of the *Lunyu***

In this essay, I want to use the concrete and continuing “process” of reading the *Lunyu* as a heuristic to support my claim that Confucius is indeed a process philosopher. The argument is that, true to the premises of the text itself, the *Lunyu* is not only continually reconstructed and made corporate in successive readings, but is in fact reauthored and reauthorized by each reader in every generation and cultural site, including our own. I will argue that this processual understanding of the *Lunyu* highlights the centrality of situated particularity, collateral relationality, temporality, and productive indeterminacy as persistent defining features of a grounding Confucian cosmology: precisely those cultural assets that Whitehead and Dewey deem threatened in the commitment of the fallacies they have called “misplaced concreteness” and “*the philosophical fallacy*” respectively.

Situated particularity, collateral relationality, temporality, and productive indeterminacy are evidenced in the reading of the *Lunyu* in many different ways. Let us consider how the “logic” or “coherence” of the text is recovered and indeed extended as it continues to be read. If we look at the history of the translation of the *Lunyu* into the English language, Arthur Waley early on allows that “it is clear . . . that the different Books are of very different date, and proceed from very different sources.”<sup>5</sup> In the most recent translation, Ted Slingerland observes that “there is no doubt among contemporary scholars that it is a somewhat heterogeneous collection of

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<sup>5</sup> Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*, 21.

material from different time periods.”<sup>6</sup> Waley and Slingerland then go on to cite available historical scholarship and commentary that provide the context necessary to produce what they take to be a coherent, focused, and responsible reading of the text that best recovers the vision of the Master. For Waley,

Thought grows out of an environment. Ideally speaking the translator of such a book as the *Analects* ought to furnish a complete analysis of early Chinese society, of the processes which were at work within it and of the outside forces to which it reacted.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly for Slingerland, “our knowledge of the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States language usage, society, history, and thought should delimit the parameters of possible interpretations of the text.”<sup>8</sup>

Waley and Slingerland are fine scholars providing necessary historical scholarship that enables a particular English-speaking readership to engage the *Lunyu* as a reasonably determinate artifact. There are other translators who have more confidence than I do that deliberate historical research can provide us with the resources to take this always provisional and incomplete task of situating the text to a level of transparency that goes far beyond the claims that either Waley or Slingerland would be willing to make. If scholars such as Waley and Slingerland continue to do historical spadework on the *Lunyu* in an effort to bring it into clearer sight, Bruce and Taeko Brooks bring heavy equipment to the archaeology of recovering what they claim to be *The Original Analects*. In a contemporary reenactment of the episode of the well-intentioned attempt by the Lords of the North and South Seas to bring proper order out of Lord Hundun 渾沌 recounted in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the Brooks’s in their translation work have sought to overcome what they take to be the veritable chaos of the received *Lunyu*—heterogeneity, pervasive interpolation, divided and conflicted viewpoints, the later insinuation of veiled attacks on the Master, hopelessly corrupt passages, and so on—by aggressively dismantling and reorganizing the entire structure of the text.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Slingerland, *Analects*, xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Slingerland, *Analects*, xvi. Slingerland does allow that “this set of assumptions is by no means the only angle from which one might approach the text.”

<sup>9</sup> To rehearse the *Zhuangzi* “Ying di wang” 應帝王 anecdote: “南海之帝爲儵，北海之帝爲忽，中央之帝爲渾沌。儵與忽時相與遇於渾沌之地，渾沌待之甚善。儵與忽謀報渾沌之德，曰：‘人皆有

By conjuring up *Zhuangzi*'s well-known account of the death of Lord Hundun, the Brooks's remind us of why *hundun* in the context of classical Chinese cosmology is better rendered positively and productively as "Lord Spontaneity" rather than as the familiar "Lord Chaos." In the cosmology assumed by the *Lunyu*, *hundun* is the integral indeterminacy that allows for unique particularity and the possibility of the spontaneous emergence of novelty that honeycombs all construals of order. The imposition of an overly determinant order upon *hundun* might well threaten the progress of ongoing self-reconstruction and the novel meaning that emerges from it. After all, it is the collaboration of Lord Spontaneity with the received order of Lords Swift and Sudden that has made the world hospitable, and it is their attempt to impose their own order on Lord Spontaneity that not only snuffs out his life, but is certain suicide for themselves. Applied to the *Lunyu*, it is the interface between a somewhat determinate "text" and the indeterminacy of one's own experience that is the source of life itself, making our lives deliciously uncertain and in degree, unpredictable.

To go too far in enforcing any given design—any single interpretation of the text—is simply selecting one out of myriad candidates for order and privileging that one possible understanding over other possibilities. To the extent that Swift and Sudden would transform the unsummed and interpretively open *Lunyu* into a single-ordered world, they do so to the detriment of both text and reader. We must, after all, follow Whitehead in worrying that an over-determination of the *Lunyu* might come at a cost, where the "sense of penetration"—the stuff of life itself—might be threatened if not even lost "in the certainty of completed knowledge."

Without a doubt one necessary element in recovering the logic and coherence of the *Lunyu* is providing as much historical context as we can. In our own recent translation of the *Lunyu*, Henry Rosemont and I have focused on certain philosophical dimensions of the interpretive context—primarily the cosmology and the language—to attempt to join other scholars in setting what we also take to be appropriate constraints on possible textual

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七竅，以視聽食息，此獨無有，嘗試鑿之。’日鑿一竅，七日而渾沌死。” The ruler of the North Sea was “Swift,” the ruler of the South Sea was “Sudden,” and the ruler of the Center was “Hundun,” or “Spontaneity.” Lords Swift and Sudden had on several occasions encountered each other in the territory of Lord Spontaneity, and Spontaneity had treated them with great hospitality. Swift and Sudden, devising a way to repay Spontaneity’s generosity, remarked that: “Everyone has seven orifices through which they can see, hear, eat, and breathe. Spontaneity alone is without them.” They then attempted to bore holes in Spontaneity, each day boring one hole. On the seventh day, Spontaneity died.

interpretation. But in clarifying the process nature of the cosmology and the paronomastic openness of the language of the *Lunyu*, we also argue that this text taken on its own terms must also be treated as aporetic, a work in progress, a never-ending-story.<sup>10</sup> That is, the interpretation must do better than the classical Greek aesthetic sensibility harshly criticized by Whitehead for losing sight of the balance needed between the particular details and some abstracted and “objective” sense of coherence. There must be room for what different readers bring to the emerging logic of the text. The determinacy achieved by historical scholarship must be balanced by the creative indeterminacy of particular interpretation. Indeed, in Francois Jullien’s book, *In Praise of Blandness*, he is attempting to overcome the negative associations of indeterminacy and to reinstate the value of pregnant vagueness as the gateway through which novelty and creative advance emerges, and as the source of endless metamorphoses. For Jullien, then, another name for borderless and uncontained blandness (*dan* 淡)—in this case, the as yet undetermined and always novel reading of the text—is “plenitude,” the repleteness of inexhaustible possibilities.

Dewey too exhorts us to use the historical artifact—here it would be the *Lunyu*—as an instrument to live forward:

Imaginative recovery of the bygone is indispensable to successful invasion of the future, but its status is that of an instrument. To ignore its import is the sign of an undisciplined agent; but to isolate the past, dwelling upon it for its own sake and giving it the eulogistic name of knowledge, is to substitute the reminiscence of old-age for effective intelligence.<sup>11</sup>

As Dewey insists, the contextualism of process philosophy—and our argument is that the *Lunyu* is process philosophy—requires “fat” rather than “thin” contexts. If we are going to understand Confucianism as something other than a scholasticism or an antiquarianism, there is a second perhaps even more vital dimension of historical and philosophical context that must be considered. We must concern ourselves with the life and times of its readers as a continuing source of additional meaning. The *Lunyu* is a didactic, living text as well as an historical artifact, and readers are co-respondents in their growing relation to this text. A serious and responsible reading of the *Lunyu* is a collaboration, requiring from the reader

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<sup>10</sup> Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*.

<sup>11</sup> Dewey, *The Essential Dewey*, 50.

a kind of co-creative responsiveness. Readers grow their own interpretations by aggregating organic associations among passages and ideas, and those who know the text best change their lives dramatically on account of it. Peimin Ni has quite appropriately made much of what he terms the “*gongfu*” (功夫 or 工夫) dimension in his work on Confucianism, characterizing the *Zhongyong* in the following terms:

It remains, however, characteristically Confucian in the sense that its fundamental aim is not to *describe* what or how the world is; it is rather to *instruct* people *how* to live their lives. . . . It is therefore entirely proper to talk about Confucian cultivation as the Confucian *gongfu*—what kind of efforts should be made and how to make them, what abilities one will be able to achieve through the efforts, and what the functions of the abilities are.<sup>12</sup>

Ni is certainly correct in saying that the *Lunyu* is devoted to instructing the reader in the project of *how* to become most fully human (*ren*). It takes the cultivation of familial reverence (*xiao*) as the grounding value and as the very source out of which emerges the flourishing human community:

Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the proper way will grow therefrom. As for family and fraternal reverence, it is, I suspect, the root of consummate conduct.<sup>13</sup>

The *Lunyu* provides an unambiguous description of the vital Confucian project: one’s energies or *gongfu* are to be directed primarily at cultivating oneself to become an effective member of the family, and to extend those familial feelings to the community at large:

The Master said: “As a younger brother and son, be filial at home and deferential in the community; be cautious in what you say and then make good on your word; love the multitude broadly and be intimate with those who are authoritative in their conduct. If in so behaving you still have energy left, use it to improve yourself through study.”<sup>14</sup>

But familial deference does not entail self-abnegation. On the contrary, it requires that each person realize themselves uniquely. Six times Confucius

<sup>12</sup> Ni, “Reading *Zhongyong* as a *Gongfu* Instruction,” 190.

<sup>13</sup> *Lunyu* 1.2: “君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其為仁之本與。”

<sup>14</sup> *Lunyu* 1.6: “子曰：‘弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛衆，而親仁。行有餘力，則以學文。’”

is called upon to clarify what he means by the obscure term *ren*, and six times he gives profoundly different answers, with each answer dependent on the nature and character of his interlocutor. There can be no replication in the project of becoming uniquely human:

The Master said, "In striving to be consummate in your conduct, do not yield even to your teacher."<sup>15</sup>

Above, Waley and Slingerland have suggested that the very nature of the *Lunyu* itself is a combination of Confucius speaking for himself—but only as remembered and interpreted by others—and of disparate hands over generations reflecting on what Confucius might have meant in their own reconstructions of his teachings. From the very beginning, Confucius and his Confucianism have been under construction. Across the ensuing centuries, the aggregating interlinear commentary that has attached itself to each passage of the *Lunyu* is the remnant history of an interpretive appropriation that occurs with every reading. The text of the *Lunyu* is porous and protean, and is being reconstructed *pari pasu* in a constantly changing context as readers and commentators engage each other critically across the centuries.

### 3. A Process Reading of the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius)

The Cambridge rhetorician, I. A. Richards, in reflecting on a responsible reading of the companion Confucian classic—the *Mengzi*—at once clarifies and further complicates our problem. He expresses serious misgivings about the idea that analysis of the historical, theoretical, and conceptual aspects of the work can be relied upon to produce the full meaning of the text and thereby solve what he takes to be the problem of translation. He reinstates the affectivity of the text, and in doing so, seeks to balance the harmony of the whole with the feelings of the particular reader:

The problem seems to grow still more formidable as we realize that it concerns not only incommensurable concepts but also comparisons between concepts and items which may not be concepts at all. If we agree that most literary meanings are likely to combine at least four components ((1) Intention or purpose; (2) Feeling, or attitude to what is being spoken about;

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<sup>15</sup> *Lunyu* 15.36: “子曰：‘當仁不讓於師。’”

(3) Tone, or attitude to those spoken to; and (4) Sense, or reference to what is being spoken about), and if we confine the term ‘concept’ to the fourth of these component functions, we shall frequently suspect that our business with a passage concerns the first three functions much more than the fourth. . . . In place of a baffling and obscure concept, translation has in such extreme cases to deal with a relatively describable blend of intention, feeling, and tone. . . . [M]ovements of thought involving vague concepts can have a power and coherence which analysis would destroy.<sup>16</sup>

Richards wants to include in comparative studies generally, and in a reading of these Confucian canons specifically, the purposive and affective force of the text that invariably colors its more cognitive conceptual and theoretical aspects. Indeed, it is perhaps this subjective affectivity more than any cognitive dimension of the text that allows it to function as a heuristic for the self-cultivation of the individual reader. While Richards is keenly aware of the danger of overwriting the text with our own prejudices and forcing a structure upon it that has little or no relevance to its own content, what requires further reflection here, I think, is not only the inescapability of reinterpretation, but indeed, the desirability of it. Certainly what we might call the “perlocutionary” force of the text is integral to its coherence—its power to cause effects, to change the feelings of its readers, to create a mood that moves and even inspires them. The self-professed purpose of the text, after all, is not only to teach its readers, but to transform them (*jiaohua* 教化)—to grow them from small people (*xiaoren* 小人) into significant people (*junzi* 君子). The point, however, is that in this transformative project, the readers must not only be willing, but must be complicit—we are not merely passive readers, but instead have an authorial role as well. Thinking our way through the *Lunyu* is inseparable from feeling it concretely, where affect is an always particular, subjective form of feeling.

#### 4. Zhu Xi 朱熹 and His “Proper Way of Reading a Text” (*dushufa* 讀書法)

Does my essay do any more than proclaim the obvious? Are not our best interpreters of the Confucian tradition well aware of the ongoing personalization and reconstruction of the Confucian canons? I think not. Indeed, I want to take

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<sup>16</sup> Richards, *Mencius on the Mind*, 87-88.

Daniel Gardner's celebrated work, *Chu Hsi [Zhu Xi]: Learning to be a Sage*, as a representative case in point. It is widely acknowledged that the enormous virtue of this study is to reinstate the centrality of self-cultivation as the prime directive in Zhu Xi's philosophical project. The question, however, is what does Gardner take to be the ultimate function of "self" in self-cultivation? To what extent is self-cultivation a creative undertaking that adds meaning to a living tradition?

In outlining Zhu Xi's exhortation on the "proper way of reading a text" (*dushufa* 讀書法), Gardner cites Zhu Xi as insisting that the reader come to the text with an "open mind" (*xuxin* 虛心). He warns against bringing unchecked emotions and desires to the text, and against importing preconceived ideas into the meaning of the text. In Zhu Xi's own words,

There is a proper way of reading a text. Before reading it you must scour and scrape the heart-and-mind until it is spotless. . . . In reading a text, you cannot overwrite it with your own ideas. You must get rid of your own thoughts, and read the text to discover what the ancients meant by it.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time that Zhu Xi seems to discourage a free reading of the text, he also insists that readers must strive to make the text their own:

Basically in reading a book one must first become thoroughly conversant with the text, and will only get what it means when the very words seem to come from one's own mouth, and having continued with real concentration, when the very ideas seem to come from one's own heart-and-mind.<sup>18</sup>

While Zhu Xi is adamant that we cannot force meaning on the text and "yank it to make it grow," still the understanding of the work must be a sustained collaboration between the text and the particular reader, where the uniqueness of the coherence of each particular is a factor in the meaning of the text:

In reading, one must appropriate the text intimately for oneself. One cannot simply look at the words, nor can one force its growth. . . . In reading,

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<sup>17</sup> Zhu, *Zhuzi yulei*, 11:177, 185: "讀書有簡法, 只是刷刮淨了那心後去看. . . . 看書, 不可將自己見硬參入去. 須是除了自己所見, 看他冊子上古人意思如何."

<sup>18</sup> Zhu, *Zhuzi yulei*, 10:168: "大抵觀書先須熟讀, 使其言皆若出於吾之口, 繼以精思, 使其意皆若出於吾之心, 然後可以有得爾."

one cannot simply seek the coherence of the text from the paper on which it is written, but must look into one's own self and seek it there.<sup>19</sup>

While Zhu Xi states repeatedly that coherence (*li* 理) is importantly individual and particular as well as general, Gardner takes the neo-Confucian project as a familiar kind of objective idealism in which we are all striving to discover the same transcendental truth irrespective of our status as unique individuals, where our "relation" to the meaning of the text is wholly passive:

Chu's [Zhu's] *tu-shu-fa* [*dushufa*] thus placed a great deal of value on the autonomy of the individual in the reading process. But we must recognize that autonomy in the process did not by any means translate into subjectivity in the final understanding. For according to Chu, the truth in the text was the same for every reader. It was an objective truth, first expressed long ago by the revered sages.<sup>20</sup>

## 5. Whitehead and Friendship

Whitehead uses friendship as his example of how relationality is intrinsic, constitutive, and productive—the characters of the friends are invested and grow in the connectivity we call friendship—and the only creativity is a situated co-creativity. The *Mengzi*, in describing a scholar's search for worthy friends, has a memorable reflection on how books such as the *Lunyu* become our "friends in history":

Finding that making friends with the best scholars in the world is still not enough, these exemplary local scholars go back to talk with the ancients. In reciting their poetry and reading their writings, how could these scholars not come to know the ancients as real people? Thus in discussing the world in which they lived their lives, the ancients become their "friends in history."<sup>21</sup>

The point here is that the character of *both* friends—the exemplary local scholars and equally, the books that provide them with "friends in history"—grow in the connectivity that is their friendship.

<sup>19</sup> Zhu, *Zhuzi yulei*, 11:181: "讀書，須要切己體驗。不可只作文字看，又不可助長。．．．讀書，不可只專就紙上求理義，須反來就自家身上推究。"

<sup>20</sup> Gardner, *Chu Hsi: Learning to Be a Sage*, 55-56.

<sup>21</sup> *Mengzi* 5B.8: "以友天下之善士爲未足，又尚論古之人。頌其詩，讀其書，不知其人，可乎？是以論其世也。是尚友也。"

The received *Lunyu* begins with a passage that has been cited endlessly at occasions in which Confucian culture has come into contact with the indeterminacy of foreign appropriation:

To have friends coming from distant quarters—is this not a source of enjoyment?<sup>22</sup>

“Friends” (*peng* 朋) here means *menxia* 門下: students of the same master, and probably originally refers to the many followers of Confucius who came from places beyond the boundaries of his home state of Lu. Whitehead’s reflection on how the greatest art arises from the miraculous balance that is achieved when the component details disclose themselves most fully in the totality of the achieved effect allows us to invest a different value in what has become a worn cliché. From the perspective of the *Lunyu* itself, “friends coming from distant quarters” might well be construed as a euphemism for the indeterminacy needed to challenge and reform what Whitehead describes as “an oppressive harmony” that can threaten the very survival of a living text—that is, any conservative orthodoxy that smothers novelty by perpetuating a single, ossified reading of the *Lunyu*.

While we might not want to claim that Toegye and Dasan and Sorai and the Boston Confucians are established Confucian orthodoxy, we can appreciate the degree of transformation and the exciting life they bring to the *Lunyu* and other Confucian texts by seeking to reconstruct them within the context of other distinct cultures and philosophical epochs.

## 6. A Self-Consciously Conservative Interpretation of the *Lunyu*

There is a final issue that needs to be addressed in these pages. A rather natural question to be asked is: In our attempt to get past earlier culturally reductive readings of the Chinese corpus, are we not in fact just substituting one Western philosophical reading of these texts with another? Are we not rescuing the Chinese tradition from an uncritical Cartesian and a calculated Christian reading only to overwrite it with our own pragmatic, process assumptions?

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<sup>22</sup> *Lunyu* 1.1: “有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎?”

Encountering the unsummed richness of the original texts themselves, we as interpreters are always people of a specific place and time. Such an interface in itself is a formula for inescapable cultural reductionism. Certainly, our too hastily constructed interpretive strategies and overarching theories—“philosophical” or otherwise—when applied in the practice of cultural and textual translation, cannot help but put concrete detail at some considerable risk. When Robert Frost remarks that “what is lost in translation is the poetry,” I think that as an artist he is quite properly concerned that translation is a literary transaction that at best makes different, and that most often, makes less.

Indeed, in order to maximize our efforts in translation, we first and foremost need a commitment to a Heideggerian *Destruction* in which we struggle to recover the situated, primordial meanings by “polishing” the key terminology. This process is “conservative” in the archaeological sense of recovering as much contextualizing detail as possible, and is “radical” as we pursue the root meanings within the soil of Chinese culture. In spite of our real interpretive limitations, to the extent that we can, we must struggle with imagination to allow a text that belongs to another cultural narrative to reveal its poetry—the unmediated, non-referential bottomlessness of its own detail and particularity. This being said, is such a resolute commitment to recovering the objective specificity of the text enough? Is it possible, or even desirable, to leave off our efforts with grasping as much of the original meaning as we can?

And can there ever be such a thing as purity in translation and cultural interpretation anyway? First, the image of Jorge Luis Borges’s “Funes the Memorious” leaps to mind, raising the question of whether can we actually “think” particularity.<sup>23</sup> Again, to what extent and in what degree is it ever possible to escape our own facticity to read these texts with naïveté and innocence, free from our own cultural assumptions? Perhaps, instead of pretending to an impossible objectivity, we need a hermeneutical openness in the project of cultural interpretation. Surely the savvy interpreter is Bacon’s bee who must mediate between the textual specificity of Bacon’s ant, hopelessly lost in the inexhaustible details of phrase and meaning, and the always tenuous web of contextualizing generalizations woven by Bacon’s

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<sup>23</sup> In this story, Borges introduces a character who, with perfect memory of every detail of his day, requires fully 24 hours to remember 24 hours. Such completeness turns Greek abstraction on its head, precluding the possibility of rising above the detail to reflect and deliberate on one’s experience.

spider. That is, beyond the necessary commitment to respecting the particularity of the text, we are in need of Gadamer's hermeneutical sensibilities that begin from an awareness of our own prejudgments, and that allows for both textual detail and interpretive generalizations in the ongoing and inevitable fusion of horizons.

First, we must allow that our own interests and values guide our choices in a palpable way, and enable us to see only what we would see. Henry Thoreau reflects on the collaborative nature of acquiring new knowledge in the human experience:

A man receives only what he is ready to receive, whether physically or intellectually or morally. . . We hear and apprehend only what we already half know. . . . Every man thus *tracks himself* through life, in all his hearing and reading and observation and traveling. His observations make a chain. The phenomenon or fact that cannot in any wise be linked with the rest which he has observed, he does not observe.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, it can be argued that "wisdom" emerges analogically through establishing and aggregating a pattern of truly productive correlations between what we know and what we would know. Such correlations are "productive" in that they increase meaning, and we actually achieve wisdom itself when we are able to optimize these meaningful correlations effectively in our life situations.

Saying the same thing in a different way, Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Man* asks: "What can we reason, but from what we know?" Adapting this question with license to our present task, we might allow that we can only know what we do not know by invoking what we do know. This means that cross-cultural understanding must proceed analogically with each tradition having to find within its own resources a vocabulary that enables it to restate in some always imperfect way the philosophical and cultural assets of the tradition that it would understand better.

Of course not all analogies are equally apposite, and as we know from our experience with Chinese philosophy, poorly chosen comparisons can be a persisting source of distortion and of cultural condescension. A heavy-handed and impositional "Christian," "Heideggerian," and yes, even "Pragmatic" or "Whiteheadian" reading of Chinese philosophy betrays the reader not once but twice by distorting both the Chinese tradition and the Western analogue in the

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<sup>24</sup> Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, vol. 13, 77.

comparison. Even so, we have no choice but to identify productive analogies that, with effort and imagination, can in the fullness of time be qualified and refined in such a way as to introduce culturally novel ideas into our own world to enrich our own ways of thinking and living.

And we need to be analogically retail and piece-meal rather than working in whole cloth. That is, when turning to the *Zhongyong* in which the human being is celebrated as co-creator with the heavens and the earth, we might find analogy with Whitehead in his concern to reinstate “creativity” as an important human value. At the same time, we might be keenly aware that when the same Whitehead invokes the primordial nature of God and the Eternal Objects that primordial nature of God sustains, this long shadow of Aristotelian metaphysics sets a real limit on the relevance of this dimension of Whitehead’s thought for classical Chinese process cosmology.

Further, analogies can be productive of both associations and contrasts, and we can learn much from both. Indeed, while Aristotelian teleology and his reliance upon logic as method might serve as a point of contrast with Chinese philosophy, his resistance to Platonic abstraction in promoting an aggregating practical wisdom does resonate productively with one of the central issues in classical Confucian moral philosophy: a commitment to the cultivation of excellent habits of the heart-and-mind. In this project of cultural translation, we must pick and choose our analogies carefully—but pick and choose we must.

And taking one further turn in the hermeneutical circle, such analogical explorations and appropriations are by no means passive. Going back to Frost, surely what is “*found* in translation” is also poetry. Try as we might, we cannot avoid in degree “making up” our interpretation and “making over” the text with it. But at the same time, one way or another, we are likely also making the text bigger in making it our own. To “appreciate” the text means not only to recognize its magnitude and complexity, but also to become creatively responsive to it, and in the process of doing so, to add our own value that “appreciates” the text further. Arthur Waley for example, as a translator of Tang poetry and Noh plays, became a prominent literary personality among the Bloomsbury group with such notables as T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, and Bertrand Russell, because of his capacity to interpret premodern Asian culture for a world audience and elevate this new art to global status.

Indeed, the *Zhongyong* is made more meaningful because it is read and “translated” by Ezra Pound and by us too; reinforcing the premise that

creativity is always collateral, the process is itself recursive. Ezra Pound's idiosyncratic engagement with Chinese poetry presaged the novel form of free verse that marks our own contemporary Western poetic sensibility, and yes, it is this Western free verse that has more recently inspired a new generation of Chinese poets. Just as Chinese poets are inspired by a Western appropriation of their poetry, so we can also come to see our Whitehead and our Aristotle in a different and brighter light by coming to know the *Zhongyong* better. And so the circle turns.

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## 把文本變成自己的 ——恰當閱讀中國哲學之反思

安樂哲

### 中文摘要

如果要讀出中國文獻文本自己本身述說的意義，它是有個自己的語義闡釋環境的。這個語義闡釋環境，這就是《易經大傳》已鮮明清晰闡述的“過程宇宙論”。這樣存在的一個語義闡釋環境，也恰如《論語》總在繼續重建一樣，經歷日日新地解讀，始終一以貫之。它是這樣傳承，被不同時代文化環境的儒者（我們自己今天也在其中）持續保持其一慣性、權威性。

筆者指出，本文也對《論語》採取“過程哲學”解讀的立場，這樣可使其域境性特點、互系性、時宜性以及動態特點，作為奠定儒家宇宙觀的一以貫之諸特徵，得以突顯，占據中心位置。懷德海與杜威的“過程哲學”，在他們各自稱為的“錯置具體性謬誤”和“頂級哲學謬誤”文化遺產中，是受到威脅的。筆者所做的，正是圍繞不同時代對《論語》日日新具體性、一貫性的解讀過程，嘗試性地闡釋和提出孔子是一位過程哲學家這一觀點。

**關鍵詞：**闡釋域境，過程哲學，創作，論語