

INTRODUCTION

The last generation of sourcebooks for Chinese philosophy consists primarily of original translations of excerpts from selected, representative texts, with an attempt by the editors at a sufficiently broad coverage of each of the several philosophical lineages under review. In Wing-tsit Chan's 陳榮捷 ground-breaking contribution to this important initiative, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1963), his choice was to provide his readers with a considerable volume of translated textual materials organized chronologically, with a minimum of philosophical commentary or interpretive context. This Chan *Source Book* has been foundational in several senses. In what it includes and what it excludes, it circumscribed the parameters of the philosophical corpus for a generation of students of Chinese philosophy. For example, "original" pre-Qin texts and figures of "orthodox" schools are much emphasized while Han dynasty philosophy is underrepresented, being described as merely eclectic and "miscellaneous" (za 雜). Again, this Chan anthology has set a high bar in the quality of its translations. In this respect, it has galvanized a specific formula of translations for key philosophical terms, promoting what scholars have since come to regard as the standard if not "literal" rendering of the classical Chinese philosophical vocabulary. For its time, it was a quantum advance on what had rather serendipitously been translated previously from the Chinese philosophical canons both in its coverage and in its quality.

In the decades that have ensued since the initial publication of Chan's *Source Book*, substantial and sometimes complete translations of many of the traditional philosophical works included in its pages have appeared. Although these new publications are usually more comprehensive than the sometimes brief excerpts found in Chan's *Source Book*, the fuller translations with some notable exceptions have in many respects provided the student of Chinese philosophy with more of the same. That is, many of the more recent publications have expanded the coverage of this philosophical

corpus through either setting their own chronological limits or focusing selectively on one tradition or another. And they have, with varying degrees of success, aspired to match the quality of the translations found in Chan's *Source Book*.

In my efforts to compile this new *Sourcebook*, while highly appreciative of the progress that has been made, I have had two closely related concerns about the limitations of what has come before. First, many of these new translations have uncritically perpetuated the same formula for rendering key philosophical terms proffered in the earlier efforts. Secondly, there has been insufficient attention paid to locating these philosophical classics within their own interpretive contexts as a precondition for allowing these texts to speak on their own terms. Indeed, I will argue that by default, we have in some important degree inadvertently transplanted these texts into a worldview and a commonsense not their own. And the consequence of uncritically preserving the same formula for rendering key philosophical terms is that this now "standard" vocabulary has encouraged a sense of confidence in the literalness of what is taken to be an erstwhile "Chinese" philosophical vocabulary.

To be fair to the important new translations that have appeared over the past few generations, we must ask the question: At the end of the day, can European languages, freighted as they are with a historical commitment to substance ontology—what Jacques Derrida has called "logocentrism" and "the language of presence"—actually "speak" the processual worldview that grounds these early Confucian texts? Can canonical texts such as the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) and the *Expansive Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) be translated into English and still communicate the worldview that has been invested in them? And more to the point, given the project presently at hand, how does this new *Sourcebook* address the challenge of trying to provide a translation of these Chinese texts that would respect their own implicit worldviews?

It is in this effort to take Chinese philosophy on its own terms then, that the first section of this *Sourcebook* is an extended essay, "Confucian Natural Cosmology: An Interpretive Context." This introductory section is an attempt to excavate and make explicit the tradition's own indigenous presuppositions and its own evolving self-understanding. A careful reading of it will hopefully sensitize the reader to some of the ambient and persistent assumptions that have given the evolving Confucian philosophical narrative its unique identity over time. It is these same presuppositions

that inform the philosophical vocabulary and set the parameters within this cosmological context from which their meanings must be parsed. As I have argued in setting out this interpretive context for classical Confucian philosophy, making cultural comparisons without the hermeneutical sensitivity necessary to guard against cultural reductionism is undertaken at the risk of overwriting these same texts with our own cultural importances. In this insufficiently critical process, we inadvertently make a world familiar to us that is not familiar at all, and in this specious familiarity, effectively surrender much of the substance of the tradition's own uniqueness and value.

As its point of departure, the *Sourcebook* includes a critical version of the original classical Chinese text for both the expert and generalist alike as a basis for making whatever comparisons with, and evaluations of, the translations they might choose. Informing this comparative exercise, I and my collaborators D.C. Lau, David Hall, and Henry Rosemont have over the years in our earlier translations of the canonical texts compiled a rather substantial glossary of philosophical terms describing the implications and the nuanced evolution of this extended cluster of key philosophical concepts. Just as the introductory essay on the interpretive context is a self-conscious attempt to be as cognizant as we can about our uncommon assumptions, I think it equally important to say up front why we have translated particular terms in the way we do, and what reasons we have for abandoning many of the earlier formulations. This abiding concern to provide the context and an explanation for the central vocabulary has prompted me not only to revise but to expand substantially upon this rather extensive lexicon and produce a companion volume for this *Sourcebook* entitled *A Conceptual Lexicon for Classical Confucian Philosophy*. In my best efforts to encourage readers to become familiar with this *Conceptual Lexicon*, I have in the *Sourcebook* within the translated texts themselves included along with their “placeholder” translations, the romanization and the Chinese characters for these key terms: for example, “exemplary persons” (*junzi* 君子). Again, sometimes the same Chinese term in a different context is better served by a different English translation. For example, in alternative contexts, *junzi* should quite properly be translated as “lord” or “prince” or “ruler” rather than as “exemplary persons.”

Respecting the fact that there are no real equivalencies for the key philosophical terms in our European languages, the project here is not to replace one set of problematic translations with yet another contestable set

of renderings. The goal instead is to encourage students of Chinese philosophy in their reading of the translated texts to consult this *Conceptual Lexicon* of key philosophical terms with the expectation that in the fullness of time they will appropriate the key Chinese terminologies themselves and make them their own—*tian* 天, *dao* 道, *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, and so on. In thus developing their own increasingly robust insight into these philosophical terms, the students will be able to carry this nuanced understanding over to inform a critical reading of other currently available translations. Ultimately for students who would understand Chinese philosophy, *tian* 天 must be understood as *tian* 天, and *dao* 道 must be *dao* 道.

In the philosophical introduction, “Chinese Natural Cosmology: An Interpretive Context,” I have argued for what I take to be the evolving worldview within which these Chinese philosophical terms of art must be understood. With this in mind, I have organized the readings thematically in a way that seeks to be consistent with the living tradition itself. This is necessary because Chinese philosophy does not parse comfortably into the standard Western philosophical categories such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and so on. To take just one example, in a culture where there is a presumed continuity between “knowing” as “realizing” and thus as a productive “doing” (*zhixingheyi* 知行合一), what is erstwhile epistemology very quickly spills over into ethics and into social and political philosophy as well.

Again, Chinese philosophy cannot be accommodated wholesale by appeal to the formal disciplines and areas of cultural interest that have come to define the Western academy: philosophy, religion, psychology, and so on. In the case of religion, for example, the well-intended attempt of some recent interpreters to rescue Chinese philosophy from the overlay of a Judeo-Christian worldview fails utterly if, in the process, this rehabilitation serves to secularize Chinese philosophy by robbing it of its importantly distinctive religious dimension. After all, there are many different ways of being religious, and while the Abrahamic traditions might assume uncritically that religion necessarily entails an appeal to a concept of God to the extent that an erstwhile “a-theistic religiousness” sounds like an oxymoron, this should not disqualify the entertainment of an alternative family-centered Chinese religiousness that has never subscribed to this same presupposition.

Without denying that our familiar disciplines and their categorical and theoretical structures can be qualified, expanded upon, and reshaped

in sufficient degree to permit their application to the Chinese tradition, I have proceeded on the premise that to invoke these existing taxonomies as principles of organization would, on balance, be a source of more loss than gain. Indeed, the technical vocabularies and categories that define these familiar academic disciplines would only be a persistent and compounding source of equivocation. Of course, the important exception to this decision to abjure most of our formal categories is to retain reference to the discipline of “philosophy” itself. And this is not just a semantic quibble. First, philosophy is curious in the sense that it is the only intellectual discipline that takes the definition of its subject matter itself as a basic element in its subject matter. Again, this allowance is made because the use of “philosophy” as opposed to “thought” or “culture” is not neutral—it is a normative term that bestows high value on the object of its discourse. The designation “philosophy” in the academy is an acknowledgment awarded to profound and serious thinking to the extent that many if not most of professional philosophers are disinclined to refer to themselves directly as “philosophers,” usually preferring some more modest variant of “doing philosophy” or of being a “professor of philosophy.” This entire *Sourcebook*, then, is an attempt to extend the synoptic term “philosophy” and to bring it into clearer definition when applied to the Chinese tradition broadly and to Confucian philosophy in particular. It is at the same time an argument for the depth and quality of Chinese thinking with respect to some of the most perennial and important issues that confront us as human beings.

In exploring early Chinese cosmology as the relevant interpretive context for this *Sourcebook*, I have tried to find the language necessary to distinguish it from the reductive single-ordered, “One-behind-the-many” model more familiar in classical Greek idealism in which we seek to understand the “many” by coming to know the “one” ideal that lies behind them. Instead, I have argued for the persistence of a more holistic focus-field model perhaps most succinctly illustrated in the *Expansive Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), one of the canons of Confucian philosophy that is included below as seminal in setting the Confucian project of an optimizing symbiosis sought through personal and thus cosmic cultivation.

As an organizing strategy then, I appeal to the ecological project of an unrelenting regimen of personal cultivation as the pervasive preoccupation of Confucian philosophy, where this process is radically embedded and symbiotic to the extent that not only the family and community, but the very cosmos is perceived as expanding in meaning by virtue of this

continuing human enterprise. A personal commitment to achieving virtuosity within one's own relationships is thus both the starting point and the ultimate source of personal, social, and indeed cosmic meaning. In cultivating one's own person through achieving and extending robust relations in one's family and beyond, one not only enlarges the cosmos by adding meaning to it, but in turn, this increasingly meaningful cosmos provides a fertile context for the project of one's own continuing personal cultivation.

To take a concrete example, the modest and always self-effacing Confucius not only allows but endorses with enthusiasm one description of himself—that he is a person who “cherishes learning” (*haoxue* 好學). Confucius is adamant that true “learning” is coincident with moral cultivation as a commitment to growth in relations. And for Confucius, such learning means specifically to have the unrelenting resolve to become increasingly consummate in the way one lives one's roles and relations (*ren* 仁). Becoming consummate in one's conduct is a lifelong project that quite literally begins at home, and that through the refined and elegant expression of a relational virtuosity in all one does, is irreducibly collateral and transactional. I have selected the most representative passages and assembled them thematically in a way that replicates this process of meaning-making, beginning with personal cultivation and expanding radially outward to constitute a distinctively Confucian form of human and family-centered religiousness.

In deliberating on what to include in this *Sourcebook*, I have begun from what is close at hand: that is, the vocabulary most immediately necessary to the project of personal cultivation. I have then extended this terminology radially to include the cultivation of one's person within the context of the family, the community, the polity, and ultimately, the cosmos. Surrendering any pretense at being able to represent this rich classical tradition in any comprehensive way, I have simply sought to choose those illustrative passages that define both the terms of art and the problems they address. I want to highlight some of the philosophical issues that have been important to this culture's story as it has, and as it continues, to unfold. It is hoped that students by developing their own understanding of the vocabulary and the issues defining the classical Confucian philosophical narrative, will thus be inspired to read other available, fuller translations of Chinese philosophy with a greater degree of nuance and insight.

Reflecting on the actual use of this *Sourcebook* in the classroom, I have followed the *Expansive Learning* and tried to think in terms of its guiding

metaphor, the root and branches. I have limited myself to the formative and foundational pre-Buddhist Confucian thinkers who in the course of time became the orthodoxy of a continuing and evolving philosophical discourse. I have tried to treat the philosophers included as disparate members of sometimes interconnected but loosely defined lineages rather than as members of erstwhile “schools” of thought. I have read them both ecologically and as evolutionary in deference to the cosmological postulates that are acknowledged to be defining assumptions within this early Confucian narrative: “continuity in change” (*biantong* 變通), “the inseparability of continuity and multiplicity, of particular uniqueness and vital context” (*yiduobufen* 一多不分), “the mutuality of forming and functioning” (*tiyong* 體用), and “the continuity between and inseparability of the human and the cosmic orders” (*tianrenheyi* 天人合一).

In my translations I have tried wherever possible to use the plural form (“exemplary persons”) with the pronoun “their” to avoid the sexist language of “his” and “her.” Neither gender nor the distinction between singular and plural is marked in the classical Chinese language. In avoiding sexist language, I am not concealing and thus excusing gender discrimination as an integral aspect of Chinese culture predating and certainly reinforced by the Confucian tradition. On the contrary, I want to acknowledge the didactic and programmatic function of these Confucian texts as they are reinterpreted and reauthorized to serve the needs and enhance the possibilities of succeeding generations. To this end, a progressive and evolutionary Confucian philosophy as a living tradition must in our time be reconfigured to prompt a future free of gender prejudice. Confucianism is not a dogma, and there is nothing in the language that requires the gender bias.