The Analects of Confucius:
A Philosophical Translation

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Master Kong 孔子 (Confucius)

Confucius (551–479 BCE) is probably the most influential thinker in human history, if influence is determined by the sheer number of people who have lived their lives, and died, in accordance with the thinker’s vision of how people ought to live, and die. Like many other epochal figures of the ancient world—Socrates, Buddha, Jesus—Confucius does not seem to have written anything that is clearly attributable to him; all that we know of his vision directly must be pieced together from the several accounts of his teachings, and his life, found in the present text, the Analects, and other collateral but perhaps less reliable sources such as the Mencius and the Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals.¹

Recognized as China’s first great teacher both chronologically and in importance, Confucius’ ideas have been the fertile soil in which the Chinese cultural tradition has been cultivated and has flourished. In fact, whatever we might mean by “Chineseness” today, some two and a half millennia after his death, is inseparable from the example of personal character that Confucius provided for posterity. And his influence did not end with China. All of the sinitic cultures—especially Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—have evolved around ways of living and thinking derived in significant measure from his ideas as set down by his
disciples and others after his death—ideas that are by no means irrelevant to contemporary social, political, moral, and religious concerns.

Confucius was born in the ancient state of Lu (in modern Shandong province) during one of the most formative periods of Chinese culture. Two centuries before his birth, scores of small city-states owing their allegiance to the imperial House of Zhou filled the Yellow River basin. This was the Zhou dynasty (traditionally, 1122–256 BCE) out of which the empire of China was later to emerge. By the time of Confucius’ birth only fourteen independent states remained, with seven of the strongest contending with each other militarily for hegemony over the central plains. It was a period of escalating internecine violence, driven by the knowledge that no state was exempt, and that all corners were competing in a zero-sum game—to fail to win was to perish. The accelerating ferocity of battle was like the increasing frequency and severity of labor pains, anticipating the eventual birth of the imperial Chinese state.²

The landscape was diverse not only politically. Intellectually, Confucius set a pattern for the “Hundred Schools” that emerged during these centuries in their competition for doctrinal supremacy. He founded an academy in his own state of Lu and, later in his career, he began the practice of independent philosophers traveling from state to state to persuade political leaders that the particular teachings developed in their academies were a practicable formula for social and political success. In the decades that followed his death, intellectuals of every stripe—Confucians, Legalists, Mohists, Yinyang Theorists, Militarists—would take to the road, often attracted by court-sponsored academies which sprang up to host them. Within these seats of learning and at the courts themselves, the viability of their various strategies for political and social unity would be hotly debated.³

Confucius said of himself that “Following the proper way, I do not forge new paths” (7.1),⁴ allowing that he was a transmitter rather than an innovator, a classicist rather than a philosopher. This autobiographical statement is not altogether accurate—Confucius was an
original thinker by any standard—but the statement captures a basic characteristic of what came to be called Confucianism: a deep respect and affection for the rich cultural Chinese past, what in the Analects is called “the love of learning (haoxue 好學).” Confucius saw human flourishing as definitive of the reigns of the ancient sage kings, and he advocated a reauthorization of their ways of governing that had been passed on. According to Confucius—and the other two ancient texts he cites, the Book of Documents and the Book of Songs—the ancient sage kings who governed by observing ritual propriety and custom (the li 禮) rather than by law and force, were themselves reverent toward their past, were more concerned to insure the material and the spiritual well-being of the people than to accumulate personal wealth, and saw as their main task the maintenance of harmony between their community and the rest of the natural order. Confucius wished to reanimate this tradition, and pass it on to succeeding generations.

As a teacher, Confucius expected a high degree of commitment to learning from his students. On the one hand, he was tolerant and inclusive. He made no distinction among the economic classes in selecting his students, and would take whatever they could afford in payment for his services (7.7). His favorite student, Yan Hui, was desperately poor, a fact that simply added to Confucius’ admiration for him (6.11, 6.3). On the other hand, Confucius set high standards, and if students did not approach their lessons with seriousness and enthusiasm, Confucius would not suffer them (7.8).

Over his lifetime, Confucius attracted a fairly large group of such serious followers, and provided them not only with book learning, but with a curriculum that encouraged personal articulation and refinement on several fronts. His “six arts” included observing propriety and ceremony (li), performing music, and developing proficiency in archery, charioteering, writing, and calculation, all of which, in sum, were directed more at cultivating the moral character of his charges than at any set of practical skills. In the Chinese tradition broadly,
proficiency in the “arts” has been seen as the medium through which one reveals the quality of one’s personhood.

Although Confucius enjoyed great popularity as a teacher and many of his students found their way into political office, his enduring frustration was that he personally achieved only marginal influence in the practical politics of the day. He was a philosophe rather than a theoretical philosopher; he wanted to be actively involved in intellectual and social trends, and to improve the quality of life that was dependent upon them. Although there were many occasions on which important political figures sought his advice and services during his years in the state of Lu, he held only minor offices at court. When finally Confucius was appointed as police commissioner late in his career, his advice was not heeded, and he was not treated by the Lu court with appropriate courtesy. Earlier, Confucius had made several brief trips to neighboring states, but, after being mistreated in the performance of court sacrifices at home, he determined to take his message on the road again, this time more broadly.

These were troubled times, and there was great adventure and much danger in offering counsel to the competing political centers of his day. In his early fifties, he traveled widely as an itinerant counselor, and several times came under the threat of death (9.5). He was not any more successful in securing preferment abroad than he had been at home, to which he eventually returned and lived out his last few years as a counselor of the lower rank and, according to later accounts, continued his compilation of the classics. He died in 479 BCE, almost surely believing his life had been, on the whole, politically and practically worthless.

The Disciples

Although, like his Western philosophical counterparts, Confucius had a “vision” of the way the world was, he did not, could not, attempt to convey that vision—unlike many of his Western counterparts—solely
in purely descriptive language (about which, more follows). His vision was not simply one to be understood, and then accepted, modified, or rejected on the basis of its congruence with the world "objectively" perceived by his students. On the contrary, his vision was one that had to be felt, experienced, practiced, and lived. He was interested in how to make one's way in life, not in discovering the "truth."  

If this is an accurate account of what Confucius was about as a teacher, and appreciating that his students differed in age, background, education, and temperament, then we can begin to understand why, in the Analects, Confucius occasionally speaks in generalizations, but much more often gives a specific answer to a specific question asked by one of the disciples. At times, the Master gives different answers to the same question, which may all too easily suggest that he was not a particularly consistent thinker. But when we read more closely, and see that it was different disciples who asked the same question, we might reasonably postulate that Confucius based his specific response to the question on the specific perspective—lived, learned, experienced—from which he thought the disciple asked it. (cf. 11.22).

In order, then, to read the Analects and get the most out of it, we must learn something about the questioners of the Master.  

Yan Hui is far and away Confucius' favorite. Living on a daily bowl of rice and a ladle of water (6.11), Yan Hui's eagerness to learn and his sincerity endear him to the Master (6.3). Of a somewhat mystical bent (9.11), Yan Hui is nevertheless seen by Confucius as highly intelligent and exceptional among his students, such that "learning one thing he will know ten" (5.9). Yan Hui is three decades younger than Confucius and heir apparent to his teachings—certainly one reason why the latter was so devastated by his young disciple's untimely death (11.7-11). In fact, as D. C. Lau speculates, classical Confucianism might have had a somewhat different style if it had been Yan Hui rather than the five disciples in the last five books who had been responsible for its earliest transmission.
Zilu is another well-known disciple of the Master, and among his favorites, although not portrayed as uniformly exemplary as Yan Hui. Zilu is a courageous activist who is sometimes upbraided by Confucius for being too bold and impetuous (11.22). When he asks the Master whether courage is indeed the highest human excellence, Confucius replies that a bold person lacking a sense of appropriateness would be unruly, and a lesser person, a thief (17.23). At the same time, it is clear that Confucius respects Zilu’s courage (5.7), and no less clear that Zilu in his own way is attempting to grasp the Confucian vision, especially when Confucius is speaking not only with him, but with Yan Hui as well (5.26).

Zigong excels as a statesman and as a merchant. Although Confucius twits him for being stingy (3.17), he does believe Zigong can be entrusted with an administrative position (6.8). Despite his occasional officiousness, Zigong asks the important questions (7.15, 17.19), and it is clear that Confucius is fond of him (1.15).

Zengzi, or “Master Zeng,” is the foremost exponent of the filial virtues (xiao孝) among the disciples (1.9, 8.3-7), and, as evidenced by the number of times in the Analects he is referred to as “Master Zeng” (8:3-7 19:16-19), he clearly became leader of a Confucian school after the Master’s death. He is not among the sharpest of the disciples (11.18), but can at least occasionally elaborate on an unusual remark by his teacher (14.26).

Zixia is a man of letters, and is remembered by tradition as having had an important role in establishing the early canonical texts. His name appears in the early strata of the Analects (6.13) as one who is capable of treading the way (dao), and Confucius weighs his shortcomings as no worse than another disciple, Zizhang, whom he is willing to instruct at length (2.18). The Master calls attention to Zixia’s timidity (11.16), but also to his apprehending the richness of the cultural tradition (3.8).

Zizhang himself often asks detailed questions about the significance of past historical events (5.19), but clearly wishes to learn the an-
swers to his questions so that he can attempt to realize the Confucian vision in practice (2.18, 2.23).

Ranyou has a rather curious profile in the Analects. On the one hand, he is a mediocre student lacking in initiative (11.22). On the other hand, Confucius has no question concerning his administrative abilities (5.8), nor qualms about recommending him for office (6.8). In many ways, Ranyou’s failures are a fair demonstration of perhaps the main theme of the text: real education is the cultivation of one’s character, not the accumulation of administrative skills. At the end of the day, Ranyou is not able to move the usurping Ji clan, which he serves, in the direction of appropriate conduct because, as a person, he is not worthy of deference (3.6 and 16.1).

Other disciples are either well described in the text and in our notes thereto, or their qualities made known by the kinds of questions they ask, and the answers given. At times Confucius can be seen as a harshly exacting mentor with his students (14.43), but on other occasions, depending on his audience and the circumstances, as a warm, modest, and entirely human partner on a quest. In fact, he evidences a wonderful sense of humor in his interactions with his young followers (for example, 5.7, 5.20, 11.19, 17.1, and 17.4). A generalization about his interaction with his students is found in 7.38: “The Master was always gracious yet serious, commanding yet not severe, deferential yet at ease.”

The Text

Beginning shortly after he died, a few of the disciples of Confucius began setting down briefly what they remembered the Master saying to them. Some disciples of the first generation of his students continued this process, so that, as the story goes, within a century of the founder’s demise there were at least ten such little “books” about his life and teachings. Another dozen or more were compiled by we know-not-whom during the following century, and it was to be yet another hundred years before a number of these “books” were gathered together to
make up the volume we now know as the *Analects*—or “Sayings of Confucius.”

Thus the present work in twenty books was over three centuries in the making, and there were numerous difficulties in editing it into a coherent whole. In the first place, the savage civil wars plaguing China during Confucius’ lifetime greatly intensified after his death: to this day, the Chinese refer to their historical times 403–221 BCE as “The Period of the Warring States.” The disciples—and their disciples in turn—scattered; some were killed, some formed their own schools; undoubtedly much was written, but only a few copies of each text would be circulated, and of course, all were subject to loss or destruction.

Worse, in 213 BCE, less than a decade after the country had been unified by the First August Emperor of the Qin—he of the terra cotta army of tomb soldiers—the then Prime Minister Li Si ordered a general burning of all writings not dealing with the practical arts. Fair copies of each title destroyed were kept in an imperial library, but as the dynasty began to disintegrate after the death of the First Emperor, the imperial library was burned to the ground.

From the ashes of the Qin dynasty the House of Han arose. It was one of China’s longest reigning dynasties (202 BCE–220 CE), and within the first century of its rule, a syncretically fortified version of the philosophical and religious thought of what was then loosely called “Confucianism” came to dominate the intellectual life of the realm, beginning its ascendancy after Emperor Wu (140–87 BCE) took the throne. It was during this early Han period that the reconstitution of all surviving materials attributed to Confucius and his disciples took place, with one result being the text of the *Analects* as we have it today.

There are different stories told on the compilation of the *Analects*. D. C. Lau stands with traditional wisdom: this text was compiled shortly after the death of Confucius. He suggests that the first fifteen books were assembled relatively soon after the death of the Master, and
the last five books came together sometime after the original disciples had attained maturity.

More recently, John Makeham has insisted upon the fluidity of the resources that would ultimately provide the content of our received text, dating its attainment of fixed status at about 150 BCE. Bruce and Taeko Brooks have surmised that the present books 4 through 8 are the oldest strata of the text, all composed by disciples who actually studied with Confucius. Books 9 through 11 may well have been composed by the disciples of the disciples, and the remaining books follow, variously ordered temporally and topically, except that book 20 is surely the most recent, written approximately two and a quarter centuries after Confucius’ death."

The question of “when” will probably be answered in due course by the accelerating number of texts being uncovered in the archaeological finds. At this juncture, two points might be made. First, over the last forty years, the archaeological finds have repeatedly overruled—in favor of traditional dating—many modern scholars and their speculations. And, second, the fragmentary Dingzhou text which informs the present translation was excavated from a 55 BCE Han dynasty tomb yet differs only incidentally from the many, much later texts which have come down to us. It thus provides us with an initial date before which the process of compilation must have been completed. However this mystery plays out, the enormous influence that the received Analects has had on defining “Chineseness” is never in question.

For all these reasons it is not surprising that, especially to the modern Western reader who is used to a linear, sequential text, the present Analects seems to be something less than a coherent whole. A great many hands, spanning some several centuries, have set down, sorted, re-sorted, edited, and collated these “sayings.” Little wonder, then, that they can initially give the appearance of being fragmentary, disconnected, and occasionally, in conflict with each other.

In short, the present Analects is not easy to read through as a philosophical text even when it is appreciated fully that Confucius seldom
speaks ex cathedra, never speaks at all on certain issues (7.21, 9.1, 9.4), and regularly leads his students on the way by giving varied answers to the same question, based upon his perception of the student’s receptiveness to the “answer.” But these difficulties in interpreting the Analects notwithstanding, it must be emphasized again that the text as we now have it was read very closely and carefully, and in fact, usually memorized, along with the names of the dramatis personae mentioned in the text, by virtually every educated Chinese for two millennia. It was quite literally set in stone with the engraving of the Xiping stone classics over the period 175–183 CE, fragments of which have been recovered since the Song dynasty. The last Chinese civil service examination based on the Analects was administered in the twentieth century, in 1905. It thus deserves to be read as carefully and as deliberately as it was read by seventy-odd generations of Chinese, in just the form in which it has been handed down to us. There is a greater degree of coherence to the Analects than a first reading would suggest; many sections cluster around specific themes and subjects, and thus the architecture of the text emerges as readers make it their own.

Several other texts of the Warring States period attribute sayings to Confucius which are not found in the present Analects, including importantly the Mencius 孟子, the Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals (Zuozhuan 左傳), and the Xunzi 荀子. We have used these three texts extensively as sources of early commentary on the Analects, citing them where they are consistent with and shed light upon the always laconic record. There were also a number of other “books” about Confucius in circulation that did not escape destruction during the civil wars.

Other Canonical Texts

In the Analects, Confucius regularly praises a number of the legendary sage kings of antiquity—Yao, Shun, Yu—who were traditionally assigned reigns in the third millennium BCE. Whether these legendary
rulers were historical figures will probably never be known (apart from
the legends, we have little direct evidence for their existence), but
Confucius and the tradition that followed in his footsteps surely be-
lieved that they were. We know that Chinese civilization was already
highly developed by the time Confucius was born, and had been so for
at least a thousand years. And Confucius devoted his life to celebrating,
renewing, and recommending that development. Thus, while it would
not make much sense to speak of a Buddhism before the Buddha, or a
Christianity before Christ, it actually does make good sense to speak of
a “Confucianism” before Confucius: he articulated clearly and cham-
pioned compellingly a great many of the artistic, social, ritual, reli-
gious, and other practices that had already defined the Chinese cultural
tradition for a millennium.

Two of the books descriptive of that tradition predate Confucius,
and are cited by him in the Analects. The first of these is the Shujing 書
經—usually translated as the Book of History or the Book of Docu-
ments. It is thought by some scholars that parts of the Book of Docu-
ments might well be China’s oldest written work, predating even the
oracle bones of the late Shang (traditionally 1766–1122 BCE), while other
scholars would not allow that it is earlier than the Zhou dynasty (tradi-
tionally 1122–256 BCE). It is made up of a series of short essays, memo-
rials, and documents which record parts of the reigns of several of the
sage-kings and rulers of the early three dynasties (see Analects 2.23): the
Xia (traditionally 2205–1766 BCE), the Shang or Yin, and the early
Zhou. The book is by no means a complete account of antiquity, and
even the oldest parts of it are generally thought to have been written
long after the events they describe.

Although parts of the Book of Documents are simply chronicles of
events, other parts of it are the charges of rulers to their successors, and
to their ministers. The themes repeated consistently in these exhorta-
tions had moral, political, and religious qualities that came to be
definitive of the Confucian persuasion (which is probably why many
later commentators believed Confucius edited the text). Many of the practices described in the Book of Documents were surely informed by early beliefs in the supernatural, but these beliefs are not emphasized in the book as much as, for example, the exhortations to govern responsibly, and were largely ignored by the Master and his disciples when discussing the text.

In addition to Yao, Shun, and Yu, many personages are mentioned or quoted in the Book of Documents, and three deserve special mention here because of the esteem in which they were held by Confucius. They were the founders of the Zhou Dynasty: King Wen, his son King Wu, and the latter’s younger brother, the Duke of Zhou. King Wen 文王—whose name means at once “culture,” “refinement,” “embellishment,” and “literature”—is best known as the loyal vassal of the last Shang dynasty ruler, a tyrannical despot who oppressed the people. Wen constantly remonstrated with this ruler, attempting to get him to mend his evil ways, but was unsuccessful in this effort. When Wen died, his son Wu 武—which means “martial”—led a successful rebellion against the Shang, formally establishing the Zhou dynasty. As a filial son, the “Martial King” claimed his father as the posthumous first ruler of the House of Zhou.

By championing both of these early kings, Confucius bequeathed to two thousand years of Chinese officialdom a way of coming to terms with a great tension many of them had to confront directly: what is a moral minister to do in the service of an immoral ruler? Those who believed their ruler was reformable through remonstrance and example, could claim King Wen as their exemplar; those who believed otherwise could at least retire, or, more strongly, raise the flag of rebellion in the name of good King Wu.

It was toward the third member of this royal trio, however, that Confucius appears to have felt the closest personal bond (see especially 7.5). The Duke of Zhou was exemplary in at least two respects. First, in a very moving passage, the Book of Documents records the duke’s offer-
ing sacrifice and prayers to the ancestors on behalf of his seriously ill elder brother, King Wu, in which he implores the ancestors to heal his brother, and take him (the duke) instead, if a royal death be necessary. These entreaties eventually proved fruitless; the king succumbed, leaving as his patrimony to the throne a three-year-old son. The duke of Zhou thereupon assumed the regency, but instead of usurping the throne himself, turned it over to his nephew as soon as the latter achieved his majority and was capable of assuming royal responsibility. Thereafter, like Cincinnatus, the duke retired to his own estate to live out his days; a worthy cultural hero indeed.

The second canonical work quoted more than any other source in the Analects is the Shijing 詩經, variously translated as the Book of Poetry, Book of Odes, or Book of Songs.\textsuperscript{15} Although regularly cited in support of some weighty aesthetic, moral, or political point that Confucius wished to make, the original 305 poems that comprise the Songs are just that: poems to be intoned and chanted aloud. While some of them do indeed have a moral import that can be read out of them, the majority are simply reflective of life in earliest historical China. There are love poems, and poems lamenting a son or husband going off to war; poems dealing with nature, with hunting and fishing, with friendship, with festivals; and there are poems dealing with legends and ancient rituals. Collectively the poems of the Songs paint what must be the most accurate picture we have of the everyday life of the Chinese—aristocrats and commoners alike—living in approximately the ninth century BCE.

In the West, probably the best-known ancient Chinese work is, if not the Analects, then the Yijing 易經, or Book of Changes.\textsuperscript{16} Although parts of it, like the Book of Documents, probably date from early Western Zhou (1122–771 BCE), the work as we have it today, with accretions spanning many centuries, only came together many generations after the death of Confucius. Originally a book of divination—and never ceasing to be such—the Book of Changes became the first among the canonical classics, and certainly influenced later Confucian thinking. It
may well have been read in some form by the authors of the “books” that now make up the Analects. At the very least, Confucius is explicitly quoted as interpreting one of the hexagrams in this text (13.22). There is also one version of the Analects suggesting that Confucius late in his life was himself a student of the Book of Changes (7.17) that is gaining increased credibility from the Confucian commentaries recovered at Mawangdui in 1973. Although we still follow the Dingzhou text which does not reference the Book of Changes, the appearance of this variant speaks to the sustained importance that this text came to have in the intellectual life of China.17

Other texts now included in the Confucian canon—parts of which were probably extant while Confucius was alive—are three texts on ritual: the Zhouli 周禮 (Rituals of Zhou), Yili 義禮 (Appropriateness and Rituals), and the Liji 禮記 (Records of Rituals).18 Another historical work, the Chunqiu 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals) is a chronicle of events at the court of Lu 722–481 BCE, an era which subsequently came to be known as the “Spring and Autumn” period after the chronicle’s title. A series of commentaries written on this laconic record of court events were to become the focus of interpretative exegetical studies during the Han dynasty.19 There also appears to have been a Yuejing 樂經 (Book of Music), but no copies or even significant fragments thereof have been extant for some two thousand years.

We see the beginning of the succession to Confucius in the last books of the Analects in which several of his now mature disciples pronounce on the meaning of Confucius’ teachings. But the most famous successor to Confucius was the later “Master Meng” (Mengzi 孟子), Latinized as “Mencius,” who flourished one hundred and fifty years after the Master (ca. 372–289 BCE). Mencius was himself supposed to have studied with a follower in the school of Zisi 子思 (491–431 BCE), a grandson of Confucius who is associated with the Zhongyong 中庸, the Doctrine of the Mean, and several of the newly recovered texts at the
1993 Guodian find in which he is named explicitly. In the book that bears his name, Mencius elaborated upon and embellished the views of Confucius, defending them against all comers with skill, passion, and grace. He later was canonized as the “Second Sage” of Confucianism, in no small part because of his claim that human beings are naturally inclined toward good conduct. A number of passages in the Mencius are explicit commentary on the Analects, and have been included in the notes to this translation.

The next most famous successor to Confucius before the Han dynasty was “Master Xun” or Xunzi (ca. 310–238 BCE), who, like Mencius, defended the Confucian vision against its rivals among the “Hundred Schools” of thought that were contending during the Warring States period. If perhaps less passionate in his thinking than Mencius, he was equally graceful, and far more rigorous (at least from a Western philosophical perspective). Given his role in co-opting much of the competing wisdom of his day for “Confucianism” and his unparalleled influence on the establishment of Confucianism as the state ideology a century after his death, Xunzi has, not inaccurately, been referred to as “the molder of ancient Confucianism.”

Although we cannot be sure that either of these famous successors to Confucius had available to them the Analects as we have it today, both of them regularly cite the Master as saying things that, while sometimes not found in the current text, are generally compatible with its philosophical spirit, at least as, mutatis mutandis, it would inform the intellectual world of the day. The recently recovered commentaries to the Book of Changes at Mawangdui (1973) that cite Confucius’ reflections explicitly add to our store of Confucius-related materials. These references provide evidence for believing that there were several more “books” about Confucius in circulation during this period, and further, that Mencius and Xunzi deserve the interpretative successor status they achieved.
The Later Commentarial Tradition

Shortly after the *Analects* as we have it today took form, a long and venerable commentarial tradition on the text began, a tradition probably rivaling that of biblical scholarship, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

After several centuries of competing intellectually and spiritually with the Buddhism imported from India, the *Analects* and other Confucian classical texts underwent a thorough reexamination in the light of changes in Chinese thought brought about by the sinicization of Buddhist doctrines and by the changes in political, economic, and cultural patterns that accompanied China’s growth as an empire. This reexamination of the classical writings marked the beginning of what has come to be called neo-Confucianism, an intellectual and profoundly religious movement which reached its height during the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE), under the influence of the encyclopedic scholar-philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200 CE).21

Combining some themes from the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Book of Changes*, and the books on ritual, the syncretic neo-Confucians constructed an explicit metaphysical system that is largely absent in the ancient writings, a system designed to counter the rich Buddhist metaphysics (and its Daoist variant) which had long held sway conceptually both among the literati and the common people. Continuing the pattern established early in its career—that is, a porous Confucianism absorbing whatever was necessary to sustain it against competing intellectual forces—neo-Confucianism, while overtly repudiating Buddhism and Daoism, expanded to embrace a much enhanced spiritual sensibility drawn from these other traditions. This is not to suggest that the neo-Confucians distorted fundamentally the views or writings of their classical predecessors. On the contrary, they used their metaphysics and enhanced sense of religious fellowship to justify and even fortify the Confucian way of life as described in the *Analects* and other early texts: aesthetic, moral, and spiritual advancement in one’s life
could only proceed by fulfilling one's many obligations to family and society.

Put another way, Zhu Xi and his colleagues did not—by their lights—break with the classical tradition; they saw themselves as returning to the tradition and providing metaphysical underpinnings for the views of Confucius and other ancient cultural heroes. One of the central threads which ties the early and late Confucians together is the importance of self-cultivation—the central theme of the Analects—not only for aesthetic development, but for moral strength, the social good, and spiritual insight as well. The neo-Confucian form of discipline involved in self-cultivation takes on a more contemplative aspect than is found in the early writings, but the emphasis on self-cultivation and personal discipline is persistent and pervasive. The sacred is not transcendentally removed from the secular.

Zhu Xi's commentaries on the Analects (and on the Mencius) became definitive of the tradition from the early fourteenth through the twentieth centuries. Along with these two texts, Zhu Xi emphasized the importance of two chapters taken from the Records of Rituals, called the Great Learning (Daxue 大學) and the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong-yong 中庸). Taken together with the Analects and the Mencius, these texts came to be known as the “Four Books,” and served as the core canon of China’s civil service examinations for over six hundred years.

Moreover, Zhu Xi’s legacy extended beyond the Middle Kingdom. When Western missionaries, merchants, and scholars came to China and began translating Confucian texts, they inherited Zhu’s commentarial legacy from their own Chinese teachers, an inheritance that culminated in the monumental achievements of the Scottish Presbyterian missionary James Legge (1815–1897), whose Chinese Classics remains, in many respects, the benchmark for all translation work to this day.

One of the more recent ironies regarding the Analects occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in which China’s political leadership tried to erase the country’s cultural past. The “Anti-
Confucius Campaign" (pikong 批孔) orchestrated a nationwide critique of Confucius that had the entire literate Chinese population studying the Analects in order to call it into question—a strategy that did more to reauthorize this classic than to stem its influence.

In summary, it is essential for the reader of the Analects—and Confucian writings more generally—to appreciate the singular role played by the Master in shaping Chinese thought, government, culture, and daily life. The importance of Daoism and Buddhism notwithstanding, Confucianism has been the dominant cultural resource transmitted and elaborated upon by the literati for over two millennia, and because government officials were drawn from the ranks of the literati, it served as the official state ideology as well. Moreover, because it celebrated tradition, rituals, filial obligations, ancestor reverence, and other such popular institutions, Confucianism was exemplified in the lives of Chinese commoners, who were thereby followers of the Master in practice even though they had no firsthand knowledge of the Analects and related texts.

Confucius, then, was not simply one great thinker among many in China; his defense and enhancement of the early heritage established him as the enduring symbol of Chinese civilization. As a consequence, he has been honored even by those whose views were different (Daoists and Buddhists), and by those who could not read the writings which expressed those views. Thus the spirit of the Analects has been consistently reflected in the writings and actions of later Confucian philosophers, and continues to color the entire fabric of Chinese culture.

Finally, the contemporary Western reader of the Analects must bear in mind that the early emerging "Confucianism" was challenged at its inception by Daoists, Mohists, Legalists, and proponents of others of the "Hundred Schools" of classical Chinese thought. In the course of time, it was overshadowed by Buddhism for several centuries. And again later, it was challenged by Christianity, first by the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans of the late sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries, and afterward by both Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The earliest incursions of missionaries were buttressed by what they believed to be the unassailable rationality of classical Western learning, while the later reinforcements relied on the gunboat diplomacy of the imperialistic Western powers as they laid claim to China. And, of course, liberal democratic, capitalist, and Marxist ideas have contributed much to the Western onslaught against the resilient Confucian tradition. But in the face of all these challenges Confucianism has not only persisted, it has repeatedly risen and reasserted itself with renewed strength and substance derived from its appropriation of precisely those forces that would undermine it. Thus it would be presumptuous—and very probably false—to suggest that it cannot have any purchase on us today.

This endurance is not merely evidenced by the fact that the most successful—in strictly economic terms—of non-Western nations in modernizing their societies have been those heavily influenced by the Confucian tradition: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and more recently, China itself. The “Confucian Hypothesis” which is regularly invoked to describe this success, often depicts an authoritarian Confucius who, in our opinion, is a very different one from the sagely teacher found in the Analects. Our Confucius is undogmatic (9.4), not concerned with personal profit (4.16, 7.7), dislikes competitiveness (3.7), sets little store by material possessions (1.15), and is more concerned about equitable distribution of wealth than wealth itself (16.1); it is neither an authoritarian nor a capitalist Confucius that is met in the pages of the present book.

For all these reasons, then, the Analects should not be read merely for antiquarian interest, or for modern economic insight either. Rather should the reader consider seriously the possibility that there might be much in this text that speaks not only to East Asians, but perhaps to everyone; not only to the scholars of the past, but perhaps to all those who wish to help shape a more decent and humane future today.
**Metaphysics, With Reference to Language**

In order for the reader to appreciate fully the sophisticated depth of the Analects, we as translators must first attempt to describe the world as experienced by the ancient Chinese who walk through its pages. This is a daunting task, because underlying the grammar of the contemporary English language is a rather different "world." To say this is not to suggest Chinese exoticness: trees, birds, flowers, mountains, rivers, and most everything else in China do not differ radically from their counterparts closer to home. Nor is it to say that all ancient Chinese beliefs and attitudes differ radically from our own: many different Chinese held many different beliefs and attitudes, and a great many of them have Western counterparts.

Rather we are saying that there are presuppositions underlying all discourse about the world, about beliefs, and about attitudes, which are sedimented into the specific grammars of the languages in which these discourses take place. Proceeding from an awareness that the only thing more dangerous than making cultural generalizations is the reductionism that results from not doing so, we need to identify and elaborate some of these presuppositions. To establish some initial terms for comparison, we want to claim that English (and other Indo-European languages) is basically substantive and essentialistic, whereas classical Chinese should be seen more as an eventful language.
If this be so, then experiencing a world of events, seen as persistently episodic, will perhaps be different from experiencing a world of things, seen interactively.

To take an example, the tree seen in one’s front yard is clearly the same tree all year long; its substance—underlying reality—remains the same, despite differing appearances throughout the year. But in the world of lived experience, it is not forced on us to focus on the tree’s sameness, substance, or essence. Rather can we experience a tree with flowers and buds, a tree with green leaves, then with brown leaves, and finally, a tree with no leaves at all. The tree appears differently, and why can’t the appearances be “real”? The tree can be perceived eventfully, relationally, with respect to the seasons, other natural phenomena, and with respect to ourselves as well: only during certain times will the tree shade us, and there are other times to rake its relentless crop of falling leaves, still another time to prune it.

This example will almost surely seem odd to anyone unfamiliar with the idea of being able to experience the world “nonsubstantially.” A part of the reason for the oddness, however, lies not in any unreasonableness of the Chinese orientation—if we are right, their orientation is eminently reasonable—but rather lies at least partially in the grammatical rules of English which we cannot significantly violate in attempting to describe that orientation. The definite article in English signals “the one and only,” and the use of the same pronoun in a sentence must refer to the same object. Thus when we say “the tree” it must be a “one and only” tree, and when we refer to “it,” it must be the same tree, no matter what the season. Similarly, the boy who purportedly chopped down a cherry tree and confessed to the deed must be the same George Washington who served as the first president of the United States.

Thus it is important to note here—we will have more to say about the Chinese language in the next section—that classical Chinese has no definite articles (or any articles at all), and its pronouns do not function just as modern English pronouns do. Essentialism is virtually built
into English—indeed, into all Indo-European languages—by the way things, essences, substances, (nouns) do something (they are verbed), or have something else attributed to them (via being auxiliary verbed). Consequently, moving from Chinese as our object language, which may properly be described as eventful, into an essentialistic target language, English, will require a stretching of the latter in order to better convey the former—as we have done in our translation of the *Analects* (and in the preceding sentence).

Aristotle’s categories demand from us that experiences be factored into things, actions, attributes of things, and modalities of actions—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Hence, our first impulse in encountering the unfamiliar is to make such a determination. *Dao* 道 becomes reified and objectified as “the dao.” Yet *dao* has as much to do with subject as it does with object, and as much to do with the subject’s quality of understanding as it does with the various aspects of the felt experience. Said another way, *dao* defies Aristotle’s categories, being all of them at once. And our experience of the tree is constitutive of *dao*, one experience among many which in sum make up one’s day.

Some of the “eventful” properties of classical Chinese can be discerned in modern spoken Mandarin, or *Putonghua*. The very expression “thing,” for example—*dongxi* 東西, literally, “east-west”—is a nonsubstantial relationship.26 Again, noun phrases are, in linguistic terms, head-initial in English, and head-final in Mandarin. Thus the English sentence:

The young woman who just entered the room is very bright.

would have a very different word order in Chinese:

Just now room-inside enter that-young-woman very bright.

*Gangcai wuzili laide xiaojie feichang congming.*

剛才屋子裡來的小姐非常聰明。

For the two of us at least, the “English” young woman is considerably more substantial, but much less dynamic (more thingful/essential vs.
eventful/relational) than her “Chinese” counterpart, an impression strengthened by the lack of an auxiliary verb in the Chinese.

In our view, early Chinese thinkers, unlike their Western counterparts ancient and contemporary, were not concerned with seeking the essence of things—that which remained constant throughout the changes manifest to our senses. On the contrary, they seem to have presupposed that the only constant is change itself, as the Book of Changes makes explicit. The reality/appearance dualism that is so close to the heart of Western philosophizing is closely linked to the permanence/change and form/matter distinctions, and consequently we should not be surprised to find no discussions of underlying reality versus changing appearances in early Chinese texts: reality and appearance are one and the same, and the reality is that everything changes, in nature, in society, and at the personal level. Most of the changes are cyclic (the tree will flower and bud again next year) and harmoniously integrated (the birds and bees return when the flowers and buds do). Some changes are novel (an abundance of flowers one year), others unexpected (lightning may strike the tree). Within limits we may creatively affect the changes (pruning the tree this way rather than that), fully realizing that the cycle of changes is hierarchical, genealogical, and irreversible (one day the tree will wither and die—as will we—and our descendent grandchildren will nurture its descendent seedling). Significantly, the context and the persistence of the particular phenomenon is perceived as far more fluid in this Chinese worldview (much more of the fruit produces worm farms than apple trees).

If our interpretation on this score has merit, the reader should expect to find in classical Chinese texts a more relational focus; not a concern to describe how things are in themselves, but how they stand in relation to something else at particular times. Thus, if the world is ever-changing, then those relations, too, must be ever-changing and not only with respect to trees. We can see this clearly in the discussion of human relations which dominate a great deal of the Analects. Although children must be filial to their parents throughout life, the
relation between them changes. When young, children stand in the relation of beneficiary to their parents, but change to benefactor when the children mature and their parents grow old. And the same holds cyclically for them after they have become parents and grandparents in turn. Stated more generally, no one, not just parents and children, is either benefactor or beneficiary in and of herself, but only in relation to specific others at specific times.

The nature of “relationality” needs to be clarified, for there is possible equivocation here. In a world of substances, people or things are related extrinsically, so that when the relationship between them is dissolved, they are remaindered intact. Such extrinsic relatedness can be represented as:

But relatedness defining of the Confucian worldview is intrinsic and constitutive. Perhaps “correlation” is a more felicitous term, so that it can be diagrammed as:

Under such circumstances, the dissolution of relationships is surgical, diminishing both parties in the degree that this particular relationship is important to them. In such a world, people literally rather than figuratively change each other’s minds.

The point can be generalized still further perhaps: no-thing or nobody has an essence, but can be defined only “correlationally,” at any given time, with differing relations holding at other times; we are both benefactors and beneficiaries of our friends, neighbors, lovers, colleagues, and so forth, dependent on specific circumstances. We see
these patterns of thought not only in early Chinese philosophical writings, but in all other writings as well. The Chinese *materia medica* describes the chest as *yin* (receptive, soft, submissive) with respect to the back, which is *yang* (creative, hard, aggressive). But in relation to the abdomen, the chest is *yang*. But these relations, too, can be changed, depending on anatomical conditions (a broken leg, a pinched nerve, and so on). That is to say, nothing is altogether *yin* or *yang* in and of itself, but only in relation to one or more other “things,” temporally contextualized.²⁷ (We can note here in passing that if there are no essences, there cannot be any peculiarly masculine or feminine essences, and consequently we must refrain from imposing Western concepts of gender on early Chinese thinkers despite the patriarchal structure of classical and imperial Chinese society.)²⁸

It is significant, we believe, that although working with very different texts, the distinguished historian of Chinese science Nathan Sivin has made much the same point, not only about medicine, but all scientific pursuits as undertaken in China:

Scientific thought began, in China as elsewhere, with attempts to comprehend how it is that although individual things are constantly changing, always coming to be and perishing, nature as a coherent order not only endures but remains conformable to itself. In the West the earliest such attempts identified the unchanging reality with some basic stuff out of which all the things around us, despite their apparent diversity, are formed.

In China the earliest and in the long run the most influential scientific explanations were in terms of time. They made sense of the momentary event by fitting it into the cyclical rhythms of natural process.²⁹

We would extend Sivin’s observation to include not only scientific, but Chinese ethical discourse as well. The “basic stuff” of the scientific West resembles the enduring self, or soul (“strict self-identity”) of the moral and religious West, whereas the Chinese made sense of personal identity “by fitting it into the cyclical rhythms of natural [and social]
process.” Many factors enter into the analysis of what we have referred to as benefactor-beneficiary roles, but time is fundamental. A common lament among the elderly in the West is that “I’m not the person I used to be.” In the Chinese context, the statement is quite literally true. General Washington differed from President Washington, and neither bore a close resemblance to the boy who supposedly chopped down the cherry tree.

To elaborate these points in a Western philosophical context, first, the “basic stuff” of the scientific West came to be seen as substances (noun phrases), in which attributes inhere (auxiliary verbs) or which are active (transitive and intransitive verbs). Thus Heraclitus could ask how it was possible to step into the same river twice when all of its substance (water) was different. In attempting to get to the bottom of things, Descartes argued for two substances which share no predicates because they are absolutely distinct: body (that which is extended) and mind (that which thinks). But Cartesian efforts to account for how the two substances could interact were not persuasive to Descartes’ successors. Like Spinoza, Leibniz believed that substances could not, in fact, interact, but while the former concluded there could therefore only be a single substance (with many modes and attributes), the latter instead argued for an indefinitely large number of them. These individual substances, “monads,” could not causally affect each other, but could all dance to the same tune played in a preestablished harmony composed by God.

Metaphysically astigmatic, perhaps, the early Chinese thinkers never seem to have perceived any substances that remained the same through time; rather in our interpretation they saw “things” relationally, and related differently, at different periods of time. Dao, the totality of all things (wanwu 萬物), is a process that requires the language of both “change (bian 變)” and “persistence (tong 通)” to capture its dynamic disposition. This processional nature of experience is captured in the Analects 9.17:
The Master was standing on the riverbank, and observed, “Isn’t
life’s passing just like this, never ceasing day or night!”

Analogously, whereas for many if not most Western thinkers, each
of us is clearly the same person throughout time—whether as the pos-
sessor of an immortal soul created by God or more agnostically, as a
self with memory and moral responsibility—early Chinese thinkers,
especially Confucians, seem to have seen persons changing and growing
significantly from child to adult. For them, growing up through the
cultivation and articulation of relationships makes us different persons,
as does getting married, becoming a parent, and so forth. As the quality
and quantity of our relationships proliferate, so, too, are we extended
in the world. This idea should not be altogether foreign; if we may be
said to “learn from experience”—especially our mistakes—is not the
learning reflected in our changed attitudes, beliefs, and conduct? Do
we “change our minds” only figuratively, or should we understand this
in a much more literal sense?

There are, however, regularities and continuities underlying
change; our lives are neither arbitrary nor solely subject to chance or
whim. There are as many different ways to be a filial son or daughter as
there are sons and daughters, but certain attitudes and conduct, such
as hatred and disrespect, fall beyond the pale. New friends are never-
theless friends, and friendship makes demands on us because true
friends must be relied upon to be such. We express our unique
personhood—not individualism—by the creative ways we interact
with others, as children, parents, lovers, friends, and so forth, within
the constraints denoted by what is meant by “parent,” “lover,”
“friend,” and “neighbor.” Although accordance with ritualized roles
and behaviors requires personalization such that each daughter is
uniquely “this one and only daughter,” the disciplining effect of the
formal aspect of ritual that makes growth and refinement possible can-
not be overstated.

This point can be seen in another way by considering the passages
in the Analects (6.25, 11.16, 12.11, and 13.3) which are usually described as
a concern of Confucius for “using names properly (zhengming 正名).”
The passages are fairly straightforward: junjun 君君 (a ruler, to rule, “rulerly”), may be rendered as “the ruler should rule,” without doing violence to English usage. And other English nouns can function similarly: we can easily interpret the meaning of chenchen 臣臣 as “ministers should minister.” But shifts of meaning take place if we say fufu 父父 “fathers should father”—where the verbal function of “father” means “to sire”—and the Chinese becomes positively ungrammatical if we translate zizi 子子 as “sons should son.”

What we wish to suggest is that we see a correlation between the dynamic—yet constrained—relational elements of Chinese characters (both in and of themselves, and with respect to other characters in a sentence) that mirror the dynamic yet constrained relational way the writers of those characters responded to the world they experienced. A “son son-ing” will neither allow the noun to be inactive, nor will it allow the verb to be random.

Further, it is well known that in classical Chinese the subject noun phrase is frequently omitted, strengthening a dynamic, eventful reading of the language, and, thereby to some extent, strengthening as well a dynamic, eventful sense of being in the world. In fact, the noun-verb distinction regularly gives way to a “gerundical” language. It is not “What do you mean by ‘government?’” nor “What do you mean by ‘to govern?’” nor “What do you mean by ‘proper government?’” but “What do you mean by ‘governing properly?’”

When we consult traditional Chinese dictionaries which themselves are endeavors to explain such a world—the second-century Shuowen jiezi 説文解字, for example—we discover that terms are not defined by appeal to essential, literal meanings, but rather are generally brought into focus paronomastically by semantic and phonetic associations. “Exemplary person (jun 君),” for example, is defined by its cognate and phonetically similar “gathering (群),” which must rest on the underlying assumption that “people gather round and defer to exemplary persons.” As it insists in the Analects (4.25): “Excellent persons
do not dwell alone; they are sure to have neighbors.” “Mirror (jingzi 鏡子)” is defined as “radiance (jing 景)” : a mirror is a source of illumination. “Battle formation (zhen 陣)” is defined as “displaying (chen 陳)” : a battle formation’s most important service is to display strength as a means of deterring the enemy. A “ghost or spirit (gui 鬼)” is defined as “returning (gui 歸)” : presumably it has found its way back to some more primordial state. “The way (dao 道)” is defined as “treading (dao 跚)” : as the Zhuangzi says, “The way is made in the walking of it 道行之而成.” Within the Analects itself, “authoritative person (ren 仁)” is defined as “being slow to speak (ren 言)” (12.3), and “governing properly (zheng 政)” is regularly glossed as “acting properly (zheng 正)” (12.17).

What is remarkable about this way of generating meaning is that a term is defined nonreferentially by mining relevant and yet seemingly random associations implicated in the term itself. Further, erstwhile nominal expressions default to verbal expressions, “things” default to “events,” underscoring the primacy of process over form as a grounding presupposition in this tradition.

When we extrapolate from the understanding of words to the understanding of persons, we find that instead of positing some intrinsically residing feature—some self-same identical characteristic that qualifies all human beings as members of a natural humankind—persons, like words, are to be understood by exploring relevant associations that constitute their specific patterns of meaningful relationships. Persons are not perceived as superordinated individuals—as agents who stand independent of their actions—but are rather ongoing “events” defined functionally by constitutive roles and relationships as they are performed within the context of their specific families and communities, that is, through the observance of ritual propriety (li 禮).

The dominant philosophical preoccupations of cultures are often a function of tacit assumptions made early in their narratives that are often reflected in their languages. Greek metaphysical presuppositions melded with Judeo-Christian beliefs to produce a “God-model,”
where an independent and superordinate principle determines order and value in the world while remaining aloof from it, making human freedom, autonomy, creativity, and individuality at once problematic and of key philosophical interest. On the Chinese side, the commitment to the processional, transformative, and always provisional nature of experience renders the “ten thousand things [or, perhaps better, ‘events’] (wanwu 萬物)” which make up the world, including the human world, at once continuous one with another, and at the same time, unique. Thus the primary philosophical problem that emerges from these assumptions is *ars contextualis*: how do we correlate these unique particulars to achieve their most productive continuities? (This is the underlying general form of “questions” posed to the *Book of Changes* when casting the stalks.)

Ancestor reverence as the defining religious sensibility, family as the primary human unit, authoritative humanity (perhaps more literally, “co-humanity,” *ren* 仁) and filiality (*xiao* 孝) as primary human values, ritualized roles, relationships, and practices (*li* 禮) as a communal discourse, are all strategies for achieving and sustaining communal harmony (*he* 和). As it states in the *Analects* 1.12:

Achieving harmony (*he*) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (*li*). In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work.

The contrasts between things/essences, and events/relations, on the one hand, and words and grammar on the other, may be obscured by our having referred to “sentences” in the classical Chinese language. We all know what a (declarative) sentence is: it is that which expresses a complete thought, and is the kind of thing that is true or false. What is less clear, however, is that what “sentences” in classical Chinese express are the “complete thoughts” of the person(s) who wrote them.
Chad Hansen, for instance, has argued that ancient Chinese thinkers did not view language basically as a way of describing the world, or of communicating one's beliefs about it, but rather as a means of guiding actions in the world. "Speaking (dao 道)" is a "guiding discourse (dao道)." Said a different way, language is both performative and prescriptive; it both does something to the world and recommends how it should be. While we would quarrel with a few of Hansen's specifics, for example his willingness to limit "discourse" to language while not taking into account the other dimensions of discourse, namely, physical body, ritual, music, and so on, we do endorse the overall thrust of this claim.31

To appreciate what Hansen is about, and to appreciate the way in which his arguments are congruent with our own, we must turn from metaphysics and grammar to religion. In the West, although there are many differences between the attributes of God in the three Abrahamic traditions, they affirm in unison, via Genesis and other writings, that He created the world for a purpose, and according to a plan, from which it must follow that the world must be explanatorily intelligible, no matter how difficult it might be to arrive at the true explanation. As the Koran records Allah saying, "Think ye I made the world in jest?" It follows in turn that the more we attempt to discern what the world He created is like, the more we may be enabled to know why He created it as He did, and thereby come to know why we, as parts of this world, are in it.

In this way, by grasping the One behind the many, we solve the riddle of the meaning of life, a riddle that has so thoroughly permeated the Western intellectual tradition. In discovering this "One," we discover "objectivity" itself: a privileged position outside of the world from which objective and hence universal statements about it, unconstrained by time or context, can be made. Further, it is by virtue of analogy with this "objective One" that we are able to disengage from our contexts, thereby resolving them into "objects" independent of ourselves.
Seen in this light, the Abrahamic religious traditions are not the competitors of science and philosophy in the West, but the parents of both. Until the Age of Enlightenment, the vast majority of thinkers we refer to as scientists or philosophers—Isaac Newton, for example—were deeply religious, and what we refer to as their scientific or philosophical interests may also be described as spiritual pursuits. Of the indefinitely large number of “facts” about the world that might be known, relatively few of them today seem to have any direct significance for our all-too-human lives, except instrumentally. But if any facts provide clues to God’s purpose(s), then they can be significant indeed. The reasoning is straightforward: the better we come to understand deeply the world He created, the better we may be able to understand why He created it, and derivatively, why He created us to be a part of that world.

The pervasiveness of this originally religious orientation to the world—incorporating some less religiously inspired facets of early Greek thought into it—is evidenced, we believe, by the fact that the dominant mode of learning in the West, throughout its history, has been to acquire knowledge about the world, to learn the way the world is; and to describe that world in grammatical sentences, expressing complete thoughts, sentences which are true or false.

In contrast, there is no creation myth or legend in ancient China. There is no Genesis, nor New Testament or Koranic equivalents, nor a Chinese Cronos or Zeus, and there is no affirmation in any ancient text, explicit or implicit, that the world is explanatorily intelligible. In both cultures, of course, the world is discernible for what it is, through the testimony of the senses, that is, through appearances; but for the ancient Chinese at least, the appearances were not deceptive, and the what and the why of the world (the existence of some underlying ultimate reality) does not seem to have preoccupied them. They did not, in other words, have any good reason for thinking that there might be an explanation of why the world is as it is, and thereby had no reason
for seeking a *transcendental* answer to the question of why we are in this world.

If our views on this issue are warranted, they will help to explain why Chinese philosophers in general, and Confucius in particular, were teachers in a very different way than their peers steeped in the Greek and Abrahamic traditions. For Chinese teachers do not seem to have been so much concerned with describing and thereby conveying knowledge about the world as they were to have their students learn *how to get on* in the world, which is clearly reflected in the written texts. To be sure, language in the Western educational tradition is at times employed to assist students in learning how to *be*, to get on in the world, but such recommendations are dependent upon complying with some true state of affairs. In early China, the reverse seems to have been more nearly the case: “the way *(dao)* is made in the walking of it.”

Reinforcing this point is the fact that classical Chinese has no close lexical equivalent for the English “true” and “truth,” and even more significantly, the sense of “true to fact” does not have the importance invested in it that it does within the Western narrative. These English terms are, of course, properties of statements, sentences used to describe the world: if our descriptive statements are accurate, then what we stated is true; and if not, not. But if description is not taken to be the essential function of language, a concept of truth linked to declarative sentences need not arise, or at least, need not assume importance.

What we have presented above is a woefully inadequate account of the religious dimensions of both the Abrahamic and Chinese traditions, but may nevertheless serve to render more intelligible the ancient Chinese way of “looking at things.” If their basic concern is to guide actions with effective discourse, thereby helping listeners and readers learn how to get on, to be in the world, as we would put it, then it might come to be appreciated that the Chinese *languages*—about which more will be said below and in Appendix II—can be as effective in this prescriptive way as English is for descriptive purposes. This distinction between descriptive and prescriptive also provides
some further insight into what Confucius was about in giving different answers to the same question when asked by different disciples.

We are certainly not suggesting that the Chinese did not experience substantial things; in the Middle Kingdom no less than in the Middle East, kicking a rock must hurt one's foot more than kicking a pile of leaves. Nor were the ancients of Western civilization unaware of change through events: despite the logical acumen of his student Zeno, Parmenides did not gain many followers. And further, classical Chinese is just as capable of describing objects as Indo-European languages are of describing events. We are certainly not claiming that China knew nothing of "things," and Greece, nothing of "events."

Rather does it appear to be a matter of emphasis, here event-oriented, there thing-oriented. We are acutely aware of the difficulties involved in understanding what we are suggesting, namely that the ancient Chinese experienced "world," and the language that reports on it, are very different from our experienced "world," and our language. We hope that we are not merely returning China to the "inscrutable East" from which she has been emerging, thanks in large measure to the sinological scholarship of our predecessors in the West. But we want to insist that the "scrutiny" be done with great care. For example, the sinological linguist Peter Boodberg once lamented as follows:

One must deplore the general tendency... (alas, too prominently figuring in sinological research on this continent) of insisting that the Chinese in the development of their writing, as in the evolution of many other of their cultural complexes, followed some mysterious esoteric principles that set them apart from the rest of the human race.39

For ourselves, we believe there is something profoundly right, and something profoundly wrong, in the sentiments Boodberg expressed. Right, in the sense that the Chinese are indeed equally members of the human community, and any "esoteric principles" invoked that suggest their being entirely "other" should be viewed with great suspicion. But
this view is profoundly wrong when it suggests that the Chinese are “just like us” except for relatively inconsequential details, for the Analects could then only be read as the pronouncements of a man who was a well-meaning preacher at best, and at worst, an authoritarian dogmatist. But Confucius is arguably the most influential thinker in the history of the human race, and definitely so in China, and we are therefore extremely reluctant to ascribe preacherly, authoritarian, or dogmatic qualities to his pronouncements. We believe he has much to say to us today—otherwise we would not have essayed this translation—but before what he said can be heard twenty-four hundred years and half a world away from him, we must first give him, as other, his otherness. Perhaps, in allowing the Master his difference, we may appear to be relying on some “mysterious esoteric principles” of the kind Boodberg deplored. But in our view, only after we have understood deeply how different Confucius was from ourselves will we be able to appreciate with equal depth what he meant when he said that “Human beings are similar in their natural tendencies (xìng 性), but vary greatly by virtue of their habits.” (17.2)

Language, With Reference to Metaphysics

Our commitment to the belief that classical Chinese is an efficacious means of expression and communication, when combined with our belief that the language is nonessentialistic in its structural characteristics, commit us also to the view that essentialism—and derivatively, universalism or absolutism or both—are not the only ways of viewing, being in, or simply describing the world. On the other hand, we do not wish to provide either aid or comfort to those of a thoroughgoing relativistic bent.

One insight that emerges out of doing comparative philosophy is that the Chinese tradition is not, as often first assumed, a mirror opposite of the dominant Western one. The absence of transcendence is not
immanence, the absence of objectivity is not subjectivity, the absence of absolutism is not relativism, the absence of atomistic individuality is not some faceless collectivity. In trying to understand Chinese culture, we have to, with imagination, seek out a third position.

Suggesting that China, as the other, is radically other does not imply that the other is wholly other. If it did, we could not argue that Confucius could have anything of import to say to us today. Believing that he does have much to “say” today, we must examine more closely the language into which the “sayings” of Confucius were couched.

In 1890, a Christian missionary in China offered the following complaint:

Is there any convenient method of stating the doctrine of the Trinity which does not imply the grossest materialism? . . . Use whatever language you please to express the resurrection, and the uninitiated will understand it to mean transmigration.34

Our own thesis is that the classical Chinese language—the language in which the books of the Analects were composed—is unique, being sharply distinct not only from all non-sinitic languages, but from spoken Chinese as well, both ancient and modern. In Appendix II we proffer a number of detailed arguments for this claim, but perhaps some more general reflections on the nature of the original language of the Analects will help orient the general reader more self-consciously to what it “says” in the language to which it has been translated.35

In the first place, a belief that classical Chinese writing is fundamentally a transcription of speech can not only obscure our perceptions of their dissimilarities, it may also lead us down barren research paths in Chinese philosophy. Too many writers have pointed to one or another particular linguistic constraint in classical Chinese and then gone on to argue that Chinese thinkers were thereby hindered in some conceptual endeavor such as thinking abstractly, logically, precisely, or what have you. Clearly these kinds of arguments need a very large number of supporting assumptions, necessary among them being that
any semantic, syntactic, or phonetic feature found in the written language will also be found in the spoken. It must be assumed, in other words, that the same grammatical constraints apply to both languages. If they do not, there is no reason to believe that the written more than the spoken language reflects the intellectual capabilities of the Chinese peoples; indeed, all of the evidence shows—for all languages and peoples—that the opposite is the case. But then this assumption has no plausibility whatsoever, and consequently neither do any of these Chinese-think-concretely-not-abstractly arguments.\textsuperscript{36} By focusing on the differences between the written and spoken languages, on the other hand, we can offer another hypothesis which suggests a different perspective: rather than being somehow constrained in thought and expression by their language, Chinese thinkers may have been twice blessed in having two distinctive linguistic media to choose from in transmitting their poetic, philosophical, and religious visions, concerns, and prescriptions.

**Classical Chinese. How Does It Mean?**

When we speak of “classical” or “literary” Chinese, we do not mean the language employed by everyone in China prior to the May Fourth Movement of 1919, nor do we mean the vernacular written language of today which is more or less a transcription of everyday speech. Rather, we mean the \textit{wényán} 文言 language of imperial China, the language in which the classics, the histories, poetry, literature, philosophy, and official documents have come down to us. Without peer in terms of continuity, the protoform of this language was in use in 1200 BCE, and the language is still used on occasion in China today—newspapers, for example, are written in a quasi-classical style, and it is also the medium in which Mao Zedong wrote his poems. The modern written and spoken languages are replete with short sayings (\textit{chéngyǔ} 成語) that are often direct allusions to the classical corpus, and often retain their classical form. Yet \textit{wényán} is not fundamentally spoken. Allowing that
many passages from the classics found expression in speech by being memorized and quoted, and that the more famous of them became proverbial, there is little direct evidence to show that basic verbal communication took place through this medium. Further, it is difficult to see how verbal communication ever could take place in classical Chinese because the extraordinarily large number of homophonous terms makes the language virtually uninterpretable by ear alone. Far too many semantically unrelated lexical items have exactly the same phonological realization to be understood aurally, even when important tonal differences are taken into account.

This homophony is unusual among languages, but has existed in Chinese almost since its inception. Phonetically, most consonantal endings of syllables have dropped off over the centuries, but even when they were present, the number of homonyms was very high, with anywhere from two to seven different characters pronounced identically. Today the situation is even worse. In a common five-thousand-word dictionary, for example, even when the tones are taken into account, forty semantically dissimilar graphs are pronounced identically /yi/; the sounds /shi/ and /ji/ each have thirty-two lexical entries; /zhi/ has thirty-one; and so on, with almost no phoneme having only one semantic correlate. It is the use of binomial expressions in the spoken language that significantly enhances oral communication.

Classical Chinese, however, is like the good little boy: it was primarily to be seen and not heard. A person who tried to deliver a speech in wenyan today would end up with a soliloquy. This is not to imply that sounds were and are totally irrelevant to the written language, for some puns and all rhymes, alliteration, and so forth are obviously phonetic in character. Further, such linguistic devices were undoubtedly of enormous value in facilitating the memorization of large tracts of text that could be recalled to fund discussion. What this does imply is the following, which is an important premise for our overall position: spoken Chinese is and was certainly understood aloud; classical Chinese is not now and may never have been understood aloud as a primarily
spoken language; therefore spoken and literary Chinese are now and may always have been two distinct linguistic media, and if so, the latter should clearly not be seen as simply a transcription of speech.

The importance of this observation cannot be overstated. The distinguished philologist Bernhard Karlgren, reflecting on the possibility of rendering the classical Chinese language into an alphabetic script, concludes that the characters are indispensable. This is a language which can be read, but which cannot be understood when read aloud. What would be the not inconsequential cost to the culture of attempting to save the labor entailed by the memorization of the classical script? According to Karlgren,

In the first place, by the introduction of alphabetic writing the Chinese would be compelled to discard his literature of some 4,000 years and with this the backbone of his entire civilization. And this for the reason that the Chinese literature transcribed in phonetic script would become absolutely unintelligible . . .

It is well known that most of the grammatical features of Indo-European languages are absent in classical Chinese: there are no moods, voices, tenses; no declensions; no marking for pluralization. Perhaps most important, there are no formal “parts of speech” in classical Chinese; only in a context can a character be said to be a noun, adjective, verb, or adverb (and the reader should keep in mind that all of these grammatical categories stemmed from the study of Indo-European—essentialistic—languages).

The point deserves elaboration, because grammatical issues frequently demonstrate the impossibility of translation without interpretation. To render junzi as “Gentleman” is to impose a masculine reading of the term which is not marked in the term itself, and making it singular is also an extrapolation that is not indicated by the characters. One reason for doing so, of course, is because most translations wish to point up the patriarchal social hierarchy of ancient China, and “Gentleman” does this, as do “he” and “him” when a pronominal form
refers back to junzi. But pronouns are not marked for gender or number either, and consequently the resultant sexist translation appears straightforward, even though altogether absent in the original. (And there is at least some evidence that women could be regarded as having some of the same qualities of the junzi at the time of, or shortly after, the composition of the Analects.)

The absence of the singular in our translation underscores our relational and eventful interpretation of person in the Confucian world. Such persons, embedded in their respective fields of roles and relationships, act, for good or ill, on behalf of their communities.

In translating the Analects without the usual appeal to sexist language, we are not concealing and thus excusing a gender discrimination that has been an integral aspect of Chinese culture predating and certainly reinforced by the Confucian tradition. On the contrary, acknowledging the didactic and programmatic function of the Confucian text, which must be reinterpreted to serve the needs and enhance the possibilities of succeeding generations, our point is that Confucianism as a living tradition must be reconfigured to prompt a future free of gender prejudice. Confucianism is not a dogma, and there is nothing in the classical language that requires the gender distinction.

Unlike other linguistic scripts, the Chinese writing system has an unbroken history of more than three thousand years, and even today some of the characters are written pretty much as they were at the outset: those representing the sun 日, moon 月, a bow 弓, human being 人, door 門, and so on. Called pictograms, these characters are stylized direct representations of objects. A second category of graphs—ideograms—combine pictograms to convey more abstract concepts, such as the sun and moon together (ming 明) to signify “bright,” “intelligent,” “illumined,” or two trees together (lin 林) for “grove” and three (sen 森) for “forest.”

In modern Chinese, only about ten percent of the characters are either pictographic or ideographic in nature, the remaining ninety per-
cent being called phonograms, characters with one component supposedly indicative of meaning (semantic), the other component(s) indicating sound (phonetic). A further discussion of these categories of characters is proffered in Appendix II, but for now it merely needs to be noted that of the 2200-odd characters found in the Analects, the great majority of the philosophically significant among them are either pictograms or ideograms; that is to say, they are basically semantic in nature, and are to be interpreted more visually than aurally, and are to be read in relation to each other.

It must also be realized that at the time of the writing of the books comprising the Analects, both pictograms and ideograms, while conventional in one sense, nevertheless resembled fairly closely what they represented. The Chinese did not, of course, have to represent the concept bright/illumined/intelligent by concatenating the graphs for sun and moon; they might have used the graph for “fire,” or “white.” In this sense the graphs are conventional. But the sun and the moon are bright, and one can see the meaning of the compound graph ming—especially in its earliest forms—from its components in a way that is unavailable to those English readers who simply confront visually the symbol bright, a sign conveying no semantic information directly despite its curious spelling.

In addition to carrying its own linguistic weight, then, the semantic component of classical Chinese had to perform functions which are more commonly served by the phonetic and syntactic components of the grammars of other languages, which is an additional reason for thinking that classical Chinese is a unique linguistic medium. Additional material can be adduced in support of the uniqueness thesis and more detailed arguments will be given in Appendix II, but enough should have been presented thus far to at least establish the importance of distinguishing the grammatical structures of spoken and written classical Chinese in much greater detail than has heretofore been the case, and concomitantly, to generate skepticism for the too easily
accepted assumption that classical Chinese is simply the transcribed version of the early spoken language, but badly done. With these minimum linguistic warrants for the thesis in hand, let us turn briefly to a few of its more philosophical implications.

In the first place, the heavy grammatical burden placed on the semantic component of classical Chinese contributes to what may appropriately be called “semantic overload” in the literary language. The average lexical item found in the literature (especially the basic 2500+ characters) is so rich in semantic content that meaning differentiation is difficult, with the consequence that virtually every passage is ambiguous, being subject to a multiplicity of readings until and unless a specific interpretation is given to it (which is then handed down orally or in the form of commentary). This ambiguity is compounded by the use of “loan” characters which as homophones or abbreviated graphs, would substitute for more abstract or complex ideas. Even as late as the Dingzhou strips dating from almost the middle Han, this practice is still apparent: zheng 正 is used for zheng 政; bi 辟 for pi 饒; er 耳 for chi 聰, and so on.

Many Western scholars have of course called attention—often loudly—to this ambiguity and lack of precision in classical Chinese, seeing it as a distinctive linguistic liability. But perhaps their perceptions are biased. The lack of precision could be a decided communicative asset, a kind of “productive vagueness” that requires the reader to participate in establishing an interpretation, and to internalize the given passage in the process of doing so.

In those instances where detail or exactness of expression was necessary, we might assume Chinese thinkers availed themselves of their spoken language, wherein there is every reason to believe as much precision was and is possible as can be achieved in any other natural language. On the other hand, if what was to be expressed involved a broad vision, or a manifold attitudinal stance, or a complex of relations, then precision might be counterproductive because it could, for example, make the elements of the expression too discrete, and their interrela-
tions too obscure. In such cases, the written language might be employed instead to effect the communication concisely, competently, and elegantly. In large measure the semantic content of a message is determined not only by the specific lexical items utilized, but also by their structure and organization. The reader of classical Chinese knows well that there is a subtlety and a richness to the characters and their arrangements that allow a communicative style that can be as effective as it is terse, and unattainable verbally. Without disparaging the significance or worth of exact expression, it should nevertheless not be alarming to note that our general philosophical views and perspectives are often transmitted best by very general terms (no matter what the language), nor should it be perplexing to realize that ordinary language is not always adequate for communicating extraordinary experiences and insights.

In classical Chinese this extraordinary kind of communication is made possible semantically by the fact that each lexical item carries all of its meanings with it on every occasion of its use, and the concatenation of two or more characters therefore associates all of the meanings of each one with the others. It is unlikely that many associations would be lost in reading, because even though word order was important, it was not firmly fixed in the literary language, so the reader would have to examine almost every passage several times, attending to multiple possible orderings of the characters before settling on an interpretation. This type of communication was further enhanced by the pictorial, imagistic, and aesthetic quality of the characters. One way to relate two or more characters in a passage would be to see that they all contained a certain element; the characters for “virtue (de 德)” and “thought (si 思)”, for example, could be associated together at least visually because they both contain the character for “heart-and-mind (xin 心)”. The majority of the basic 2500+ characters which formed the lexicon of classical Chinese are constituted in the same graphic way; hence, what might be overlooked completely or passed off lightly as mere punning or ungrammatical in an alphabetic language could be

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employed seriously for expressive and communicative purposes in an ideographic one.

This point can be seen in another way by attending to a (technically) nonlinguistic feature of classical Chinese: style preference. Parallel sentence construction was prized, a sign of education, intelligence, and aesthetic sensibility on the part of the writer. There were undoubtedly cultural factors that influenced this style preference, but we must note here its significance for interpreting and translating texts: when faced with, say, four parallel sentences, some will be less syntactically (or semantically) ambiguous than others, and it is therefore a splendid heuristic device to interpret the syntactic (and/or semantic) structures of the more ambiguous sentences on the basis of the reading given to those that are much less so, where they are at all times construed relationally. Earlier we employed this system of parallel construction ourselves in the discussion of using names properly. If we translate the relevant Analects passages as “Let rulers rule, let ministers minister,” then we may proceed—without obfuscation, we hope—to “let fathers father, let sons son.”

There is a further implication of the nature of the classical written language that complicates, but certainly does not vitiate, the claim we are making for maintaining a separation between the written and the spoken language. The parallel structure, rhythm, repetition, rhyme, and other features of the written language facilitate memorization, and memorization was a major discipline in the appropriation of a tradition that had limited material resources available to it for its transmission. This factor would mean that there would be important overlaps between the expressive and more precise spoken language and the terse, poetic written language committed to memory and repeated orally as an enhancement for the spoken language. Then and now, the Chinese language is freighted with classical allusions made available by dressing the spoken (and now written) vernacular language with a shared range of phrases that have become proverbial.
Against this background, we may turn now to a brief account of a number of key philosophical terms frequently occurring in the Analects.

The Chinese Lexicon

Dao occurs some eighty times in the Analects, and is of central importance for interpreting the thinking not only of Confucius, but all other early Chinese thinkers as well; it is very probably the single most important term in the philosophical lexicon, and in significant measure, to understand what and how a thinker means when he uses dao is to understand that thinker’s philosophy.

The character has two elements: chuo 道 “to pass over,” “to go over,” “to lead through” (on foot), and shou 首, itself a compound literally meaning “head”—hair and eye together—and therefore “foremost.” Dao is used often as a loan character for its cognate, dao 導, “to lead.” Thus the character is significantly verbal, processional, and dynamic. The earliest appearance of dao in the Book of Documents is in the context of cutting a channel and “leading” a river to prevent the overflowing of its banks. Even the shou “head” component has the suggestion of “to lead,” or “to give a heading.”

Taking the verbal dao as primary, its several derived meanings emerge rather naturally: to lead through, and hence, road, path, way, method, art, teachings; to explain, to tell, doctrines. At its most fundamental level, dao seems to denote the active project of “road building,” and by extension, to connote a road that has been made, and hence can be traveled. It is by this connotation that dao is so often nominalized in translation (“the Way”), but we must distinguish between simply traveling on a road, and making the journey one’s own. In our interpretation, to realize the dao is to experience, to interpret, and to influence the world in such a way as to reinforce and extend the way of life inherited from one’s cultural predecessors. This way of living in the world then provides a road map and direction for one’s cultural successors.
For Confucius, dao is primarily rendao 人道, that is, “a way of becoming consummately and authoritatively human.” As 15.29 tells us: “It is the person who is able to broaden the way, not the way that broadens the person.”

Above we have made the argument that dao defies Aristotle’s categories, and that it has as much to do with subject as object, as much to do with the quality of understanding as the conditions of the world understood. This point might be reinforced by citing a passage in John Dewey which makes a similar point:

If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in accomplishing this work. . . . That which guides us truly is true—demonstrated capacity for such guidance is precisely what is meant by truth. The adverb “truly” is more fundamental than either the adjective true, or the noun, truth. An adverb expresses a way, a mode of acting.4

In pursuing our translation of this text, we have tried wherever possible to respect the extent to which the “path” metaphor pervades the text. A sustained image that the Chinese text presents is Confucius finding his way. That is, in reading the Analects in the original language, a term such as guo 過 that is often nominalized as “faults,” or if its verbal aspect is acknowledged, translated as “to err,” has the specific sense of “going astray” or “going too far”: not just erring, but straying from the path.

Tian is a term that we have chosen not to translate, largely because we believe its normal English rendering as “Heaven” cannot but conjure up images derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition that are not to be found in China; and “Nature” will not work either. In the first place, tian is often used alone to render tiandì 天地—“the heavens and the earth”—suggesting that tian is not independent of this world. The God
of the Bible, often referred to as metonymically “Heaven,” created the world, but tian in classical Chinese is the world.

Tian is both what our world is and how it is. The “ten thousand things (wanwu 萬物),” an expression for “everything,” are not the creatures of a tian which is independent of what is ordered; rather, they are constitutive of it. Tian is both the creator and the field of creatures. There is no apparent distinction between the order itself, and what orders it. This absence of superordination is a condition made familiar in related notions of the Daoist dao and the Buddhist dharma which at once reference concrete phenomena and the order that obtains among them.

On this basis, tian can be described as an inhering, emergent order negotiated out of the dispositioning of the particulars that are constitutive of it. But tian is not just “things”; it is a living culture—crafted, transmitted, and now resident in a human community. Tian is anthropomorphic, suggesting its intimate relationship with the process of euhemerization—historical human beings becoming gods—that grounds Chinese ancestor reverence. It is probably this common foundation in ancestor reverence that allowed for the conflation of the culturally sophisticated Shang dynasty’s di 帝 (ancestral spirits) with the notion of tian associated with the Zhou tribes, militant and Romanesque, who conquered the Yellow River valley. There seems to be sufficient reason to assume that tian is consistent with the claim of Sarah Allan and Emily Ahern that Chinese gods are, by and large, dead people. In the absence of some transcendent creator deity as the repository of truth, beauty and goodness, tian would seem to stand for a cumulative and continuing cultural legacy focused in the spirits of those who have come before. It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between mythos, logos, and historia is radically different from the Western tradition. Culturally significant human beings—persons such as the Duke of Zhou and Confucius—are “theomorphized” to become tian, and tian is itself made anthropomorphic and determinate in their persons.
Finally, *tian* does not speak, but communicates effectively although not always clearly through oracles, through perturbations in the climate, and through alterations in the natural conditions of the human world. *Tian* participates in a discourse shared by the human community—at least by the most worthy among them. Given the interrelatedness and interdependency of the orders defining the Confucian world, what affects one, affects all. A failure of order in the human world will symbiotically be reflected in the natural environment. Although *tian* is not the "personal" deity responsive to individual needs as found in the Judeo-Christian worldview, as aggregate ancestor it would seem that *tian* functions impartially on behalf of its progeny to maximize the possibilities of emergent harmony at all levels. That *tian* is not transcendental, but indeed functions on behalf of its progeny, is seen clearly in the *Book of Documents*: "*Tian* hears and sees as the people hear and see."43

仁. *Ren*, translated herein as "authoritative conduct," "to act authoritatively," or "authoritative person," is the foremost project taken up by Confucius, and occurs over one hundred times in the text. It is a fairly simple graph, and according to the *Shuowen* lexicon, is made up of the elements *ren* 人 "person", and *er* 二, the number "two." This etymological analysis underscores the Confucian assumption that one cannot become a person by oneself—we are, from our inchoate beginnings, irreducibly social. Herbert Fingarette has stated the matter concisely: "For Confucius, unless there are at least two human beings, there can be no human beings."44

An alternative explanation of the character *ren* 仁 we might derive from oracle bone inscriptions is that what appears to be the number "two 二" is in fact an early form of "above, to ascend *shang* 上," which was also written as 二.45 Such a reading would highlight the growing distinction one accrues in becoming *ren*, thereby setting a bearing for one's community and the world to come: "those authoritative in their
conduct enjoy mountains ... are still ... [and] are long-enduring (6.23; see also 2.1 and 17.3).

Ren is most commonly translated as “benevolence,” “goodness,” and “humanity,” occasionally as “humanheartedness,” and less occasionally by the clumsy and sexist “manhood-at-its-best.”

While “benevolence” and “humanity” might be more comfortable choices for translating ren into English, our decision to use the less elegant “authoritative person” is a considered one. First, ren is one’s entire person: one’s cultivated cognitive, aesthetic, moral, and religious sensibilities as they are expressed in one’s ritualized roles and relationships. It is one’s “field of selves,” the sum of significant relationships, that constitute one as a resolutely social person. Ren is not only mental, but physical as well: one’s posture and comportment, gestures and bodily communication. Hence, translating ren as “benevolence” is to “psychologize” it in a tradition that does not rely upon the notion of psyche as a way of defining the human experience. It is to impoverish ren by isolating one out of many moral dispositions at the expense of so much more that comes together in the complexity of becoming human.

Again, “humanity” suggests a shared, essential condition of being human owned by all members of the species. Yet ren does not come so easy. It is an aesthetic project, an accomplishment, something done (12.1). The human being is not something we are; it is something that we do, and become. Perhaps “human becoming” might thus be a more appropriate term to capture the processional and emergent nature of what it means to become human. It is not an essential endowed potential, but what one is able to make of oneself given the interface between one’s initial conditions and one’s natural, social, and cultural environments.

Certainly the human being as a focus of constitutive relationships has an initial disposition (17.2). But ren is foremost the process of “growing (sheng生)” these relationships into vital, robust, and healthy participation in the human community.
The fact that Confucius is asked so often what he means by the expression ren would suggest that he is reinventing this term for his own purposes, and that those in conversation with him are not comfortable in their understanding of it. Confucius’ creative investment of new meaning in ren is borne out by a survey of its infrequent, and relatively unimportant usage in the earlier corpus. Ren does not occur in the earliest portions of the ancient classics; and only three times in the later parts. This unexceptional usage compares with 105 occurrences in the Analects in 58 of the 499 sections.46

Given that ren denotes the qualitative transformation of a particular person, it is further ambiguous because it must be understood relative to the specific concrete conditions of that person. There is no formula, no ideal. Like a work of art, it is a process of disclosure rather than closure, resisting fixed definition and replication.

Our term “authoritative person” as a translation of ren then, is a somewhat novel expression, as was ren itself, and will probably prompt a similar desire for clarification. “Authoritative” entails the “authority” that a person comes to represent in community by becoming ren, embodying in oneself the values and customs of one’s tradition through the observance of ritual propriety (li). The prominence and visibility of the authoritative person is captured in the metaphor of the mountain (6.23): still, stately, spiritual, enduring, a landmark of the local culture and community.

At the same time, the way of becoming human (dao) is not a given; the authoritative person must be a “road builder,” a participant in “authoring” the culture for one’s own place and time (15.29). Observing ritual propriety (li) is, by definition, a process of internalization—“making the tradition one’s own”—requiring personalization of the roles and relationships that locate one within community. It is this creative aspect of ren that is implicit in the process of becoming authoritative for one’s own community.

The contrast between top-down and impositional “authoritarian” order, and the bottom-up, deferential sense of “authoritative” order is
also salutary. The authoritative person is a model that others, recognizing the achievement, gladly and without coercion, defer to and appropriate in the construction of their own personhood. Confucius is as explicit in expressing the same reservations about authoritative relations becoming authoritarian as he is about a deference-driven ritualized community surrendering this noncoercive structure for the rule of law (2.3).

Li has been translated as “ritual,” “rites,” “customs,” “etiquette,” “propriety,” “morals,” “rules of proper behavior,” and “worship.” The compound character is an ideograph connoting the presentation of sacrifices to the spirits at an altar (li 䓬). It is defined in the Shuowen paronomasticaly as lü M, meaning “to tread a path; hence, conduct, behavior”—that is, “how to serve the spirits to bring about good fortune.” Properly contextualized, each of these English terms can render li on occasion, but in classical Chinese the character carries all of these meanings on every occasion of its use.

We have chosen to translate li as “observing ritual propriety.” Again, this rendering is a considered choice.

Li are those meaning-invested roles, relationships, and institutions which facilitate communication, and which foster a sense of community. The compass is broad: all formal conduct, from table manners to patterns of greeting and leave-taking, to graduations, weddings, funerals, from gestures of deference to ancestral sacrifices—all of these, and more, are li. They are a social grammar that provides each member with a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity. Li are life forms transmitted from generation to generation as repositories of meaning, enabling the youth to appropriate persisting values and to make them appropriate to their own situations.

Full participation in a ritually-constituted community requires the personalization of prevailing customs, institutions, and values. What makes ritual profoundly different from law or rule is this process of making the tradition one’s own. The Latin proprius, “making something
one’s own” as in “property,” gives us a series of cognate expressions that are useful in translating key philosophical terms to capture this sense of participation: yi 義 is not “righteousness” but “appropriateness”; zheng 正 is not “rectification” or “correct conduct,” but “proper conduct”; zheng 政 is not “government” but “governing properly” in our translation.

For Westerners, there is ostensibly a distinction to be made between being boorish and being immoral. For Confucius, however, there are simply varying degrees of inappropriate, demeaning, and hurtful behavior along a continuum on which a failure in personal responsiveness is not just bad manners, but fully a lapse in moral responsibility.

In defining filial piety (xiao 孝), for example, Confucius is not concerned about providing parents with food and shelter—we do as much for our domestic animals. The substance of filial piety lies in the “face (se 色)” one brings to filial responsibility—the bounce in the step, the cheerful heart, the goodwill with which one conducts the otherwise rather ordinary business of caring for aging parents (2.8).

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to understanding what li means in the world of Confucius is thinking that “ritual” is a familiar dimension of our own world, and like “benevolence,” we fully understand what it entails. “Ritual” in English is almost always pejorative, suggesting as it often does compliance with hollow and hence meaningless social conventions. A careful reading of the Analects, however, uncovers a way of life carefully choreographed down to appropriate facial expressions and physical gestures, a world in which a life is a performance requiring enormous attention to detail. Importantly, this li-constituted performance begins from the insight that personal refinement is only possible through the discipline provided by formalized roles and behaviors. Form without creative personalization is coercive and dehumanizing law; creative personal expression without form is randomness at best, and license at worst. It is only with the appropriate combination of form and personalization that community can be self-regulating and refined.
Xin, which we have translated as “making good on one’s word,” has been described by Ezra Pound, following his teacher Ernest Fenollosa, as a picture of “a man standing by his word.”\textsuperscript{47} No small number of scholars have excoriated Pound for his philological flights of fancy, but every sinologist must analyze this particular character in the same way: the character for “person” 人 stands to the left of the character for “speaking” or “words” 言. When it is now remembered just how many characters in the classical Confucian lexicon were pictographic or ideographic in nature, we should be willing to allow Pound and Fenollosa their rendering. Modern research has shown that the Shuowen is mistaken in classifying xin under the huiyi 會意 “ideographic compound” category of Chinese graphs; ren 人 is almost surely the phonetic in xin. But the excellence of the philological detective work on this graph in no way invalidates the importance of the fact that every reader of the Analects confronts visually “person” standing by “words” or “speech.” Xin is often translated as “trustworthy.” However, being simply well intended in what one says and does is not good enough; one must have the resources to follow through and make good on what one proposes to do. Interestingly, as with most classical Chinese terms, in understanding xin we must appreciate the priority of situation over agency. That is, xin in describing the situation of persons making good on their word goes in both directions, meaning both the commitment of the benefactor and the confidence of the beneficiary. Xin, then, is the consummation of fiduciary relationships.

Yi. In his translation of the Analects, the distinguished scholar D. C. Lau translates yi sometimes as “right,” other times as “duty,” and on occasion as “moral” or “morality” more generally. If one is committed, as Lau is, to portraying Confucius as a “moral philosopher” in more or less the Western sense, then yi is probably the best candidate as a Chinese lexical equivalent for “morals” or “morality.” But the term “morality” in contemporary English, and particularly in post-Kantian ethics, is linked intimately with a number of other terms: “freedom,”
"liberty," "choice," "ought," "individual," "reason," "autonomy," "dilemma," "objective," "subjective." None of these English terms has a close analogue in classical Chinese, and hence in the absence of these associations, we are skeptical of using "morality" for yi, which is linked intimately with a very different cluster of terms: "observing ritual propriety (li 禮 )," "authoritative conduct (ren 仁 )," "making good on one's word (xin 信 )" (1.13), and so on.

Several variants of the original Shang dynasty characters for yi suggest another interpretation. Yi, etymologically, is an adumbrated picture of a sheep (yang 羊) over a first-person pronoun (wo 我) "I," "we," "me," "us," the origins of which are unknown. As an aside, it is revealing that in a tradition in which person is irreducibly social, the distinction between the singular "I" and the plural "we" is not indicated in the language. The "I" and the social context are reflexive and mutually entailing.

This pronoun wo is itself, in many of its early representations and attested in the Shuowen lexicon, a picture of a human hand holding a dagger-axe (ge 戈). When it is remembered that sheep were periodically sacrificed at large communal gatherings (3.17), we may gloss yi as the attitude one has, the stance one takes, when literally preparing the lamb for the ritual slaughter.

This attitude, this stance, is making oneself a sacred representative of the community, and thereby purifying and making appropriately sacred the sacrificial animal. If this be so, then yi should not be rendered as "moral" or "morality." "Appropriate" or "fitting" are perhaps closer English equivalents for yi, and that is how the term is translated herein. Yi, then, is one's sense of appropriateness that enables one to act in a proper and fitting manner, given the specific situation (4.10, 9.4, 18.8). By extension, it is also the meaning invested by a cumulative tradition in the forms of ritual propriety that define it—import that can be appropriated by a person in the performance of these roles and rituals. It is because yi is the sense of appropriateness that makes rela-
tionships truly meaningful in a community of mutual trust, that Confucius says “making good on one’s word (xin 信) gets one close to appropriateness.”

The reader should keep in mind that “appropriate,” as we use it for translating yi, should be understood in terms of not only its aesthetic and moral connotations, but also with its social and religious implications in mind as well.

Zhi, with or without the sun radical 日 beneath it, is usually translated as “knowledge,” “wisdom,” and “to know.” Donald Munro has rendered zhi “moral knowledge,” but this introduces “moral” again—with its attendant unwarranted associations as discussed above.48 Also, while bringing attention to the important axiological dimension of zhi, it sets a limit on a more holistic sense of wisdom that might not be altogether desirable. We translate it, whenever possible, as “to realize.” “To realize” has the same strong epistemic connotations as “to know” or “knowledge” in English. You may say you believe whatever you like, but you can only know, or realize something, if that something is indeed the case. In addition, it underscores the performative, perlocutionary meaning of zhi: the need to author a situation and “make it real.” Furthermore, by translating zhi as to realize, we believe we are paying proper attention to the Confucian precept generally described as “the continuity between knowledge and action (zhixing heyi 知行合一)—that is, “to know is to authenticate in action.” This practical entailment of the classical Chinese zhi precludes the familiar distinction between knowledge and wisdom that we find in English. If to finalize is to make final and to personalize is to make personal, then “to realize” must mean “to make real,” again, an expression which exploits the richness of English without having to invoke all the philosophical associations that come immediately to mind upon coming across the terms “moral” and “knowledge.”
Xin was originally a picture of the aorta, but the character has been rendered as "mind" as often as "heart." There is much justification for this, for there are many passages in the classical texts which do not make much sense in English unless the xin thinks. But to divorce the mind from the heart—the cognitive from the affective—is to reenter the Western metaphysical realm again, most especially via the mind-body dichotomy, and embrace the notion of an ahistorical, acultural seat of pure rationality. To avoid this reference, we render xin as "heart-and-mind," which is inelegant perhaps, but serves to remind the reader that there are no altogether disembodied thoughts for Confucius, nor any raw feelings altogether lacking (what in English would be called) "cognitive content."

In the classical Chinese worldview, in which process and change have priority over form and stasis, it is frequently observed that, with respect to the human body, physiology has priority over anatomy, and function takes precedence over site. This being the case, it might well be argued that xin means "thoughts and feeling," and then derivatively and metaphorically, the organ with which these experiences are to be associated.

和 He is conventionally translated "harmony," and we follow that rendering. The etymology of the term is culinary: harmony is the art of combining and blending two or more foodstuffs so that they come together with mutual benefit and enhancement without losing their separate and particular identities. Throughout the early corpus, the preparation of food is appealed to as a gloss on this sense of elegant harmony. Harmony so considered entails both the integrity of the particular ingredient and its ease of integration into some larger whole. Signatory of this harmony is the endurance of the particular ingredients and the cosmetic nature of the harmony in an order that emerges out of the collaboration of intrinsically related details to embellish the contribution of each one.
In the Analects, this sense of harmony is celebrated as the highest cultural achievement. Here, harmony is distinguished from mere agreement by invoking the central role of particularity. The family metaphor pervades this text, encouraged by the intuition that this is the institution in which the members give themselves most fully and unreservedly to the group nexus, in interactions that are governed by the customs (li) appropriate (yi) to the occasion. Importantly, such a commitment to family, far from entailing self-sacrifice or self-abnegation, requires the full expression of personal integrity, and thus becomes the context in which one can most effectively pursue personal realization.

De is conventionally translated as “virtue,” or “power,” but the Chinese term more nearly approximates dharma in signifying what we can do and be, if we “realize (zhi)” the most from our personal qualities and careers as contextualized members of a specific community. We translate de as “excellence” in the sense of excelling at becoming one’s own person. The late justice Thurgood Marshall asked for his tombstone to read: “He did the best he could with what he had.” What he “had” was his de, and he surely developed it to the fullest.

De has a range of meaning which again reflects the priority of situation over agency, characterizing both giving and getting. De is both the “beneficence” and the “gratitude” expressed in response to such largesse (cf. 14.34).

Shan is most frequently translated as “good,” but such a rendering has the disadvantage of “essentializing” what is fundamentally relational. A popular anecdote about John Dewey is perhaps useful in making this point.

One afternoon Dewey and a colleague attended a lecture. Having taken their seats, the colleague leaned over and said to Dewey, “Look at those two gentlemen on the end of the row—don’t they look alike!” And Dewey, taking a long look at the two gentlemen, replied with a
smile, "You know, you are right, they do look alike. Especially the gentleman on the left."

Appreciating Dewey's point, we need to understand that shan is first and foremost "good to" or "good for" or "good with" or "good in" or "good at," and only derivatively and abstractly, "good." We have struggled to retain this relational sense of shan, translating it variously as "truly adept," "ability," and so on. This understanding of shan, like "appropriateness (yi 義)," highlights the fundamentally aesthetic nature of Confucianism, where the common good is achieved in the productive relationships of a flourishing community. The character or "ethos" of person and community is an ongoing aesthetic achievement.

文 Wen means "to inscribe," "to embellish," and by extension, "culture." What is interesting about wen is that, given the absence of a severe physis/nomos, nature/nurture distinction in the classical Chinese world, this term like dao is used to characterize the patterned regularity that defines both nature and human culture. For example, tianwen 天文 is the pattern of the heavens, while in the modern language, wenzi 文字 are written characters, wenxue 文學 is literature, wenming 文明 is civilization, and wenhua 文化 is culture. In the classical language, the single character wen does much of the work of these various binomial expressions. This continuity between nature and the human world is another indication of priority of situation over agency and the radical situatedness of the human experience in this tradition.

孝 Xiao is, straightforwardly, "filial piety" or "filial responsibility." Given the central place of the family for the Confucian way, appropriate family feelings are that resource from which a pathway through life emerges (1.2). It is important to note that in promoting the family as the pervasive model of order, the Confucian worldview does not accept that hierarchical social institutions are necessarily pernicious, or that simple egalitarianism should be an uncritical value. Having said this, an obstacle to understanding xiao can arise from a simplistic equation
between filial responsibility and obedience. At times being truly filial within the family, like being a loyal minister within the court, requires remonstrance rather than automatic compliance, yet such a responsibility to question authority has its limits, and is not a warrant to pit one’s own opinions against one’s elders. (2.5, 4.18).

There are other important terms in the Analects. The two elements of Confucius’ “one strand” that give coherence to his philosophy are described in 4.15 as zhong 忠 and shu 蹟, which we have rendered as “doing one’s utmost” and “putting oneself in the other’s place.” This, then, is Confucius’ prescription for how best to determine appropriate conduct. Perhaps it seems odd that the “one” strand is in fact “two,” zhong and shu, but in addition to being two aspects of one method, what ties them together is the presence of the shared “heart-and-mind (xin 心 ).”

In the absence of appeal to principles or rules which exist independent of a situation, Confucius allows that “Correlating one’s conduct with those near at hand can be said to be the method of becoming an authoritative person” (6.30).

Two terms best understood in relation to each other are xue 學 “learning” or “studying,” and si 思 “reflecting.” Just as observing ritual propriety (li) entails a process of making the culture one’s own by appropriating meaning from the communal memory and conducting oneself appropriately (yi) in one’s roles and behaviors, learning similarly requires personalization through reflecting on what we have learned and the application of this learning in an appropriate way to the business of the day.

It is important that xue be construed as an unmediated process of becoming aware (xue is actually cognate with and defined paronomastically as jue 覺 “to become aware”) rather than as conceptually mediated knowledge of an objective world described in sentences that are “true,” as discussed earlier. At the time of Confucius, this “becoming aware” denoted the heightening awareness of the scholar engaged in
both studying and teaching as one pursues the goal of becoming a learned person. It was only later in the tradition that the focus of xue came to rest on studying. Learning, in the xue sense, also involved inheriting, reauthorizing, and transmitting one’s cultural legacy; it is not passive acquisition of “the facts.”

As for si, “reflecting,” it has several defining characteristics. It is generic in covering various modes of thinking: pondering, entertaining, imagining, deliberating, and so on. Not unexpectedly, it is often associated with tolerance. The term also connotes a directed concern. It must also be borne in mind that the seat of si is the xin, heart-and-mind; hence such reflection is not solely a cognitive process, but an affective one as well. The Master sums up this complementarity between xue and si in 2.15:

Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances.

Finally, in the Analects, Confucius and at times his disciples, make approbationary remarks about several categories of persons: daren 大人 “persons in high station,” shanren 善人 “truly adept persons,” chengren 成人 “consummate persons,” renzhe 仁者 or renren 仁人 “authoritative persons,” and so on. We wish, however, to focus on three other categories of persons: the shi 士 or “scholar-apprentice,” junzi 君子 “exemplary person,” and sheng 聖 or shengren 聖人, “sage,” contrasting these three with the xiaoren 小人, “petty person.”

All three of these expressions were in use before the time of Confucius. In the Book of Songs, for example, the term shi is used for a man of middle social status, at other times for a retainer, and yet again to designate a servant. It also appeared to be the term for a lower level functionary of a lord, perhaps a man of arms, somewhat akin to the old English knight (and Waley so translates the term). A junzi was a lord’s son, or perhaps, as Boodberg has argued, the bastard son of a lord.50 The character sheng in the Book of Songs and Book of Documents would appear to have the meaning of “very wise person.”
Confucius appropriated all of these terms for his own use, giving them connotations and denotations that shifted their sense and reference away from position, rank, birth, or function toward what we (not he) would term aesthetic, moral, and spiritual characteristics. Owing to Kierkegaard and others, these three cultural interests are distinct realms in the West; their interrelatedness would, we would maintain, be self-evident to Confucius. Again, the sacred is not *transcendentally* distinct from the secular in China.

Twelve passages in the *Analects* make reference to the *shi*, most of which suggest that he is an apprentice of some kind. The *shi* is to be precise and formal, punctilious perhaps. He has already extended himself beyond the family, for in no passage in the *Analects* is *xiao*—filial piety—associated with the *shi*. Moreover, while the structure of the twelve passages has suggested to most translators that what is being described are the *shi*’s qualities, what he *is*, we believe those passages are better construed as instructions for what the *shi* should *do*. He has set out on a path, a road, but he still has a long way to go, and there is much yet to be done. As Master Zeng says (8.7):

> Scholar-apprentices (*shi* 卒) cannot but be strong and resolved, for they bear a heavy charge and their way (*dao*) is long. Where they take authoritative conduct (*ren*) as their charge, is it not a heavy one? And where their way ends only in death, is it not indeed long?

By describing the *shi* as one who has assumed the burden of *ren*, we get a strong hint that it is a moral and spiritual apprenticeship the *shi* is serving, for *ren* is, again, the highest excellence for Confucius. Further evidence that the *shi* is one who has set out on a spiritual path is found elsewhere (4.9 and 14.2) in which negative instructions are given, the thrust of which is to eschew material well-being.

There are, of course, numerous positive instructions the Master proffers, not only for the *shi*, but for others as well: become steeped in poetry, and in history; study and practice the *li*; listen to, play, become
absorbed in music; perform public service when it is appropriate to do so; and above all—and by so engaging in these efforts—learn to extend one’s human sympathies beyond the family, clan, and village, and learn to become benefactor and beneficiary within a much larger circle. Again, the shi are never instructed in the proper behavior and demeanor due one’s parents, children, or other relatives.

If our reading of these passages is warranted, it will follow that the major goal toward which the shi is striving is to become an exemplary person, or junzi. The shi does, while the junzi more nearly is. In the text, the junzi is almost always described (for the benefit of the disciples), not instructed (because presumably he doesn’t need it). He has traveled a goodly distance along the way, and lives a goodly number of roles. A benefactor to many, he is still a beneficiary of others like himself. While he is still capable of anger in the presence of inappropriateness and concomitant injustice, he is in his person tranquil. He knows many rituals and much music, and performs all of his functions not only with skill, but with grace, dignity, and beauty, and he takes delight in the performances. He is still filial toward his parents and elders, but now takes “all under tian” as his dwelling. While real enough to be still capable of the occasional lapse in his otherwise exemplary conduct (14.6), he is resolutely proper in the conduct of his roles—conduct which is not forced, but rather effortless, spontaneous, creative. There is, in sum, a very strong aesthetic and ethical dimension to his life; he has reauthorized the li, and is therefore a respected author of the dao of humankind.

For most of us, the goal of junzi is the highest to which we can aspire. There is, however, an even loftier human goal, to become a “sage” or shengren; but in the Analects it is a distant goal indeed. What the shengren shares in common with the junzi is that both categories emerge out of effective communication. Etymologically, the junzi 君子 is one who “oversees (yin 上)” community through effective “communication (kou 口).” The shengren (聖人) is a virtuoso of communication, “listening (er 耳)” and “presenting ideas (cheng 星)” that not
only come to define the human experience, but which further have cosmic implications. As we recall from Confucius’ notion of “the proper use of names (zhengming 正名)” in 13.3, to name (ming 名) a world properly commands (ming 命) a proper world into being.

There are eight references to shengren in the text. In one passage Confucius dares not rank himself a shengren (7.34), in another he laments that he never has, and probably never will, meet one (7.26), and in still another he gently chastises Zigong when the latter likens him to a shengren (9.6). And later, even though Mencius allows that the man in the street who acts like a Yao or a Shun (that is, a shengren) is a sage, he, too, suggests strongly that this goal is beyond the reach of most mortals.\(^{5}\)

Yet it is there. There are shengren. They have risen beyond the level of junzi, because 16.8 describes junzi as those who stand in awe of the words of the shengren. From 6.30 we learn that one who confers benefits on, and assists everyone, is a shengren.

And finally, Zixia allows that it is not even the junzi, but the shengren alone “who walks this path every step from start to finish” (19.12). There is a slight hint of the mystical here that is not common in the Analects. But if mysticism it is, it is a mysticism of an unusual sort, coming as it does as the culmination of an active and engaged social and political life, beginning with what was near, and getting to what was distant (14.35). If the career of Confucius is one example of sagehood, perhaps walking the path from start to finish reports on Confucius who, at the end of his life, could give his “heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries” (2.4).

To summarize this brief reading of the qualities of, and relations between, the shi, the junzi, and the shengren: all shengren are junzi, and all junzi were formerly shi, but the converse does not hold. These are, in other words, ranked types of persons, and the ranking is based on a progression from scholarly apprenticeship to sagehood. Shi are, relatively speaking, fairly numerous, junzi are more scarce, and sheng are
very few and far between, owing to the heaviness of the burden, and the distance of the journey (8.7).

The shi are resolute in following the dao as it is embodied in ritual propriety (li) that governs the interpersonal relations definitive of the shi's several roles. Much farther along this journey of learning and doing we have the junzi, who know the li thoroughly enough to express their spirit even in the absence of precedent; they perform their roles masterfully, and derive a deep satisfaction from the grace, dignity, effortlessness, and creativity with which they have come to conduct themselves with others, strangers no less than kin. And it is the junzi who ascend in the midst of many to provide a bearing for exemplary conduct through effective service in roles of social and political responsibility.

At the upper end of this continuum, then, are the shengren. In addition to possessing all of the qualities of the junzi, the shengren appear to see and feel custom, rituals, and traditions holistically, as defining and integrating the human community broadly, and as defining and integrating as well the communities of the past, and of the future. This seeing and feeling of the shengren can be described as an awareness which gives one the capacity to go beyond the particular time and place in which we live, effecting a continuity not only with our contemporaries, but with those who have preceded us, and with those who will follow behind.

The metaphors used to describe the shengren are cosmic and celestial: “Confucius is the sun and moon which no one can climb beyond” (19.24). The culture that finds its focus in this rare person elevates the human experience to heights of profound aesthetic and religious refinement, making the human being a worthy partner with the heavens and the earth. The model of the shengren shines across generations and across geographical boundaries as a light that not only stabilizes and secures the human world, but that also serves humankind as a source of cultural nourishment and inspiration. It is the shengren who leads the way of the human being (rendao 人道) into its more certain future.
In reading the relationship between the shi, junzi, and shengren hierarchically, we must emphasize that the hierarchy should not just be imagined vertically, concluding in a transcendent we-know-not-what. Rather do we want to maintain the rich path imagery of dao: the shengren have traveled, appropriated, and enlarged a longer stretch of the road than the shi and junzi, and they are providing signposts and a bearing for the latter as well. The later Confucian Xunzi has succinctly described this relationship at the close of his masterful essay on ritual, the li:

Only the shengren is able to understand the observance of ritual propriety. The shengren understands this observance with clarity; the shi and junzi perform it with ease; the officials maintain it, and the common people use it to create their own customs. In the hands of the junzi, it becomes the way of humanity; in the hands of the common people, it becomes the business of ghosts and spirits.  

This, then, in all too brief a compass is our interpretation of the eventful world of the Analects, the relational people who experience it, and the language which per-, in-, and re-forms that world and those people. We hope it will enable the Western reader of this text to appreciate how a Chinese Hamlet may have spoken somewhat differently had he read it. Rather than “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy,” he may well have said, “There are more ways of experiencing the heavens and the earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.”
1. Later in this Introduction we mention James Legge, whose translations and commentaries on classical Chinese texts every serious student will wish to consult eventually. See especially *The Chinese Classics*, in five volumes, originally published in Shanghai during the nineteenth century, reprinted by the University of Hong Kong Press in 1960. The first volume contains a biography of Confucius, pp. 56–90. Other biographies in English include Raymond Dawson’s *Confucius*, Richard Wilhelm’s *Confucius and Confucianism*, and perhaps the most readable, *Confucius and the Chinese Way* by H. G. Creel.

2. Thus we should not be surprised to find that writings devoted explicitly to military strategy and tactics were a major genre in ancient China. See for example, *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare*, and the newly recovered *Sun Pin: The Art of Warfare*, the first translated by Roger T. Ames, and the second by D. C. Lau and Roger T. Ames, both published in this same Classics of Ancient China series.

3. The *locus classicus* for surveying Chinese philosophy has been Fung Yu-lan (1953). It has been superseded in most respects by more recent, and more interpretative—but well done—works including A. C. Graham (1989), Benjamin Schwartz (1985), and Chad Hansen (1992).

4. This notation refers to book 7 (of 20 books), passage 1 of the *Analects*.

5. Volume III in James Legge, under the title *The Shoo King*, and volume IV, *The She King*, respectively. The former has also been translated by Bernhard Karlgren as *The Book of Documents*. Karlgren produced an equally literal translation of *The Book of Odes*. A more flowing rendition of *The Book
of Songs is Arthur Waley’s, and a more creatively interpretative version is Ezra Pound’s The Confucian Odes.


9. Other translations of the Analects include James Legge, Volume I; Arthur Waley, The Analects of Confucius; D. C. Lau, Confucius: The Analects; Raymond Dawson, Confucius: The Analects; Simon Leys, The Analects of Confucius. We have also profited from reading the manuscript translation and commentary of the Analects by E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks published by Columbia University Press under the title The Original Analects. Most of these earlier translations have something particular to recommend them: the Lau translation is unmatched in its philological sensibilities; the principle driving the Brooks translation is that historical detail is essential for a full understanding of the text. We hope that their translations and our philosophical presentation of the text will be seen to complement each other.

10. For more on these events, see Derk Bodde’s China’s First Unifier, and the first volume of The Cambridge History of China.

11. The Brooks interpretation is consistent in important degree with the detailed textual work on the Analects by John Makeham (1996).

12. Makeham (1997): 263 states:

The redaction of LY included in the so-called Xiping stone classics (but actually cut over the period 175–183) is said to have been based on the Lu Lun.

13. See note 5.


15. See note 5.

16. Far and away the most influential translation of the Book of Changes has been by Richard Wilhelm (1961). Two recent additions are Lynn (1994) and Shaughnessy (1996), the latter published in this Classics of Ancient China series.
17. The associations between Confucius and the commentaries on the *Book of Changes* is an old story that has fresh corroboration in the new commentaries on this text found at Mawangdui. See Shaughnessy (1996).

18. There is no full English translation of the *Zhouli*. The *Yili* was translated by John Steele as the *I-Li* (Probsthain, 1917), and Legge did the *Liji* as *Li Chi*.

19. Legge (1960) V.


22. A useful reference for Zhu Xi is *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*, Wing-tsit Chan (1986).

23. See P. J. Ivanhoe (1993), and Tu Wei-ming (1979) and (1985).


25. Much of the material in this and the following sections reflects positions we have elaborated on in other writings. See Hall and Ames (1987), (1995), and (1998), and Rosemont (1974) and (1991).

26. Suggested to us by Wang Qingjie.

27. See Veith (1972).


32. *Zhuangzi* 4/2/33.

33. Cited in John DeFrancis (1984):69. While we disagree with DeFrancis about the phonetic significance of classical Chinese, we do so with diffidence.
because of our respect for his contribution to scholarship. Further, while we have greater reservations than he does about the alphabetic reforms for written Chinese, we are entirely sympathetic to the pedagogical reasons which motivate his pressing for them: literacy would become more widespread.

34. Cited in Wright (1953):291. His entire essay—"The Chinese Language and Foreign Ideas"—is well worth the reader’s attention.

35. These few pages are a summary of a portion of Rosemont (1974) which contains relevant references.

36. A persistent theme of both "old China hands" and many scholars. See Dubs (1929b), especially 26–29, and Ullman (1969), 18–20. Plato, Wittgenstein, and most recently, Borges in his "Funes the Memorius" all present a relatively persuasive argument that human beings cannot think "concretely."


39. This lexical section is informed by Hall and Ames (1987), Thinking Through Confucius. Throughout, we describe the Chinese terms dynamically and relationally as much as the grammar of English will allow rather than as fundamentally referential, denoting things, substances, essences. Although Noam Chomsky (1996):52 is arguing in a different context, he is formulating an understanding of language that would seem to provide corroboration for our approach to classical Chinese in particular, and to languages more generally:

...[T]here need be no objects in the world that correspond to what we are talking about, even in the simplest cases, nor does anyone believe that there are. People use words to refer to things in complex ways, reflecting interests and circumstances, but the words do not refer; there is no word-thing relation... nor a more complex word-thing-person relation...

[Italics in the original]


42. See Allan (1979) and Ahern (1981).


47. Pound (1951):22.


49. See the endnotes to 13.23 for an extensive discussion of the culinary associations that have been used to gloss this term.


52. Xunzi 75/19/121. A fuller account of this path of spiritual progress is in Rosemont (1999) and Ames (1999).