
Review: The Master's Voice: On Reading, Translating and Interpreting the "Analects" of Confucius

Reviewed Work(s): The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation by Roger T. Ames, Henry Rosemont and ; The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Followers by E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks; The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu) by Chichung Huang; The Analects of Confucius by Simon Leys

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Source: *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Summer, 2000), pp. 563-581

Published by: Cambridge University Press for the University of Notre Dame du lac on behalf of Review of Politics

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1408208>

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The Master's Voice: On Reading, Translating and Interpreting the *Analects* of Confucius

Alice W. Cheang

The end of the twentieth century witnessed a Confucian revival. Beginning in the 1980s, we had, among those who would speak in behalf of the Chinese, advocates like Tu Wei-ming who predicted a "third wave" of Confucianism that—with the gradual waning of Marx-Leninism's star—would provide a new ideological foundation to undergird the economic boom on Asia's Pacific Rim. In the West, the years preceding the *fin de siècle* produced a bumper crop of scholarly works on Confucian thought and—more to the general public's benefit and interest—numerous translations of the *Lunyu*, the collection of sayings which (according to tradition) contain all that we have of Confucius's teachings, as directly transmitted to his disciples. This essay reviews four of these translations, those by (in alphabetical order) Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks, Chichung Huang, and Pierre Ryckmans (writing under the pseudonym Simon Leys). All use "the *Analects*" as their title, after the nineteenth-century missionary-scholar James Legge. The four are by no means the only recent translations of the book, although two are among the very best, but they represent something of the broad spectrum of styles and approaches to interpreting Confucius. I would like first, however, to describe

Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., translators: *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998. Pp. xv, 326. \$27.00. \$14.00, paper.)

E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks, translators: *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Followers*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Pp. x, 342. \$29.50.) To obviate the tedious formality of calling these joint authors "the Brookses," I will refer to them hereafter as one corporate body, Brooks.

Chichung Huang, translator: *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 216. \$11.95.)

Simon Leys, translator: *The Analects of Confucius*. (London and New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997. Pp. xxxii, 224. \$12.95.)

my own approach to reading the *Analects*—not my interpretation of its contents but my understanding of how the text works on me as one of its many readers—by way of outlining a general framework for my review.

“Every translation is an act of interpretation,” but in few cases is this more true than of attempts to put the *Analects* into another language. The text is made up of very short passages, divided into twenty sections or “books” of varying length, in which (as the title suggests) Confucius speaks. The topics that form the subject of his conversation, though numerous, fall into two broad categories: those that have to do with the individual’s conduct in relation to the human collective (ranging from family to body politic) and those having to do with the individual’s conduct in relation to the realm of the sacred. Sometimes he is represented as making a simple statement—musing, reflecting, or, more rarely, pronouncing—and sometimes as putting a question to an interlocutor or answering a question that has been put to him. In the former case, the passage is nearly always presented without context, in the latter with minimal context if any. The form of the book precludes extended argumentation, so that all we have for understanding Confucius’s views are these terse, aphoristic sayings. But since the passages are not systematically grouped by topic (nor, by and large, according to any immediately discernible organizational principle), it is not always obvious exactly what the sayings are about, nor what relation they bear to one another.¹ Add to this the difficulty of the language, with its archaic vocabulary and an oblique, elliptical grammar that often leaves referents ambiguous or unclear, and the content as well as the field of the Master’s discourse becomes at times a matter of opinion.

Simon Leys, in his short but inspiring introduction, notes that the *Analects* is a “classic,” by which he means that the book is the canonical text at the core of a much larger textual tradition, open-ended because continuously growing as new materials—such as

1. With some exceptions: Book III, which has many passages on ritual, and Book X, nearly all of which is about ritual etiquette. In Books XVI through XX, universally regarded as of later origin than the rest of the *Analects*, the passages tend to be longer, with some narrative content, including numerous anecdotes about Confucius and his disciples and their encounters with historical and imaginary figures.

annotations, commentaries and glosses—are added to it. Our four translations represent some of the latest accretions to this burgeoning corpus, and two of these (Brooks and Leys) contribute commentaries. But perhaps the open-endedness of the *Analects* refers not just to the accumulation of commentarial traditions around the text, but is intrinsic to the character of the text itself. So much of what the reader is accustomed to taking for granted in other texts is missing in the *Analects* that we have perforce to read *into* the text merely in order to read it—supplying, as the case may be, a background to make sense of a conversational fragment in a given passage, narrative links connecting actions recorded in one passage with those in another, an explanation plausible enough to reconcile apparent inconsistencies between different passages. No other text in classical Chinese (except, perhaps, the *Book of Changes*) so insistently challenges us to exercise our creative faculties in interpretation, so that the burden of making sense of the text is shifted from the author to the reader; or rather, the text is perceived by the reader as incomplete until he, in the act of reading, completes it.

Take this pronouncement from Book Four, by common agreement belonging to one of the older, if not the oldest, strata: “The Master said, *De* (variously, virtue, moral force, excellence) is not solitary; it necessarily has neighbors” (IV, 25). Is he referring to the transformative power of *de*, which draws people irresistibly to itself (Leys’s interpretation); or does this saying emphasize the social character of *de*, which cannot exist in isolation (Brooks)? The former is consistent with other passages on good government, such as the simile likening the ruler to the polestar around which all other stars revolve (II,1), while the latter speaks to the fundamentally Confucian premise that human beings can realize their humanity—their humanness (*ren*)—only in the society of other human beings. Either reading may be correct, and both are persuasive; but the weight each carries in a cumulative theory of the social and moral vision in the *Analects* is quite different. Sometimes it is possible to get interpretations that are essentially opposed in meaning out of the same passage. III, 5 has been taken to mean either “Barbarians with rulers are not as good as the Chinese without” (Ames and Rosemont, Brooks, Leys) or “Barbarians have rulers, unlike the Chinese, who do not [in the sense of failing to respect their rulers (Huang) or allowing usurpers to take

their rightful rulers' place (Arthur Waley)]."² Occasionally Confucius even appears to contradict himself outright, as when, in a text where *ren* is mentioned (according to a count by Teruo Takeuchi) 105 times, IX,1 insists, "The Master seldom spoke of profit, fate, or *ren*."

In this way, the reader of the *Analects* assists in composing the text, not only with individual passages, but also in reading one passage in relation to another. There being no compelling necessity to read the passages in any particular order, most of us fall into the habit of coming back to the text, for short visits, again and again. The opportunity for serendipitous encounters with the text—with different parts of the text in different combinations, at different times and under different circumstances—is thus greatly enhanced. A reader may get to know the *Analects* very well, but only slowly, in gradual increments, never all at once and most assuredly never as all of a piece. Above all, he gets to know the *Analects* in his own way. For participation is crucial if we are to learn anything from this book. In VII, 8, Confucius is recorded as saying, "If [I] raise one corner and [they] do not come back with the other three, I will not do [it] again." "They" are, presumably, students, in which case "it" must be the lesson. According to this analogy with the carpenter's square, whatever results from the Master's instruction must be in large part the student's own work. A similar distribution of effort holds between text and reader: the text gives us just enough (sometimes not quite enough) to get started, and we have to "come back with" the rest. Thus the *Analects* does with its reader what Confucius purports to do with those who would learn of him.

This becomes important when we remember that much of the teaching in the *Analects* seeks to model moral behavior—behavior that is becoming to a truly responsive and responsible human being—by means of exploring such questions as the meaning of

2. *Bu ru* usually means "not the equal of" in the sense of "inferior to," so a grammarian might argue, *prima facie*, that only the first reading is valid; but we may also construe an implied topic in the passage: "In depravity, the barbarians [who still honor their rulers] have not reached the level of the Chinese [who no longer do so]." Both readings are thus grammatically possible, and in both Confucius—whether praising or censuring—shows himself loyal to his own cultural group. Leys also compares the merits of these two readings (see his note on this passage, pp. 121-23).

humanity (*ren*), the content of ritual (*li*), and conduct appropriate to the gentleman (*junzi*). No one can be made into a better person simply by being told that this would be a good idea, still less by reading up on the subject; but if, using these methods, we can be induced to make an active effort to engage with our mental, emotional, and psychic energies—through study (*xue*) and meditation (*si*)—some of the vital activities involved in becoming and doing good (*weiren*) and in being and acting more fully human (also *weiren*), we will have taken a step towards actualizing that goal. Or, as Confucius would say, more succinctly, “Who says that *ren* is far away? No sooner do I wish for it than it is here” (VII, 30).

The fact that the *Analects* used to be memorized only served to magnify the effect just described. To have by heart early in life an archaic text like this is to develop an intimate relationship with something that remains, for a long time, only imperfectly understood. The individual words of the text, apprehended at first as sensory impressions, are familiar without necessarily being intelligible; then, with time and repeated rehearsal, we begin, little by little, to grasp their semantic content, until finally the whole comes within the compass of our analytic powers. More simply put, the ways in which we interact with the text grow and change along with our capacity to understand it, but they tend to develop in a certain sequence. The remembered text evokes an emotional response from us long before we learn to penetrate and dissect it with the tools of reason. “Getting it by heart” thus aptly describes the process of internalizing a text; for, once properly entrenched, that text continues to command us primarily from the seat of feeling, however much intellectual appeal it may come to acquire.

Leys and Brooks, the authors of the two translations with commentaries, have clearly understood and accepted this invitation to subjective response. Their commentaries include, in addition to the usual textual and explanatory notes, remarks that represent the authors’ thoughts and opinions, not as philologists, historians, or philosophers, but as private persons reading and reacting to the words of the text for their own sake. Hence Brooks will, without embarrassment, interrupt an earnest proposition about the impact of material culture on patterns of warfare in order to display their variegated acquaintance with Bedouin horsemen, Japanese gagaku music, and Nero Wolfe, less to prove

a point than to divert us with a playful or provocative association of ideas; and Leys happily goes off on a tangent whenever Confucius affords him occasion to invoke a parallel with the work of another author, expatiate on some quirk in the Chinese national character, or cavil at Arthur Waley. That in both commentaries the personal and subjective should be interleaved among matter of a more strictly scholarly nature is wholly appropriate. The text admits the possibility of all kinds of responses and, so long as there is integrity in the response, each has a certain validity. There is no one way to receive the teaching of the Master.

In writing as they have done, Brooks and Leys place their work in the direct line of the Chinese commentarial tradition. Brooks even adopts the form of the traditional commentary; Leys, more modestly, puts his in a section of "Notes" at the back (although the notes are as long as his translation). In either case, they model a participatory approach to the *Analects*, one that, in seeking to engage the text, engages us in the text along with them. This is how commentary has traditionally been conceived as a literary genre: one wrote commentary as a way of entering into conversation with the text—or rather, with the living voice of the (perhaps dead) author that the text embodies—and in so doing opened a way into the conversation for others. The close juxtaposition of text with commentary (added as marginalia at the top of the page or inserted between passages as interlinear notes) reproduces the point-counterpoint effect of dialogue. Over time a text may accumulate numerous commentaries, as others are stimulated to join the conversation, or, to put it another way, as the conversation expands to make room for other voices. This is the point of Leys's remark about the open-endedness of the *Analects*, that in its all-embracing magnitude the text comes to assimilate, not only the words of the Master himself, but those of everyone—past and future—who listens to him, makes answer to his questions, and asks questions of him in return.

It is said that, when a poem is translated, the first thing to be lost is the poem itself. The first thing to disappear in a translation of the *Analects*—its most distinctive formal characteristic—is the opacity of the text. Much that in the original is dense and ab-

struse becomes clear, comprehensible, and pellucidly simple. The translator, constrained by the limits of the grammatically feasible, usually has to choose among several interpretations, all possible in Chinese, so that most of the latent ambiguity in the original is suppressed in the converted text. At the same time, what in Chinese reads as mere suggestion must often perforce be made explicit. The text, so spare in the original—or, as Derrida would have said, so full of absences—proliferates under the translator's hand until most of the gaps that are essential to keeping the meaning open are filled in. The *Analects* then comes across in translation as fully and immediately accessible, to some even as highly readable; indeed, it is now possible to get through the text quickly and easily. What has been added is necessary in order to render the words of Confucius intelligible in another language, but the result is a text in which the balance of power is shifted towards the author (in this case the translator) and away from the reader.

Ames and Rosemont believe that it is possible for a translator to render the *Analects* in such a way as to recover its original meaning, that is, a meaning close to that intended by the author(s)/compiler(s). Western readers must first, however, be warned against the distortions that their linguistic and cultural training will have predisposed them to project onto this non-western text. Examining another culture from the vantage point of one's own worldview is likened to looking through a window; sometimes our vision is so obfuscated by our conditioned perceptions that the window turns into a mirror, reflecting back only what is already familiar to us. For this reason the translators take pains in their introductory matter to identify the sources of the otherness that they perceive in the *Analects*.

To summarize their thesis, classical Chinese belongs to a class of languages that inscribe a processual, event-oriented relation between the individual and the world, as opposed to the essentialist, substance-oriented bias inherent in the Indo-European languages. One important consequence of this divergence in orientation is that, in classical Chinese, the performative aspect of language—language as embodying action—tends to predominate over its descriptive aspect; the statements in the *Analects* are therefore meant to be read not as *descriptions* of the nature of things to edify the student's mind, but as *prescriptions* to show him how he may in his own person bring to bear on the flow of events that make up the world around

him. So, when Confucius talks about *li*, he is not so much telling us what “ritual” is as exhorting us to “ritual action.” The translators try to illuminate this fundamental difference by using a lexicon with as few ready-made associations in English as possible. *Ren* is “authoritative conduct” (instead of the usual “goodness” or “humanity”) in order to emphasize its nature as process rather than quality, as emergent in human activity and not the attribute of an essential mode of existence; likewise, *zhi* (more commonly “to know/knowledge” or “wise/wisdom”) becomes simply “to realize,” because in classical Chinese there is, according to Ames and Rosemont, no true division between the spheres of knowledge (*zhi*) and action (*xing*): the internal action of realizing that something is worth doing or being is not in fact separable from the external action of realizing it, making it a reality.

Ames and Rosemont have done much to alert the reader to the pitfalls of cultural (mis)appropriation—presuming as valid in someone else’s culture what one holds true of one’s own. But though “goodness” and “benevolence” are poor equivalents for *ren*, at the very least they convey something meaningful to the English reader, whereas “authoritative conduct” does not. Again, while “government,” with its unwanted baggage in the form of Western concepts of law and jurisprudence, fails to translate *zheng*, “sociopolitical order” is hardly an improvement.³ Moreover, it is possible to overemphasize the otherness of other cultures. The *Analects* has had, in the words of Ames and Rosemont, an enor-

3. At the same time, the translators run the risk of foregrounding western values in their own analytical interpretation of the *Analects*. Here are two examples: (1) They apologize for the lack of a coherent vision in the *Analects*, adding that there is greater coherence than is apparent at a first reading (pp. 9-10). I see the deliberate suppression of systematic arrangement in the received text of the *Analects* as vital to the way in which the *Analects* has traditionally instructed its readers. Perhaps, to a sensibility weaned on Confucius and Laozi, the arguments of Hegel may come across as inordinately and overwhelmingly monolithic. (2) The translators deduce, from the hierarchical relationship implicit in the terms *shi* (“scholar-apprentice”), *junzi* (“exemplary person”) and *shengren* (“sage”), that these are stages in human development marking progress further and further along a path towards an ultimate destination (pp. 62-65); but—as Fingarette and others have demonstrated, and Ames and Rosemont’s own findings would seem to corroborate—the “way” as conceived in the *Analects* is not so much the path leading towards a goal as it makes a goal out of being on the path, so that the way is, as it were, its own destination. In other words, there is no necessary order of progression, and this may be one of the reasons why there is no necessary order of presentation.

mous influence on “defining ‘Chineseness’” (p. 9). While this statement is unquestionably true, it has a perhaps unintended implication: if it is permissible to say that the *Analects* defines what it means to be Chinese, would it be equally permissible to say that we read the works of Plato to learn what it means to be Greek? The *Analects*, concerned as it is primarily with questions of political and practical philosophy, will necessarily read differently from works of a more purely speculative nature that modern readers in the West are accustomed to think of as philosophical writing. But the roads we build in our endeavors—though branching off in many directions—all tend toward the same end, and even a purely speculative text, when it makes similar investigations into what it means to be human, must have as one of its concerns a desire to offer up the results of the inquiry as an aid to the betterment of human life.

Lionel Jensen takes issue with Ames and Hall, the authors of *Thinking Through Confucius* (and, by extension, also with Ames and Rosemont), for proposing the existence of a “true” meaning in the *Analects* that is fully recoverable once the reader has received the necessary education in its historical and cultural background.⁴ Jensen contends that the Confucianism we know—that any given person knows—is, and can only be, the product of invention, that is, of a series of creative appropriations, on our part.⁵ While Jensen’s views are extreme, he is right to the extent that, because we all labor under historical and personal circumstances that shape our needs and dictate our desires, what we see and hear in a text is only what we *can* hear and see. Just as, three generations ago, Western scholars were gratified to find in the *Analects* the voice of a rational skeptic as they themselves were emerging from the shadow of Victorian superstition, so had the Jesuit Fathers Ricci and Ruggieri in their time confronted in the figure of Confucius a saintly but cosmopolitan scholar-statesman who (but for the lack of Latin and an opportunity for baptism)

4. Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Tradition and Universal Civilization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 17-18.

5. His argument is based on the study of two key moments in the history of cultural exchange between China and the Western world—the exportation of Confucius as an icon to Europe by Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century and his reappropriation at the beginning of the twentieth by intellectual leaders of the May Fourth Movement.

was a close counterpart to their own learned and politically supple selves. Needless to say, Confucius was neither of these things, no more (or less) than he is the enlightened mystic that current scholarship is endeavoring to make him. What different readers see in a text at different times is both there and not there; that is, it is not there until they discover it, but once it has been discovered, there it is and so remains, as burden or boon for all future readers.⁶ After all, is not reading a perennial exercise in the renewal of apprehensions, and the whole point of reading an old text to find new meaning in it? And, in considering the relevancy of a text, is not the issue precisely whether or not the text can stand up to the pressure of continual demands for new meaning from successive generations of readers? Granted that there is such a thing as deliberate and unwarrantable misprision, what gives a text lasting value is its susceptibility to interpretation. "It daily renews [its] virtue (*ri xin qi de*)," says the *Book of Changes*.

The text remains a collage of disparate, sometimes incongruent, elements until, in reading, we organize it into a meaningful whole.⁷ What enables the reader of the *Analects* to generate meaning out of its many constituent parts—the principle

6. Hence Jorge Luis Borges's remark, quoted by Leys (p. xviii), about "improving" upon Shakespeare. This is why it is not only permissible, but sometimes even commendable, to stage productions of Shakespeare in different period styles, or to recreate *Macbeth* in Japanese and *Hamlet* in Russian.

7. To use the interpretive categories of classical Chinese, organization in a text like the *Analects* takes place *xing er xia* ("below, or after, form") and not *xing er shang* ("above, or before, form"), that is, after the text has already been written and not before; in other words, it is to the reader and not the author that the final authority for constituting the meaning of the text belongs. Here perhaps lies the key to the perceived difference between the essentialistic "thing"-orientation that Ames and Rosemont describe as characteristic of the Abrahamic traditions and the mode predominating in classical Chinese texts which seems more attuned to events and relations. It is not that the Chinese are intrinsically less competent at synthesizing general principles from detailed particulars, or even that they have some inborn aversion to thought requiring a high degree of organization; it is simply that, whatever their natural predilections, they happen to have in their early written tradition a number of texts, including the *Analects*, that impose this reconstitutive activity upon the reader.

around which he organizes the text—is Confucius himself. Mencius (V, B, 1) was later to praise Confucius as the “synthesizer” of the Zhou cultural legacy, “he who brought it together and made it perfect and complete” (*jidacheng*). To borrow the idiom of the *Analects*, the Master is in his own person the “one thread stringing together” all his teachings (IV, 15). The mechanism is beautifully simple. Once we can ascribe the different parts of the *Analects* to things that the Master did or said at one time or another, it no longer matters if they seem incompatible or even that they blatantly contradict one another. A collection of otherwise disjointed statements has acquired integrity, an organic wholeness, simply because the statements are perceived as animated by a single, vital personality.

One measure of the success of a translation is the extent to which it is able to capture this quality of the living human presence—a recognizable individual voice. Of course, the translator having had to make many interpretive choices in the course of converting the text, Confucius in translation is effectively a voice-over. We hear the original voice in the text, but overlaid with the translator’s, so that the result is a composite that draws as much upon the translator’s own personality—partaking of his passions and preoccupations—as it does the actual sayings themselves. Thus Leys’s Confucius speaks in urbane and equable tones; he is, above all, a peacemaker. The Brooks portrait goes through a lengthy evolution, from aging warrior to fussy pedant, but through all these changes preserving a strain of “furious integrity,” of “generous anger,” qualities that the translators themselves clearly hold in dear esteem. Huang’s iconic Confucius is a distant figure, as befits the subject of a hagiography. He too has a distinctive voice, albeit that of a nineteenth-century schoolmaster: humorless and dogmatic, speaking without expectation of being spoken to in return, one who brooks no question and invites no rejoinder. Confucius speaks in these different voices, or rather, to him belong the voices of these different personae—different aspects of the person brought to life by these different interpretations. The work of Ames and Rosemont is unique in that their Confucius does not project any sense of individuality, a fact that may in turn reflect the philosophical outlook of these two scholars.

So far, in speaking of Confucius, I have always meant the Confucius who appears in the *Analects*.⁸ To what extent this literary persona is related to the historical person named Confucius can be conveniently bypassed by the general reader, but it is something that all aspiring *Analects* scholars—translators included—must contemplate and state a conclusion about. How much of the Confucius in the *Analects* is real? Or, to put the question in more answerable form: How many of the sayings in the *Analects* actually represent the words of the real Confucius? Arthur Waley, still unrivalled as the greatest translator of the *Analects* in the twentieth century, cleverly hedged his bets thus: “I think we are justified in supposing that the book does not contain many authentic sayings, and may possibly contain none at all.”⁹ This opinion is shared by the vast majority of *Analects* scholars, but to say this is to say nothing more definite than that they believe some of the passages to derive from actual utterances by the historical Confucius, while many of the rest are demonstrably not. Unfortunately, no one has to date uncovered any evidence, scholarly or archaeological, that can help us determine conclusively the exact proportion and distribution of authentic sayings within the text, so that what we rely on in answering this question remains, for the most part, informed guesswork.

If Waley’s rather cagily worded statement stands for a centrist position, we can perhaps imagine flanking it a right wing that holds most, if not all, of the sayings to be authentic and, opposite to that, a left wing that holds none of the sayings to be authentic, in other words, that the Master who appears in the *Analects* is purely a figment of literary creation.¹⁰ We would then have in Chichung Huang a rightist, because, to him, the words of the text are a close and correct representation of the historical Confucius’s words. His is what might be called a literalist

8. “Confucius” is the standard way of referring to this person in a Western language, so I will continue to use it, even though, as Lionel Jensen points out, it is a Latinization of the Chinese. A rose by any other name smells just as sweet, and has the advantage of being a widely recognized signifier of the object.

9. Arthur Waley, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (1938; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 25.

10. While there has been no lack of ultraconservatives, so far there have been, strictly speaking, no ultraleftists.

reading, in ways analogous to literal readings of the Bible; we could also say that he is an idealist, in the sense that he regards the wisdom enshrined in the *Analects* as constant and unchanging, so that the portrayal of the Master in the different parts of the text is not interpreted as representing shifting perspectives or chronological developments.¹¹

At the other end of the spectrum is Brooks. The Brooks position is left-wing in that they believe none of the sayings except those in Book IV correspond to things Confucius actually said. This supposition is only the starting point of a much more comprehensive theory about the authorship of the *Analects*. In brief, the Brooks team holds that, beginning with a core group of sayings by the historical Confucius, the *Analects* text came into being through a slow process of accretion, covering two and a half centuries, as book after book was added by disciples and then descendants of Confucius who successively headed the school founded in his name in the state of Lu. The implications of their initial premise are radical: if it can be shown that practically all of the *Analects*—as many as nineteen books out of twenty—do not actually come from Confucius himself, then the persona of Confucius in the text is (for all intents and purposes) just that, a literary invention, a device in whose mouth the thoughts of others have been put in order to give them greater authority. *Tuoyan*—attribution to a well-known figure—is a common practice in early Chinese texts, so the supposition is not intrinsically unreasonable. What this means, however, is that the relation between the historical and the literary Confucius, as revealed by the reconstructive work of Brooks, is so attenuated as to be virtually nonexistent.¹²

11. This nonevolutionary view of the *Analects*—and of all early Confucian texts, which Huang appears to hold in similar regard—explains why it is possible for him to quote from the *Book of Rites (Li Ji)* to explicate a point left unclear or indistinct in the *Analects*, as though the two were effectively interchangeable: if both texts are authoritative sources of Confucius's timeless wisdom, then where their contents overlap, the one can indeed be substituted for the other. It also explains his extraordinary freedom in the use of lexicographical sources. In his glossary of *Analects* terms, Huang takes definitions equally readily from the *Shuo Wen*, the earliest (Han Dynasty) dictionary, and from Republican dictionaries such as the *Ci Hai* or *Ci Yuan*, as if the language had not evolved in the intervening millenia.

12. In this, Brooks appears to be approaching agreement with Jensen, who states the even more radical position that (irrespective of whether there was an historical Confucius, whose existence Jensen does not contest but regards as beside

But there is a relation between these two Confuciuses, the one in life and the fictive one who inhabits the *Analects*, however tenuous and indirect it may be, and this relation must be perceived as real in order for the text to serve us, as it has done for centuries, as a repository of sacred wisdom. Unless the reader believes that the literary Confucius does bear *some* relation to the historical person by the same name, the *Analects* is a text like any other text. Someone said something at some time, and though much of what was said has been lost, some of it is preserved in these writings, which are for this reason cherished by us. Lytton Strachey once remarked that the King James version of the Bible represents the word not of God but of "a committee of Elizabethan bishops." Strachey was an atheist, and his point is well taken; but, granted that the English of James's clerics cannot even begin to render the words of the living Christ, neither can the original Gospels themselves, because whatever language Jesus chose to express himself in, it was probably not Greek. Yet the fact remains that, inadequate as these translations of translations may be, they are related in *some* way, however tenuous and indirect, to the holy word of God, and it is this perceived relation that gives them their great transformative power (*de*). By the same token, so long as there is something of the actual Confucius in the *Analects*—so long as there is in the text something with its own inalienable objectivity—how we represent him to ourselves as we read and interpret, or to others as we translate and comment, cannot be arbitrary.

Ames and Rosemont have assumed the traditional viewpoint that the figure in the *Analects* more or less represents the historical person, and explain the inconsistencies in the sayings, in accordance with tradition, as arising from Confucius's need to answer the exigencies of different circumstances, as he addressed different people at different times throughout his life. However, as philosophers, they are chiefly interested, not in who the man

the point) the Confucius we know—as reconstituted in the minds of posterity—is a trope, a rhetorical figure over which successive generations have hung the drapery of their own fabrications. But finally there is a world of difference between their two positions. Brooks holds that there is not much of the historical Confucius in the *Analects*, not that there is none, nor by any means that the historical Confucius is irrelevant to the study of the formation of Confucianism. Far from it: the Confucius of Book IV—Brooks's "real" Confucius—determines the form and sets the moral tone of the whole text of the *Analects*.

was, but in the content of his sayings.¹³ This is probably why they have translated the Master as speaking with a voice in which all signs of personality have been effaced, so that what he says comes across as a succession of disembodied insights. It would be no less absurd to suggest that Christians accept the teachings in the Gospels without considering their significance as the embodiment of the human life led by Christ.

Simon Leys's translation, more than any of the others under consideration here, conveys just this sense of the overwhelming personalness of the message in the *Analects*. Leys eschews the intricacies of textual scholarship that are a necessary consequence of trying to sort out the relation between the historical Confucius and his *Analects* persona, adopting instead a naturalistic view of the text, also traditional, as based on an implied chronological sequence in the events of Confucius's life. Readers tend to infer narrative progression even where there is none, so this works for the most part, and where it does not, Leys preserves a politic silence in his commentary. But the drawing of an imaginary timeline enables Leys to do just what Ames and Rosemont do not attempt—to create a persona that develops, and whose voice is capable of registering the full gamut of human emotions. It is an intimate, confiding portrait, drawn in subtle shades and vibrant with moods and feelings that we can all share—so that we grow as the persona grows, braced by his indignation, reproved by his irony, moved by his grief, solaced by his fortitude. Leys has negotiated a relationship between the text and the English reader in such a way as to enable the reader to meet the person in the text on the ground of their common humanity. And, by placing Confucius, in the commentary, in the company of thinkers, writers, and epigrammists in the West and using their words to elucidate and enlarge upon his more gnomic asseverations, Leys has also brought the Western tradition to meet Confucius on the ground of their common humanity. Truly, this is an Everyman's Confucius.

13. Their emphasis is reflected in the subtitle of their work and in the glossary provided in the introductory material, which privileges those terms in the *Analects* having to do with speculative philosophy (such as *dao*, "the Way", and *tian*, usually translated as "Heaven") over those used more commonly in the context of self-cultivation (*ren* and *li*), even though the latter have much greater frequency of occurrence.

If there is any shortcoming in this great endeavor, it is that Leys is overzealous in trying to ensure total access to the *Analects*. Hence he diligently transposes the Chinese into modern English idiom, to the point of changing a phrase like "official holding the whip" (*zhibian zhi shi*) to "janitor" (VII, 12), and translating the key term *shengren*, usually rendered "sage," as "saint." Both are examples of overkill: it is obvious from context that an "official holding the whip" is a menial job with little social cachet, while "saint," though familiar, is wildly misleading. Again, an aphorism like "A gentleman is not a pot" (II, 12) is charming but, on second thought, needlessly and avoidably cryptic. What Leys calls "pot" is *qi*, which in archaic Chinese meant "vessel" and, somewhat later, "utensil, implement." Either the gentleman should not be a mere container, content to receive passively instead of committed to taking action: or he should be broad in his capacity rather than narrowly specialized like a tool. But in neither case does "pot" convey the sense of the original. Occasionally Leys will read a word or phrase in classical Chinese in its modern meaning: he translates *buxing* as "it would not do" when it should be a much stronger "it would go wrong" (I, 12), and uses the anachronism "nations of China" for an ancient tribal term (III, 5). These are minor quibbles, however, and do not mar the general excellence of his work.

Perhaps Ames and Rosemont are right, after all, in saying that the *Analects* are essential to defining "Chineseness," because any scholar dedicated to understanding Chinese history and culture must at some point in his or her career come to terms with the *Analects*. In premodern China it was customary for the literatus to write commentaries on the classics during periods of retirement or enforced leisure; the great poet Su Shi (1037-1101) saved the *Analects* for the very end of his life, and, though now lost, that commentary has been called his crowning achievement. It may not be a coincidence that two Western giants of sinology should in their maturity also have decided to undertake translations, with commentary, of the *Analects*. Whatever the reasons for this happy confluence, we are doubly fortunate to have the work of both Leys and the Brooks team, not the least because their endeavors are in many ways complementary. Leys is interested in a Confucius who

can speak to the general reader; Brooks's Confucius is a philologist's marvel. Leys gravitates towards those aspects of the text that illustrate proclivities still prevalent in Chinese popular and institutional culture today. With Brooks we are never allowed to forget the oldness of the text, its textured and multilayered historicity, for, behind their ambitious scheme to reconstruct the original text is the even more ambitious one of using that text to write a history of Warring States China.

Building upon the investigations of the seventeenth-century textual scholar Cui Shu (to whom their translation is dedicated) and taking further direction from inspired questions asked by more recent scholars, such as Arthur Waley, the Brooks team has developed an "accretion theory" that purports to account for the entire manuscript history of the *Analects*, including all questions of dating and authorship—the history of how the text of the *Analects* came to be, reconstructed to show every single passage in the order of its original composition. In other words, it is possible not only to know which parts of the *Analects* are authentic representations of sayings of the historical Confucius (one book), but also who wrote all the other parts of the text and at what time (all the remaining books, at the rate of roughly one book per generation by a new head of the Confucian school). This steady rate of accumulation, which would have resulted in books of fairly uniform length with contents arranged in orderly and symmetrical shape, was complicated as consecutive school heads, besides writing new books, felt pressured by a rapidly changing political and social climate to modify the existing books so as to bring the text up to date as a whole.

This leads Brooks to the second and more convoluted part of their theory: the reconstruction of the order in which new passages were composed and interpolated into the preexisting material. According to Brooks, this explains the disorderly arrangement of the text in its present recension as well as the intrusion of material from later periods into the earlier strata. For instance, passages on cosmology and the law, both relatively late developments in Warring States thinking, were introduced into the earlier books in order to prove that the Confucians had counterarguments to refute these competing movements from the beginning. Interpolation also accounts for the presence of what are now Books I, II and III: these were composed in reverse order and then placed

strategically at the head of the text in order to bring to the fore the thematic concerns featured in each book. Hence, Book III, which is almost exclusively about ritual (*li*), was preposed in order to give the existing text more of the appearance of a ritual treatise, highlighting the role of the Lu Confucians as ritual experts; Book I, with its strong emphasis on self-cultivation, came later on, when the Confucians had lost their position at the Lu court, but its placement at the beginning of the text has, in Brooks's view, permanently altered the way we read the *Analects*.

The Brooks hypothesis is brilliant if outrageous; unfortunately, it cannot be proved. The authors base their arguments, partly on solid evidence, partly on speculation, or, in their own words, some of what they say is "intrinsically plausible" and some "archaeologically attested." As for which is which, it is hard to tell: the authors seem to alternate indiscriminately between the two, so that what is theoretical may not necessarily be underlain by fact, but by more theory. At the same time their textual analysis is unquestionably sound; in terms of its philological grounding, the Brooks translation is far superior to any of the others being reviewed here.

If we are willing to suspend disbelief for the nonce and read Brooks for the sheer pique and pleasure of watching prodigious minds at work, we stand to benefit in the following ways:

(a) Reading the text as evolving steadily over the course of nearly three centuries makes it possible to account for otherwise inexplicable changes in the *Analects* lexicon. For example, *ren*, which occurs throughout the text in a perplexing range of usages, has an early definition as a martial virtue but later acquires more mystical dimensions. This evolutionary view may also explain the puzzling existence of Book X: using analogies with studies in Christology, Brooks shows how, as the Confucian movement grew and emphasis shifted gradually from the figure of the founder to the content of the ideology itself, it would have become necessary to include a book which presents an abstract portrait of the ideal gentleman, as distinct from an idealized Confucius.

(b) The interpolation theory accounts *in principle* for all inconsistencies in the text: if the books were compiled by different school heads with different agendas—some of whom meant to refute their predecessors—the inclusion of material with conflicting points of view would be a matter of course.

(c) The textual scholarship in the Brooks translation provides the basis for a moving and persuasive interpretation of Warring States society in general and the dynamic interactions among the Hundred Schools in particular. This is, above all, a picture of Confucianism *in action*, as Brooks shows the movement growing in response, internally to the pressures of school politics and changing relationships at the Lu court, externally to the challenge presented by other schools—Micians in the early strata of the *Analects*, Taoists and Legalists in the later. To date, the Brooks hypothesis offers the only plausible explanation for the presence of the so-called Taoist material in the last five books that has vexed *Analects* scholarship for centuries. Lambasting Waley and others for suggesting that the material must have crept in by mistake, they argue that these books, written at the height of the Hundred Schools debate in the third century B.C., represent the Confucian school as it engaged the Taoists on their own turf—co-opting the Zhuangzi-an anecdote to depict Confucius triumphant in encounters with Taoists, just as contemporary Taoist writings were showing him defeated.

(d) Finally, by placing the early Confucian movement in the context of its times and showing us what a chimerical, syncretic creature it was even in those formative years, the Brookses have give us a valuable clue to Confucianism's seemingly indomitable aptitude for survival in subsequent periods. At the same time, they are careful to emphasize that, even as the school kept pace with the mercurial social and political transformations of which the Qin conquest marked the final culmination, it remained, in the thrust of its ideological development, true to the personality of Confucius, that is, to the values personified in him. To put it in classical Chinese terms, constancy to an ideal harmonized with adaptability to circumstance (the twin themes of *tong* and *bian* in the *Book of Changes*) to give Confucianism its extraordinary continuity when all other political philosophies of the Warring States have become academic phantasms—a continuity in which it has become intertwined with the very soul of Chinese civilization.