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Introduction

Fluidity of the Confucian Canon and Discursive Strategies

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To presuppose that every combination of elements is inferior to their original is to presuppose that draft 9 is obligatorily inferior to draft number H—since there can never be anything but drafts. The concept of the *definitive* text complies only with religion or weariness.

—Jorge Luis Borges, “Versions of Homer”

In our historical conception of Confucianism, we are understandably apt to view it as a grand cultural *Weltanschauung*, a worldview with dominant motifs, telling themes, guiding logic, and governing problematics that may be encapsulated in a master narrative. Elegant and cogent narratives of this sort abound in contemporary studies of Confucianism, masterfully woven by a host of erudite scholars. David Hall and Roger Ames pinpoint what they call “analogical or correlative thinking” as the first-order strategy of coming to grips with reality and the human condition in classical Chinese culture.¹ Tu Wei-ming sees Confucianism as a moral universe in which the self, with its immanent qualities of fundamental goodness, is the locus of ultimate transformation, in the sense of soteriological transcendence.² In pondering the “trouble with Confucianism” in the context of modernity, Wm. Theodore de Bary posits the critical, prophetic role of the *chün-tzu* (the noble man) as the fulcrum of a politicsocial community in which this figure must play the ambiguous roles of a conscientious critic of the dynastic state, a loyal servant of the ruler and a caring representative of the people whose voice could only speak through him.³ Thomas Metzger suggests looking at Neo-Confucianism as a shared cultural “grammar” that involves a “sense of predicament,” the result of the nagging awareness that there is a chasm between

the idealized goal of life—transforming state and society by the heroic moral self—and the dismal realities of the given world—the source of the anxiety of moral failure.⁴

These systematic interpretations, in one way or another, afford supreme guidance for understanding Confucianism as an integrated system of thinking.⁵ They are, however, essentially contemporary attempts to engage the “Confucian tradition” in a dialogue in order to re-invent the tradition. They are *moments* in the hermeneutics of Confucianism, moments when the heterogeneous nature of the tradition is suppressed and subordinated under a dominant motif. The trouble with this kind of macroscopic explanation is that it can be at times deterministic and reductive, excluding the contingent, the exceptional, the unexpected and the alternative. Needless to say, to point to such a problem is not to impugn the explanation itself. It is to remind us that a certain degree of determinism and reductionism is the besetting sin of all generalizations, no matter how tenable and valid they are. The point is that even if the general and somewhat stable intellectual boundaries of the Confucian tradition are correctly drawn, their inexorable constant shifts and alterations, here and there in time and space, must also be duly traced. The transmission of the Confucian canonical texts perforce means their undergoing changes as part of the process of being reinterpreted by various groups for different reasons. These changes in turn were indicative of the dynamic unfolding of Confucian doctrines. Both the texts and doctrines of any vital cultural tradition, such as Confucianism, are always in the midst of transformation, drift, and rupture, *in medias res*, relocated and remapped in ongoing interpretations and publications. Hence, the constant need to canonize and legitimize texts and ideas, that is, to fix a boundary to establish a sense of stable authority. This imposed finality is, of course, fictive, and all canonical traditions are ephemeral.⁶ Ideas and texts will be reconfigured, their boundaries reimaged.⁷

This reconfiguration and reimaging is both conservative and radical in nature. It is conservative in that its oft-avowed intention is to save and preserve the original ideas by retrieving them. It is also radical because often, the substantiation of the value of a doctrine or a text does not depend on a certain condition, especially the original condition. Take the *Ta-hsueh* (The Great Learning) and *Chung-yung* (Doctrine of the Mean), for example. Both originally were chapters in the *Li-chi* (The Classic of Rites), but they were taken out of the classic, classified as independent treatises, and then grouped with the *Analects* and *Mencius* to form the *Ssu-shu* (Four Books). The forging of the Four Books was in essence the reterritorializing and resituating of Confucian texts and their corresponding Confucian teachings, an act that was not intended by the original authors. Nonetheless, such a radical move in no way undermined their value but instead elevated it, for such transience of the classics was sanctioned and demanded by the cultural and intellectual changes of the material

It should also be noted that this unavoidable engagement with the shifting of boundaries of a tradition, be it in the form of texts or doctrines, is not only submission to the tyranny of temporality; it is also acknowledgment of the different temporalities in the dynamic development of a cultural tradition. For instance, how did the Confucian classics relate to histories? How did philosophy interact with exegesis? How did Confucian theory and practice interpenetrate? Foucault had a point when he said that “it is not enough to indicate change. . . . We must define precisely what these changes consist of: that is, substitute for an undifferentiated reference to *change*—which is both a general container for all events and the abstract principle of their succession—the analysis of *transformation*.”⁸ Regardless of whether using the word “transformation” as opposed to “change” is merely semantic legerdemain, the plea is to provide more concrete and substantive illustrations of the vicissitudes of culture. Our inquiry begins with the assumption that the Confucian tradition was not a neatly packaged organic whole in which the constitutive parts fall naturally into their places, but that it displayed the ruptures of all cultural constructions. It was forged and reformed, configured and reconfigured.

This anthology of essays is about the mapping of the intellectual tradition of Confucianism in Chinese history. It is not devoted to delineating a body of texts, doctrines, discourse, and practices in order to define what Confucianism is in any given period, but rather to showing how Confucianism was mapped along the grids of text and discourse, sometimes in relation to *other* traditions such as Taoism and Buddhism, at other times with reference to internal sectarian interests. The authors are interested in understanding how the boundaries between Confucian and other traditions were imagined, negotiated and shifted. There are a common set of issues that all the chapters seek to address:

1. The fluidity of the Confucian canon;
2. The constant need to negotiate the boundaries of Confucianism in relation to other intellectual traditions;
3. The dialogical relations between text and discourse in establishing boundaries for the Confucian tradition;
4. Specific textual and discursive strategies employed in the imagining of boundaries;
5. The range of expansive and contractive strategies used to enlarge or restrict the Confucian tradition’s intellectual space vis-à-vis other traditions.

Guided by these common concerns and issues, our volume argues that to understand Confucianism is to understand how imaginary boundaries were created in order to define a set of texts as Confucian canon and to identify ideas, and hence discourses, as uniquely Confucian. The boundaries were imagined and created to map out the discursive space of Confucianism. The demarcating lines are

created through the use of textual and discursive strategies such as taxonomy of genres and knowledge, as well as textual criticism on authorship and authenticity, to include and exclude texts and ideas. With these strategies, texts and ideas were moved in and out of the imagined boundaries. Thus, in the Confucian tradition, the relationship between texts/ideas and readers/interpreters was open and constantly changing. The essays in this volume are devoted to re-presenting the specific temporal relationships between Confucianism and its interpreters with their textual and discursive strategies. These temporal engagements were the various hermeneutical moments in the history of Confucian thought, in which the Confucian tradition was re-invented. The authors, in one way or another, reveal one central phenomenon represented metaphorically—the constant crossing, negotiating, and imagining of the boundaries that strained to circumscribe Confucianism.⁹

By drawing attention to the heterogeneous nature of the earliest Confucian texts and ideas, Michael Nylan's essay questions that most cherished of historiographic assumptions regarding the Han, the assumption that there was a recognizable Confucian synthesis achieving orthodox status at the time but later dismissed as deficient. This apparent historiographic truism and platitude owed much to the later Ch'eng-Chu masters' strong distaste for Han Confucianism. They presumed that empire, a strong political order, and orthodoxy, an equally vigorous ideological order, must go hand-in-hand. They found Han Confucianism to be insufficiently "orthodox," being neither unitary nor faithful to Confucius's precepts. Ironically, their determined efforts to denigrate all of Han Confucianism might have lent it the essentialized air of a uniform entity, so much so that many eminent Sinologists once spoke confidently of the Han "victory of Confucianism."

Nylan helps us discern the blurry boundaries that defined the complex world of Confucian—she uses often the Chinese term of "Ju"—beliefs and practices. Adducing historical evidence from the Han, she challenges the five fundamental premises that underlie the contention that there was a "Han orthodox synthesis" resulting in the "victory of Confucianism":

1. That we can easily identify who the Confucians really were, as a distinct group with a clearly identifiable ideology;
2. That the empire, that is, its rulers and administrators, like the later Neo-Confucians, presumed an absolute need for a single ruling orthodoxy;
3. That state sponsorship of Confucian activities was consistent;
4. That state promotion of Confucian activities was also effective, leading to markedly greater uniformity in thought and practice;
5. That this accomplished greater uniformity represented something quite different from what had existed in the pre-Han period.

In the process of showing the flaws of these premises, Nylan also reveals the tremendous tensions inherent in the Han Confucian tradition. By dint of the “moral quandaries, paradoxes, and polarities, all of which resulted from inexplicable mysteries that lay at the very center of the Han Confucian way, no amount of painstaking explication by would-be rationalizers could excise these mysteries from the Confucian enterprise.” Challenging the conventional view of a homogeneous Confucian orthodox synthesis, Nylan enjoins us to appreciate the lessons that the heterogeneous Han Confucianism may teach about the role of intellectual ferment, diversity, and inclusiveness in maintaining empires.

A basic reason why a text and discourse cannot be closed permanently is that they all share the same linguistic system despite attempts to develop their own vocabularies in order to exclude the multivocality inherent in all the languages in use.¹⁰ The same term signifies differently in different discourses; multiple and often competing meanings may be inscribed on it. When the interpreter chooses to cross the semiotic boundaries in rendering the *other* text in the language of his/her own intellectual traditions, boundaries become blurred. To articulate such fuzziness or hybridity in intellectual cross-breeding, scholars resort to terms like syncretism or accommodation. Yuet Keung Lo's chapter on Huang K'an's (488–545) commentary on the *Analects* explores the dialogical relationship between the commentator and the canon, demonstrating the problem of the multivocality of the text. Writing commentary was Huang's discursive strategy to break down intellectual boundaries at the canonical level. Primarily by focusing on an emerging Confucian metaphysics as documented in Huang K'an's *Lun-yü chi-chieh i-shu* (Subcommentaries on the Collected Commentaries on the *Analects*), Yuet Keung Lo examines the survival and revival of Confucian doctrines after the fall of the Han in the early third century. Lo demonstrates how Confucian learning accommodated ideas from Neo-Taoism and Buddhism by realigning its doctrinal boundaries, yielding in the end a new metaphysics that would have been quite alien to Han Confucians.

The fundamental impact on the formation of early medieval Confucian metaphysics came from a dualistic ontology of Neo-Taoism. According to Wang Pi (226–249) and other Neo-Taoists, the origin of the universe is identified as Nonbeing from which the myriad things and beings originate. The dichotomy of Nonbeing and being creates a metaphysical dualism of the transcendental and the phenomenal. Confucians like Huang K'an accepted this bifurcation of reality, and wrote about the two realms and their possible relations. To Huang, Principle, which resides in the transcendental realm, finds expression in the human realm, whereas all things and affairs in the human realm are governed by Principle. Hence their mutual interdependence. Unlike the Neo-Taoists, however, Huang did not necessarily consider Nonbeing as the ultimate, accessible only to the sage. Rather, he established a metaphysical hierarchy of selfhood, with sagehood at the pinnacle. It is also noteworthy that this notion of hierar-

chy bore a striking resemblance to a line of early medieval Chinese Buddhist thought, which argued for sequenced and gradual cultivational progression toward nirvana.

For the early medieval Confucians, the goal of self-cultivation is sagehood, which is the embodiment of Nonbeing. In embodying Nonbeing, the sage's mind becomes always empty, without encumbrance and pruned of desires. He then can naturally and appropriately respond to all circumstances. Huang's theory of no mind is quite similar to the Chinese Buddhist theory of self-cultivation most notably expounded in the commentaries on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* by Kumarājīva—the Buddha's mind is free of discrimination and distinction—and his student Seng Chao—the sage's mind is free of defilement so that everything is treated equally as emptiness. But as Lo also reminds us, medieval Confucianism did manage to claim its distinctiveness for its method of self-cultivation by displaying a much stronger interest in nurturing the immanent human nature, so that desires and feelings are not always condemned as intrinsically bad.

Thus, whether as metaphysics or as existential praxis, the principal philosophical issues that animated a third-century Confucian such as Huang K'an could not eschew and in fact invited the mediation by Neo-Taoism and Buddhism. The boundaries of medieval Confucianism shifted as Confucians came to terms with the concept and practice of sagehood and self-cultivation championed by Neo-Taoist and Buddhist metaphysics. Lo's study shows how the Confucian status of the *Analects* was subverted by Huang K'an's commentary, problematizing the practice of assigning intellectual identity to a text. The common language and discourse on metaphysics—the nature of the “sage” and “self-cultivation”—that Taoism and Confucianism shared rendered the boundaries between the two traditions blurred. The meaning of the *Analects* mediated by Huang's commentary could not be categorically either Confucian or Taoist.

As Sung Neo-Confucians developed discursive strategies to identify heresies, Confucian scholars like Ou-yang Hsiu sought to renarrate the history of the Five Dynasties from a Confucian perspective. Tze-ki Hon's essay explores the ways in which a historical narrative was imbued with Confucian messages. In the process, he shows how the past might be manipulated to endorse particular Confucian visions of state and society in the present. Hon compares and contrasts two major accounts of the Five Dynasties: the *Old History of the Five Dynasties* (Chiu Wu-tai shih) by Hsueh Chu-cheng (912–981) and the *New History of the Five Dynasties* (Hsin Wu-tai shih) by Ou-yang Hsiu (1007–1072). The former gives a positive reading of the Five Dynasties as a period with its own unique way of ordering the world; the latter, conventionally labeled as Confucian, condemns the period as a dark moment in Chinese history marred by political chaos and moral degeneration.

Hon argues that these two diametrically opposite views actually represented two different conceptions of *Ch'i* (气) and *Wu-tai* (五代) traced respectively by two gen-

erations of Northern Sung literati, separated by some seventy years. Hsueh, as a first-generation Northern Sung literatus, had served in the governments of various dynasties. He took for granted the military governance that had been in ascendancy since the last decades of the T'ang dynasty. Ou-yang, on the other hand, lived in a time when civil rule had been securely restored. He spoke for a new generation of literati intent on molding a civil culture founded on Confucian ethicomoral principles.

To bring out the differences between Confucian and un-Confucian views of the past in full relief, Hon thematically and systematically examines the way Hsueh and Ou-yang dealt with these issues: (1) the concept of the Mandate of Heaven; (2) Sino-Khitan relations; (3) kinship based on adoption; and (4) the moral mission of a Confucian scholar. Each of them involved discrimination and distinction, that is, a sense of boundary based on a set of unequivocally Confucian criteria. The concept of the Mandate of Heaven separated the ultimately profound from the merely human; the Sino-Khitan relations distinguished the barbaric from the cultured; kinship questioned the value of the patrilineal family system; the moral mission of a Confucian clarified right and wrong, good and evil. In their divergent historical renderings of the meaning and significance of these important issues, Hsueh and Ou-yang presented two different sets of criteria for delineating the boundaries of a Confucian polity. Thanks to Hon's careful analysis of the differences, we have here a revealing example of how boundaries were drawn in historical texts and discourse.

The need for discursive strategies in erecting boundaries between intellectual traditions is further explored in John Henderson's critical examination of Neo-Confucian efforts to identify heresies. Henderson synthetically presents the rhetorical strategies and arguments that the orthodox Ch'eng-Chu school devised to deal with heresies (*i-tuan*), including varieties of Buddhism and Taoism as well as renegade forms of Confucianism. The simplest of these was to reduce heresy to the terms of orthodoxy, to present heresy as a partial or one-sided apprehension of orthodox truth, thus depriving heresy of its autonomy and even its language. Second, orthodox heresiographers schematically related heresies to one another in various uncomplimentary ways. One of these ways was to pair two heresies as complementary opposites centered on an orthodox middle way. Another was to array several heresies in hierarchical orders, for example according to their relative degree of harmfulness to the orthodox way. Third, heresiographers often reduced diverse heresies to a common denominator of error, or to some primal ur-heresies such as that of Mencius's alleged archrival, Kao-tzu. Fourth, and conversely, Neo-Confucian heresiographers were also fond of depicting the most objectionable contemporary heresy, such as that of Ch'an Buddhism or Wang Yang-ming, as a monstrous composite or summa of several earlier heresies.

The last two of these strategies tended to blur the boundaries between various heresies instead of clarifying them. Neo-Confucian heresiographers also obscured the boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy in arguing that the latter had grown to be increasingly subtle through the ages, and thus increasingly difficult to distinguish from orthodoxy. The subtlety of latter-day heresies was matched by the precariousness of latter-day orthodoxy. In view of the straitness of the orthodox gate, Neo-Confucians had good reason to be watchful over themselves even while they were alone.

What is particularly interesting in Henderson's dissection of the heresiographic strategies is the revelation of the *aporia* that inhered in Neo-Confucian heresiography—at the same time that it erects clear-cut boundaries demarcating the straight from the crooked, its professed putative orthodoxy depends entirely on the supposed constant presence of the heterodox. Moreover, by failing to understand heresies on their own terms and by insisting that these pernicious ideas were deviant variations of genuine truths, these protectors of the true way were forever placing the undesirable elements at the core of orthodoxy.

The strategies of identifying heresies were of no use to those Confucians who sought an expansive approach to Confucianism. Wang Yang-ming, the purveyor of the harmful stock of heresy in the eyes of the Ch'eng-Chu partisans, is the subject of Kandice Hauf's inquiry. Wang's emphasis on the subjective experience of moral truths threatened to break down all intellectual and social boundaries. Hauf illustrates Wang's expansion of the boundaries of Confucianism by addressing three issues. First, Wang, in his earnest attempt to open up the quest for sagehood through "goodness unbound," that is, the recovery of the innate moral knowledge (*liang-chih*), purposefully and ecumenically engaged Taoism and Buddhism so that some of their teachings figured prominently in his intellectual universe. The innate moral knowledge gave him, and ultimately everyone, the autonomy to judge what was of value in alternate spiritual traditions, and therefore, the ability to transcend the boundaries between sage and commoner, and between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Second, Hauf describes Wang's Confucianism in action by providing an account of his experience with the non-Han peoples in Kweichow between the years of 1508 and 1510. In accordance with his optimistic belief in the innate knowledge of the good, Wang was convinced of their transformability. Their rough and improper behavior on the outside did not harm their innate goodness. Such outward vulgarity would dissipate and be transformed if Confucian superior persons (*chün-tzu*) were in their midst exercising their moral and scholarly influences. Instead of repudiating outright the characters and practices of the peoples he encountered, Wang took pains to transform them. Hauf proffers an interesting example wherein Wang appropriated a popular cult of the Miao people by reinscribing Confucian meanings on this local religious practice. Rather than treating the Miao worship of Hsiang, the evil stepbrother of the sage-king Shun,

as a "profane cult" (*yin-tz'u*), Wang reinterpreted the legend of Hsiang, making him a paragon of a morally transformed figure, and in the process, Wang used this occasion to sing a paean on filial piety, converting a popular religious cult into a sort of Confucian worship.

Third, Hauf considers the question of intellectual boundaries in terms of the use of physical space by evaluating the use Wang and his followers made of Buddhist, and to a lesser extent, Taoist establishments, such as shrines, temples, and monasteries. Wang Yang-ming often visited, stayed, and taught in Buddhist temples. The point is that Confucians encroached on and shared space with Buddhists and Taoists, often peacefully and matter-of-factly. In all, both in practice and in doctrine, Wang's life and teachings exemplified the elasticity of Confucianism in action. In Wang's thought, goodness, experienced subjectively, became unbounded and flowed freely across intellectual, social, and even ethnic boundaries.

While the idea of goodness cannot be frozen and claimed exclusively by any intellectual tradition, a text can similarly pass through different discursive moments. In Kai-wing Chow's essay, we find a brief history of the hermeneutic contestations that surrounded the classical text of the *Great Learning* (Ta-hsueh), beginning with the Ch'eng-Chu elevation of the text to a separate canon and ending with its branding as heterodox writing by Ch'en Ch'ueh (1604-77). Chow, using the *Great Learning* as a particular instance, addresses the theoretical issue of the fluidity of canonicity in Chinese exegesis. What were the criteria for placing a text within the boundary of an intellectual school? How were the boundaries imagined and of what were they constituted? Chow refers to the change in the status of a text in discourse as the "moment" of the text, signifying the fluidity of its discursive status, rather than the true, objective identification of it as canonical. To use the term "moment" is to avoid organizing the different variations of a text into a rigid schema of development.

As Chow reveals, Chu Hsi created two paradigms for reading the *Great Learning*. The first was structural, whereby Chu divided the text into two parts: *ching* (the classic proper) and *chuan* (the commentary proper). Propelled by his own philosophic emphasis, he himself further added a commentary on the classical passage of "*ko-wu chih-chih*" (investigation of things and extension of knowledge to the utmost). The second paradigm was doctrinal, whereby Chu imbued the *Great Learning* with independent classical status because of the text's clear definition and prescription of the goals, principles and procedures for moral self-cultivation and sociopolitical activism. Chow also shows how these paradigms of reading involved the use of two textual strategies: the assertion of "intellectual affinity" and the creation of "intellectual lineage." The former imagined the mutual identity of the text's messages and Confucius's teachings; the latter attributed the commentary to Confucius's disciple, Tseng-tzu, implying that the classic-commentary division mirrored the master-disciple relationship.

Chu's exposition of the *Great Learning* became orthodox and met no serious challenge until Wang Yang-ming's explicit plea for the return to the old version of the text when he published his *Old Edition of the Great Learning* (Ku-pen Ta-hsueh) in 1518. The circulation of Wang's *Old Edition* and the publication of Feng Fang's apocryphal stele edition had the cumulative effect of undermining the integrity of the official edition of Chu Hsi. Many modifications of the texts by sundry scholars appeared, based on the individuals' philosophic inclinations, no doubt also aided by the spread of printing technology. Finally, in the early Ch'ing, Ch'en Ch'ueh, in an effort to end the unruly motley of interpretations that had accrued around the *Great Learning*, condemned the classic as outright heterodox, a text written by neither Confucius nor his disciple Tseng-tzu, but one that was inspired by Ch'an Buddhism. Reminding one of the heresiographical strategies Henderson discusses in his chapter, Ch'en Ch'ueh, as Chow points out, used a reductionist strategy to reduce the entire text of the *Great Learning* to the heterodox teachings of Ch'an Buddhism.

Chow's highlighting of the hermeneutic "moments" of the *Great Learning* not only reveals the different discursive strategies employed, but also the fact that they were determined by the interpreter's and reader's beliefs and understanding of the Confucian tradition. A text passes through different hermeneutic moments as the boundary between canonicity and heterodoxy shifted.

On-cho Ng amplifies and extends Chow's findings in his pondering of the intimate relationship between hermeneutics and philosophy—the latter was often the domain within which the pursuit of and reflection on normative truths were undertaken. Through a detailed study of the exegetical efforts of an early Ch'ing Ch'eng-Chu scholar, Li Kuang-ti (1642–1718), Ng shows how the exegete's or interpreter's philosophical predisposition and preunderstanding guided his engagement with the classics, thereby collapsing the boundary between hermeneutics and philosophy. Ng's study provides an example of a rhetorical strategy orthodox Ch'eng-Chu heresiographers employed to attack Wang Yang-ming's teachings. In Li's case, his reading of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (Chung-yung) and the *Great Learning*, which involved textual rearrangement and emendation, was a function of his metaphysical understanding of human nature (*hsing*).

To demonstrate this nexus, Ng traces the contour of Li's philosophy, whose central premise was the assertion that human nature was the ontological hinge on which all Confucian meta-ethical arguments turned. In a way reminiscent of Ch'en Ch'ueh's identification of a specific idea with Ch'an Buddhism, Li's critique focused on refuting the Lu-Wang idea of the ontological centrality of the mind-heart (*hsin*). He affirmed the primacy of the innately good human nature as the underpinning of reality. Ng reveals the ways in which Li's hermeneutic rendering of the *Mean* and the *Great Learning* was strongly influenced by this philosophical thesis. In other words, Li, as a contingent historical agent with his

particular philosophic preoccupation, sought a meaningful conflation of the past and present through his historically contextualized interpretation of the classics.

Ng further suggests that viewed in this light, classical exegesis in traditional China, in a general way, displays some interesting and revealing commonality with contemporary interpretive hermeneutics, inasmuch as both point to the ineluctable dialogical relations between the text and interpreter. The ending portion of Ng's essay addresses Li's hermeneutic endeavor in a comparative perspective by referring to the hermeneutic ideas and theories of Martin Buber, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and David Tracy. They all take the classics, or the scriptures, as the textual embodiment of a vital cultural tradition, the locus of their understanding. To all of them, exegesis is an interactive dialogue with a living past ensconced in the classics. The classics, because of their acknowledged essential perpetuity, offer a common context, a single cultural tradition, capable of absorbing and accommodating the diversity and historicity of their interpreters.

By casting Li Kuang-ti's hermeneutics in a comparative light, Ng contributes to a better understanding of Confucian hermeneutics, not as mere repetition of the classical words frozen in a timeless moment, but as a constant historical restating and reinterpretation of the classics' apparently transtemporal ideas. In the final analysis, according to Ng, the messages of the Confucian classics remained forever fluid. As long as those texts were read, the boundaries of their truth-claims would be constantly redrawn in accordance with the philosophical pre-understanding and preoccupation of the interpreters.

If the foregoing chapters all provide a horizontal perspective of the shifting of the boundaries of Confucianism, showing how the Confucian tradition engaged Buddhism and Taoism, and how varying internal orientations within this tradition did battles and cross-fertilized, Hsiung Ping-chen's essay asks us to take a vertical view of the Confucian literati and cast light on the middlebrow. She addresses the question of how self-criticism within an intellectual tradition could be tolerated. By focusing on one such character in the world of the Confucian middlebrow, T'ang Chen (1630-1704) of the early Ch'ing, she on the one hand delineates the real boundaries separating this group of literati from the elite in traditional Chinese society, and on the other, suggests that historians make a greater effort to appreciate the agency of the middlebrow in the making of the Confucian world.

Hsiung asks us to look beyond the texts of the Great Tradition and their authors, and examine the lives and thoughts of the less well-known followers of Confucianism. T'ang Chen and his family were socially and financially ruined during the Ming-Ch'ing transition. T'ang never did receive a sound classical education and endured much hardship. Throughout his life, he grubbed along with limited income from small landholding, temporary lowly administrative employment, small business, literary service and borrowing. At times, he starved. He can be regarded as a miserable failure in conventional Confucian terms. Moreover,

his brooding frustrations, compounded by the sense of personal failure and humiliation, fostered his alienation from dynastic politics and the sociopolitical order. He became a bold critic of the existing system.

In his collected essays, the *Ch'ien shu* (Writings in Obscurity), T'ang attacked the despotic nature of a political order in which authority was concentrated in the hands of one person, the emperor, summed up by his famous indictment: "All kings and emperors are but bandits." He also criticized the oppression of women and the pomposity of men, both results of a social order in which women were treated as subservient. Nonetheless, T'ang considered himself an authentic Confucian, once reporting to the local authorities that Confucius was falsely and improperly worshipped as the God of the Earth in a small local shrine. But perhaps because T'ang Chen, being a middlebrow Confucian, was intellectually isolated and materially hard-pressed, he did tend to approach the orthodox tradition individualistically, often yielding idiosyncratic ideas. As a result, he found no audience, and was by and large excluded from the circles of the elite literati such as Ku Yen-wu, who, as a contemporary of T'ang, was contrastingly blessed with connections and social networks available only to people like himself.

But history provides an ironic twist and somewhat evens the score. A century after T'ang's son-in-law produced the first fifty copies of the *Ch'ien shu* in memory of his father-in-law, a new generation of Confucian literati, interested in statecraft, found T'ang's ideas on the political and social orders inspiring. The compilers of the famous early-nineteenth-century work, the *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (Anthology of Essays on Statecraft of the Imperial Dynasty), included no less than twenty-one essays out of T'ang's original ninety-seven, second in number only to Ku Yen-wu. The boundaries of Confucianism had shifted, when domestic crises and looming foreign problems demanded new thinking. What had been deemed impertinent in the seventeenth century was viewed with enthusiasm in the nineteenth. T'ang's thought was finally embraced as a part of the Confucian heritage.

Lauren Pfister, from a different vantage point, also leads us to a part of the Confucian intellectual universe that is seldom visited, the part where Confucianism critically engaged Christianity. After the British had set up a colony in Hong Kong in the mid nineteenth century, missionaries arrived. In 1843, a young Scottish missionary James Legge (1815-97) met a minor Chinese official, Lo Chung-fan (d. circa 1850). This meeting catalyzed in both men a certain unique understanding of the Confucian classics and rituals, particularly the discovery of a certain monotheism premised on the notion of Shang-ti (Lord-on-High).

Lo left behind a commentary on the *Great Learning*, the *Explanations and Discussions of the Old Text of the Great Learning* (Ku-pen Ta-hsueh chu-pien). As some of the much better-known interpreters of this classic whom we have seen

above, Lo rejected both Chu Hsi's textual changes and his main interpretation of the work. But what is most remarkable about Lo's exegesis is his substantive claims about the nature of the Lord-on-High, who to him, is the "sovereign lord of creative transformation," the Way (*tao*) itself. It is only because of the indwelling presence of Shang-ti in the human heart that ultimate moral transformation is possible. Shang-ti, in fact, makes the human inner being a temple (*tien*), an idea of clear Christian origin, according to Pfister. In sum, Lo's hermeneutic interpretations of the *Great Learning*, although Confucian in many regards, are apparently heavily tinged by his nascent appreciation of an all-powerful being such as the Christian God, evidently a result of his study of the Christian Scripture. (Legge did inform us of Lo's knowledge of the Christian texts.) Lo, in essence, developed a systematic "Shang-ti-ist moral metaphysics," as Pfister describes it. James Legge himself was also prompted to speculate on the "monotheistic" tendencies in the Confucian traditions. In his study of the imperial prayers and worship of the Ming, Legge concluded that inhering in them was a form of ritual monotheism. He was the first missionary to translate the imperial prayers and unequivocally identify the spiritual being addressed in them with the Christian "God." Eventually, as a devout Christian, Legge nonetheless found much in common between Confucianism and Christianity. He declared that Confucius was his "Master," in the same way that Christ was "his Master and his Lord."

Pfister, using the case of Lo's and Legge's hermeneutics, takes issue with Max Weber's rather simplistic characterization of Confucianism in terms of its "relentless canonization of tradition," casting doubts on the tradition's flexibility. Lo's systematic development of a kind of "monotheism" is a good rejoinder. Furthermore, the fact that Legge succeeded in opening up a new understanding of Christianity for Confucian scholars and forged an accommodating approach to the Confucian traditions for Chinese Christians, demonstrates the fertile possibilities of cross-cultural boundary-crossing. Whereas Kai-wing Chow, in his essay, shows how the *Great Learning* moved through its various hermeneutical moments in the commentaries by Chu Hsi, Wang Yang-ming, and Ch'en Ch'ueh, Pfister reveals how the recognition of the notion of Shang-ti in the Confucian classic by Lo Chung-fan contributed to blurring the boundary between Confucianism and Christianity.

This collection of essays, thus, uses the variegated histories of Confucianism to interrogate the nature of Confucianism, a dynamic tradition constantly shifting its boundaries. It was constantly framed and reframed with the inevitable intervention of human agency.¹¹ Therefore, the history of Confucianism cannot be studied apart from the changing narratives (doctrinal, textual, hermeneutical, philosophical, and experiential) that were used to construct it. The chapters assembled here are less about the meanings of Confucianism than the means by which those meanings were manufactured. They thus show that Confucianism

was never a formalism of ideas frozen in time, reified as immutable dogmas. Its very vitality, dynamism, and alas existence, depended on its remaking and re-inventing itself.

NOTES

1. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

2. See for example his two anthologies of essays: *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985) and *Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

3. Wm. Theodore de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

4. Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

5. For a methodological perspective on interpreting Confucianism as a "philosophical system," see Anne D. Birdwhistell, *Li Yong (1627-1705) and Epistemological Dimensions of Confucian Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 26–50.

6. Cf. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

7. Cf. Joseph Grigely, *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 1–10.

8. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 172.

9. This is not the place to discuss the use of metaphors. Nonetheless, here, we do resort to the metaphor of boundary in order to illustrate the fluidity of the Confucian tradition. But we use the metaphor advisedly. Following Donald Davidson, we employ a metaphor, in this case, "boundary," to simply make us attend to some likeness between two or more things. The metaphor has no further meaning than its literal sense. It serves to draw attention to the sheer surface commonality or pattern of relationships and transformations, subsuming under it the diverse historical issues and subjects. It is a descriptive device to portray the movements, textual, doctrinal, or experiential, within Confucianism. It is also a prescriptive device to delimit the interpretive perspective. See Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 246–47, 259–62.

10. On the multivocality of language, see M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

11. We are here borrowing from both Jonathan Culler's and Derrida's notion of "framing," that is, on the act of reading a text in "context," such as all Confucian texts and doctrines were. But this notion of frame really transcends "context" in that, in Culler's words, "it reminds us that framing is something we do; it hints of the frame-up ('falsifying evidence beforehand in order to make someone appear guilty'), a major use of context; and it eludes the incipient positivism of 'context' by alluding to the semiotic function of framing in art, where the frame is determining, setting off the object or event as art, and yet the frame itself may be nothing tangible, pure articulation." See his *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. xiv. Derrida utters something similar: "It is the analytic which determines the frame as parergon, which both constitutes it and ruins it, makes it hold . . . and collapse. A frame is essentially constructed and therefore fragile: such would be the essence or truth of the frame. If it had any truth. But this 'truth' can no longer be a 'truth,' it no more defines the transcendental than it does the accidentality of the frame. . . . Philosophy wants to arraign it and can't manage." See his *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 73. For some elaboration of this idea, see Grigely, *Textuality*, pp. 178–179.