

*The Original Analects*

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE ASIAN CLASSICS

*Translations from the Asian Classics*

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# The Original Analects

Sayings of Confucius and His Successors

*A New Translation and Commentary by*

白牧之

E. Bruce Brooks

*and*

白妙子

A. Taeko Brooks

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To

Tswēi Shù 崔述 (1740–1816)

述而不作



## Preface

Chinese wisdom is known to the West chiefly in its escapist mode. But since China, alone among the great civilizations, has maintained a continuous political identity for more than two thousand years, its *practical* aspect also invites attention, on the chance that there may, after all, be more to life than the retreat from life.

Those who choose to pursue this possibility do encounter suggestive contrasts. Many Western thinkers posit an essential antagonism between a state and its people, with government little more than an armed truce between them, whereas one strand of Chinese thought holds that state and society complete each other; that they do not ultimately conflict; that rule is beneficial. There are also negative views, less novel to Westerners, which find the state to be hostile to the aspirations of its people, or aspiration itself to be absurd. These streams of thought and their variants meet and interact to form the rich tradition of Chinese philosophy.

The Analects dates from the beginning of the period when these philosophical traditions were beginning to be articulated. It seems to consist of disconnected sayings or conversations between Confucius and his followers, among which will be found striking remarks about social mutuality and governmental responsibility, but also much less obviously relevant material, and an apparent lack of overall plan. It is at this point that the search for an alternate political theory tends to peter out. According to our researches, which are briefly summarized in the Appendices, the Analects does have a rationale, but a developmental rather than an integral one. We find that the work contains only a core of sayings by the historical Confucius, to which were added layers of attributed sayings and conversations invented by his successors to update their heritage, and to address the new needs of changing times. Understood in this way, the Analects sayings do indeed document the historical Confucius, as tradition has always held, but they also reflect the changing concerns of his later followers, including their disputes with rival points of view, over a period of 230 years from his death in 0479 until the extinction of his state, Lǚ, and with it the Confucian school of Lǚ, in 0249.

This span encompasses all but the last 20 years of the period known as the Warring States, the classic period of Chinese thought, which ended in the political unity imposed by the Chín conquest of 0221. Thus was established the first of the Chinese empires, for which the Warring States centuries seem in retrospect to have been a period of preparation. Besides the frequent wars for which they are named, these were also the centuries which witnessed the growth of trade, the spread of writing, the rise of bureaucracy, the elaboration of ritual, the growth of technology, the invention of myth, and the rise of the “little” people as a factor in great affairs. This social and intellectual tumult, which is only dimly visible in the extant texts, profoundly shaped the development of Chinese thought.

To assist the reader in perceiving the Analects in this way, the present translation departs from all previous ones in presenting the material *in historical order*. The old numbering of passages has been retained, to facilitate scholarly reference and maintain convertibility with other translations, but the sayings themselves have been arranged, as nearly as possible, in the order in which they were added to the text. Behind the Analects as thus ordered, the reader may for the first time discern the great events of the age, the rival thinkers with whom Confucius’s successors kept up a sometimes acrimonious debate, and, alone at the beginning, Confucius himself, the intensely dedicated if unsuccessful courtier who speaks to us in the core sayings.

A few conventions have been adopted to make the commentary more accessible for readers new to antiquity or things Chinese. The culturally intrusive abbreviation BC in dates is replaced by a prefixed zero (as, 0221 = 221 BC), and Chinese words have been spelled by a convention more intuitively obvious than the standard systems to readers with established English-alphabet reflexes. These devices (for details, see the Introduction) are commended herewith to other writers on these subjects. On the other hand, the specific thought and syntax of the text, and the form of some of its idioms, have as far as possible been preserved, drawing for the purpose on the wide resources of literary English, rather than adjusted to the supposed predispositions of readers, in the conviction that the value of a translation lies in conveying to its readers something that they did not already possess.

It may not be a coincidence that most previous English translations of the Analects have been made for a British audience, since the feudal heritage of Britain helps make the postfeudal world of the Analects more intelligible. To annex this advantage for American readers, occasional European references have been made. It is hoped that any European readers will look on these touches with an indulgent and forgiving eye. Another motif in the commentary is a running discussion with Arthur Waley, to our mind the most probing of Analects translators, to remind the student of the existence of other opinions, and also for what Bernhard Karlgren once felicitously called “the pleasure of crossing swords with him.”

Specialists may skip the commentaries after each passage, which are set in smaller type to facilitate that process. Generalists will find in them a modest sample of what a learned commentary might contain. Another part of their purpose for the general reader is simply to slow the general reader down. The Analects is not a unitary treatise, to be skimmed in half an hour, but a corpus of insights, each to be pondered before going on to the next. Its gnomic sayings by their nature invite, and indeed require, the reader’s mental participation in order to extract their meaning and develop their value.

The intent of these sayings is at bottom ethical: to guide Confucius’s hearers (and their successors) by strengthening resolve, shaping conduct, and preparing for the crises of practical life. Over the centuries, they have proved highly effective for that purpose. They convey, not less strikingly because discontinuously, a vivid sense of the importance of holding to right principles, doing the honorable thing, and working toward the ideal, the humane, public outcome. Confucius was himself a political failure, and many of these sayings also provide psychological support for the principled individual *in adversity*, and have helped such individuals not only to survive, but to preserve their capacity to contribute to society. Still other sayings constitute a different resource: a plan for society itself, in which ruler and ruled interact on a less adverse basis. This not quite lost tradition may prove to be of value for the long future of China; it may also conceivably become a suggestive addition to the heritage of other nations.

Readers of this Analects are thus invited to join earlier readers in many centuries and indeed in many languages, who have found in this text a faithful companion on our common, ongoing journey.

E. Bruce Brooks  
A. Taeko Brooks

22 November 1997



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