Chapter 1: Translation and Interpretation

Henry Rosemont Jr.
Brown University

Roger T. Ames
University of Hawai'i

On Translation & Interpretation
(With Special Reference to Classical Chinese)

The Italian statement *Tradduttore, traditore* is unusual in that it serves as its own proof. Not even in other Indo-European languages can the succinct expressiveness of the sentence come through well: "translators are traducers or debasers" is probably the best that can be done in English, but it is nowhere as clear in meaning as the original, nor as straightforward.[1]

In our opinion this little example is not an isolated curiosity. Very few sentences in any language can be precisely rendered in any other, in part due to the fact that if our sole concern is with truth conditions there are many different ways to express exactly the same fact even in a single language ("John broke the window; the window was broken by John; what John broke was the window; what John did was break the window; it was the window that John broke; what was broken by John was the window; what John did

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1   Some of the material in this essay is taken from the introduction and appendices to our *The Analects of Confucius; A Philosophical Translation.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1998.

to the window was break it; it was the window that was broken by John;" and so on). Which of the varied ways of expressing a singular fact a writer or speaker employs will depend on context and intent, and translators must thus be sensitive to both when electing a specific syntactic form to employ in the target language. Unfortunately, neither context nor intent are often clear, and hence translators cannot but engage in interpretation on a significant scale, whether they wish to admit it or not (we will have more to say on this point below).

Semantic issues in translation are in all probability even more numerous than syntactic ones. Even within the same family of languages we seldom find precise equivalents for individual lexical items between the object and target languages (Although sharing similar roots, modern English and German nevertheless differ in their epistemological vocabulary, for example, with the *kennen/wissen* distinction in German having no English counterpart).

Both syntactic and semantic problems loom especially large when the languages under consideration are as different as the classical Chinese language of roughly the sixth to the second centuries BCE[2] and modern English. Different translators may well have different views about the nature of the differences between the two languages, and in our opinion it is thus incumbent upon all translators to inform their readers of what they believe the nature of the languages to be.[3] In addition, we believe it important for translators to proffer their basic notions of the nature of human languages in

2   We specify these dates because there is no general agreement on when and/or where to use the term "classical" as opposed to "archaic," or "ancient" when referring to the language in which the classical texts were written, often referred to by the Chinese as "literary Chinese." (文言 *wen yan*)

3   Christoph Harbsmeier has written a lengthy essay outlining the several views prevalent among sinologists on the nature of the Chinese language(s). The essay is in Volume 7, Part 1, of *Science and Civilisation in China,* by Joseph Needham and Christoph Harbsmeier. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

general; a behaviorist view differs significantly from a generativist one, both of them from a structural approach, and all three from a deconstructionist orientation toward languages. We begin with a brief overview of orientations toward the concept of human language in general and then will turn specifically to Chinese, warning readers at the outset that our views are not uncontroversial; there are translators whose work we respect who would disagree with our philosophical approach to matters of translation (and, as we shall also argue, interpretation).

It is essential first to point out some differences between speech and writing that we believe are important, and must always be kept in mind when engaged in translation efforts. In the first place, there is the obvious fact that all cultures have spoken languages, but relatively few – until very recently – have had a writing system. Not unrelatedly, there is a sense in which writing is artificial in a way that speech is not. We learn to speak and understand the language of our birth simply by being exposed to it; we do not have to be taught our native tongue unless we have an impediment of some sort. Reading and writing, on the other hand, are not natural; we must learn to master different senses (visual and tactile as opposed to aural and oral) and we must be taught that mastery. Without specific and detailed instruction we remain illiterate.

Moreover, we believe all human languages share many features at an abstract – but substantive – level, most importantly syntactic structures, that constrain the way words may be strung together while yet enabling speakers to be able to creatively express their thoughts. We are thus in the generativist camp of linguists, and an example may illustrate wherein our views are grounded.

Let us take a sentence such as:

The boy walked up the hill.

Now if we are asked to add the adverb *slowly* to the sentence, there are seven positions in which we might place it: at the beginning or end of the sentence, or in any of the five spaces between the words.

But not all of these placements will retain the grammaticality of the sentence:

1)   <u>Slowly</u> the boy walked up the hill
2)   The <u>slowly</u> boy walked up the hill*
3)   The boy <u>slowly</u> walked up the hill
4)   The boy walked <u>slowly</u> up the hill
5)   The boy walked up <u>slowly</u> the hill*
6)   The boy walked up the <u>slowly</u> hill*
7)   The boy walked up the hill <u>slowly</u>

Sentences 1, 3, 4 and 7 are grammatical, but 2, 5 and 6 are not; how do we account for this fact?

(The short answer is that grammatical structures – in English, noun phrase, verb phrase, prepositional phrase – must maintain their integrity, and the offending sentences violate it, whereas in 1, 3, 4, and 7 the adverb is placed before, after, or between those phrase structures).[4]

Moreover, it is necessary to note that writing is not solely – and at times, not even mainly – a transcription of speech. No indirect discourse is speech transcribed, nor are newspaper headlines, many advertisements, and much else. This feature of language is particularly important with respect to classical Chinese, especially Confucianism, because of the ubiquity, in the *Analects,* of *zi yue* 子曰, "The Master said." In the first place, one feature of all natural (spoken) languages is their capacity to unambiguously express grammatical relations; without this feature of languages the *slowly* example above would be inexplicable. But classical Chinese does not have this feature; absent a specific context, grammatical relations are not unambiguously expressed.

An equally important reason for not seeing classical Chinese as a transcription of speech is phonetic. There is very little direct

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4   For a more complete analysis of these points see Henry Rosemont, Jr. & Huston Smith, *Is There a Universal Grammar of Religion?* Chicago & LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 2008, especially the second chapter.

evidence to suggest that basic *verbal* communication took place through this medium. Nor could there be such, in our view, because the extraordinarily large number of homonyms in the language makes it virtually uninterpretable by ear alone (without the use of binomes). A great many semantically unrelated lexical items have exactly the same phonological realization to be understood aurally, even when tonal distinctions are taken into account.

This is not to suggest a complete disconnect between the spoken and written Chinese languages at the various times that the classical texts were being written and edited. The *Book of Poetry* obviously was a recording of sounds, and phonetic loan words are found early on in the written record. And *perhaps* one or two of the disciples of Confucius did place a *verbatim* quote from the Master into the text that has come down to us. But it remains that *wenyan* should not be seen as fundamentally a transcription of speech. Originally the classical language had a number of syllabic consonantal endings which are no longer present in the modern language, but even then the number of homonyms was high, with anywhere from two to seven different graphs – with different meanings – pronounced identically.[5] No one will understand a passage from a classical text unless they have read it earlier, and can contextualize it. Thus the language of the classical texts was fundamentally like the good little boy: primarily to be seen and not heard.

A moment's reflection on the nature of written English will suggest that it, too, has a visual component above and beyond its being a pronunciation indicator. We must all be pleased that G.B. Shaw's demand for a purely phonetic alphabet for the spelling of English has never been met. Admittedly we have difficulty initially seeing that his made-up word *ghoti* should be pronounced "fish," (enouGH, wOmen, attenTIon), but English spelling often provides semantic no less than – and often more than – phonetic information. If we

5   See, for example, Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica.* Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen Publishing Co., 1966 (reprint).

know what "nation" means, for example, we can make a good guess about what "national" might mean too the first time we come across it because of the orthographic parallels between the terms. Yet they are pronounced differently. The same may be said for a whole host of common words in English: *photograph/ photography; anxious/anxiety, child/children,* and so forth.

We also believe that classical Chinese differs from all other languages in another, philosophically important way that other translators have neglected or ignored: It is more an event-based than a "thing"-based language, more akin to Hebrew than to most members of the Indo-European language groupings. We have argued for this claim elsewhere, and will not rehearse it herein, save to make the related claim that the nature of early Chinese metaphysics reflects the structural nature of the Chinese language. There is little by way of substance ontology – *"being"* – to be found in early Chinese thought, but much in the way of events, processes – *"becoming."* Many English nouns can be "verbed," to be sure, but in classical Chinese, virtually every graph can function as noun and verb, and usually as an adjective or adverb as well, which is no more than to say that apart from context the grammatical function of a Chinese term cannot be ascertained. The resultant linguistic dynamism of classical Chinese will thus only be captured at all well in English if verbs take pride of place in translation. Thus instead of "Zizhang asked about government" for 子張問政, we make it "Zizhang asked about governing effectively."

There are several implications of our several views on the unique nature of the classical Chinese language that go beyond issues of translation. If they can be sustained, for example, it will follow that the written texts that have come down to us will not always reflect well the grammatical patterns of the spoken language of the time; our guess would be that the use of binomes has a very long history, even though both graphs in any uttered binomial expression would seldom be transcribed together. Another implication is that it would be folly to replace the Chinese written graphs with an alphabetic system more geared to representing sounds, for the number of

distinct sounds in modern Chinese is relatively small, and there is no easy way to represent the tonal inflections of each morpheme. But this latter problem is of relatively little moment, for many sounds have over thirty different graphs associated with them even when the tones are taken into account: *yi* has 41, for example, *shi* has 32, *zhi* 31, and so on.

Still a third implication of our views on the contrasting nature of English and classical Chinese may be generalized for all translation work: it is not possible to translate a text from one language to another without an interpretation of it. In our own case we link the de-emphasis on nouns in classical Chinese with the absence of the concept of *substance* or *essence* in classical Chinese thought. In the same way, if events are linguistically center stage, then relational persons rather than individual selves will make up the *dramatis personae* in ethics. Aesthetic expressiveness (not alone in literature) may place a higher value on nuance and ambiguity than on precision.[6]

Turning now to issues of semantics facing translators, it has long been lamented that many terms of import in one language have no close lexical equivalent in others, necessitating the use of lengthier locutions in the target language that can either multiply or eliminate a nuance or ambiguity intended in the original. Here it becomes clear that interpretation affects translation right from the beginning.

In classical Chinese, to take an important philosophical illustration, there is no single lexical equivalent for the English word "moral." Most translators from the Chinese have not attended to this fact – or stretched some graph or another to make it come out as "*moral*" in parts of the translation – and the consequence has been that most Western philosophers have refused to take Chinese thinkers seriously *as philosophers*, for if, say, Confucius was indeed concerned with morals, why doesn't he take up problems of *choice?*

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6   On the importance of the term "aesthetic" as we employ it for understanding Chinese thought, See David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius.* Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1987.

Apart from the negative golden rule perhaps, where are moral *principles* to be found in the *Analects?* Why is he seemingly unaware of the issues surrounding *freedom* in moral deliberations? Does he not see how *dilemmas* arise when principles conflict? Why is he constantly blurring the distinction between the *public* and the *private* realms of our behavior?

These are serious questions, for it would be very difficult to think of *moral* issues apart from the related concepts here placed in italics. But *none* of those terms has a lexical equivalent in classical Chinese, nor for the other terms necessary to engage in moral discourse in contemporary English:

liberty, *right/wrong, rational, objective/subjective,* even *ought.*

But rather than attribute simple-mindedness or extreme naïveté to Confucius, we might posit that he has a different vocabulary for describing, analyzing and evaluating human conduct, conceptually grounded in different presuppositions about the world and the place of human beings in it than have been standard in Western thought for many centuries. The 15+ English terms listed above constitute what we call a "concept-cluster," centered on the concept *moral.* Early Confucian writings deployed a different concept-cluster for describing, analyzing and evaluating human conduct, centered on the concept of 仁 *ren,* and including such concepts as 心 *xin,* 孝 *xiao,* 德 *de,* 信 *xin,* 君子 *junzi,* 知 *zhi,* 小人 *xiaoren,* 義 *yi,* 誠 *cheng,* and 礼 *li,* plus a few others. All of these terms are polysemous in English, and hence when translating them we must not look solely at each Chinese graph in isolation, but rather see it in relation to the other terms in the cluster. None of them fit neatly or easily into the concept-cluster for *morals,* but they do mesh with each other, a meshing which all translators should be sensitive to while engaged in their work.

Our notion of concept-clusters, and the importance of the notion for translation, can be seen more clearly by considering other examples. In Chaucerian England the concept-cluster employed in the description, analysis and evaluation of human conduct centered in *honour,* which was discussed using terms like *villein, shent, liegeful,*

sake, *varlet*, *boon*, *soke*, *sooth*, *chivalric*, *gentil*, and *sinne*. Some of these terms are still vaguely familiar to English speakers, but their meanings have shifted, (*gentil*/gentle, *sinne*/sin), or we use them without knowing what they mean (*sake*), still others we skip over quickly when reading Robin Hood or King Arthur (*varlet, boon*), and still others have no meaning at all for us (*soke, shent*).

We find another concept-cluster in ancient Greece, wherein moral philosophy dealt largely with the cultivation of virtues (*aretai*), especially in the philosophy of Aristotle, who used related terms in his account like *eidos*, *dike*, *logos*, *akrasia*, *phronesis*, *eudemonia*, *agathos*, *nous*, *psuche*, *eros*, and related terms.

In ancient India the concept-cluster employed in the several strands of Hindu thought and in Buddhism revolved around the concept of *dharma*, and included *varna*, *moksha*, *samadhi*, *samsara*, *skhandas*, *nirvana*, *dukkha*, *bodhi*, (*an*)*atman*, *yog*, and of course *karma*.

What all of these examples illustrate, we believe – and they could be multiplied tenfold -- is that the idea of concept-clusters is a great aid to translating and understanding texts written against conceptual backgrounds that differ from our own, and can provide a means of giving the "other" their otherness without making them either *wholly* other, or, equally mischievous, more simple-minded versions of ourselves.

The careful reader will probably have noted that we have used "term" and "concept" almost interchangeably herein. Of course the two morphemes have different meanings, but it is fundamental to our position as philosopher-translators that a concept not be imputed to the authors and editors of foreign texts unless there is a specific lexical entry denoting that concept in the text itself. To do otherwise – assuming Confucius had the concept of "morals" in anything like the sense that contemporary speakers of English do – is to either rob the Master of his distinctiveness, or make him appear simple-minded, guaranteeing that the translators will not capture well the lessons he has to teach us today.

But that is not the end of it. It is methodologically danger-
ous to assume that writers in foreign languages had ideas just like
us when they don't have words just like us to express them. What
purely textual evidence could be adduced to suggest that Confucius
had the concept of "morals?" (Or of "karma", for that matter). Did
the author(s) of the *Daodejing* have a concept of "*freedom*"? What
might count as evidence that the authors of the *Bhagavad-Gita* had
a concept of 仁 *ren*?

Philosophers have drawn linguistic and epistemological swords
on this issue for some time. To some, our position will seem to be
"unfair to babies," making the point that we are willing to attribute
concepts to infants before they have the words to express them. And
it must be allowed that at times it is legitimate to assume that a
single concept might indeed have been held by the author of a text
without a lexical item for it if the translation runs more coherently.
But it is the idea of concept-clusters that can stop the morphemes
of other languages from becoming Rorschach blots to the translator:
the significance of our insistence on pointing out the lack of a lexical
equivalent for "morals" in classical Chinese lies in the fact that none
of the other terms associated with "morals" in contemporary English
will be found in the texts either.

It has been this problem of translation as interpretation and
the importance of thinking in terms of concept-clusters that has
driven our happy collaboration in retranslating the Chinese clas-
sics. Our starting point has been that, without sufficient concern
for the parameter of the interpretive context set by concept-clusters,
translators in the process of introducing Confucianism into the
Western academy have willy-nilly overwritten its key philosophical
vocabulary and terms of art with the values of an Abrahamic reli-
giousness not its own, thereby reducing Confucianism in the eyes
of many to a necessarily anemic, second rate form of Christianity.
Witness the standard formula of translations: *tian* 天 is "Heaven,"
li 禮 is "ritual," *yi* 義 is "righteousness," *dao* 道 is "*the* Way," *ren* 仁
is "benevolence," *de* 德 is "virtue," *xiao* 孝 is "filial piety," *li* 理 is
"principle,"and so on. In sum, such a vocabulary cluster conjures

forth a pre-established, single-ordered and divinely sanctioned cosmos guided by the hand of a righteous God that ought to inspire human faith and compliance.

There have been subsequent efforts by some scholars to rescue an uprooted and transplanted Confucianism from this Christian soil. But the result has often been to reconstruct its ideas and values through the prism of an Orientalism that would ostensibly save the integrity of Confucianism by dismissing its profoundly religious dimensions, and in so doing, reduce it to a kind of secular humanism. Or perhaps worse, in interpreting Confucianism's inclusive and provisional approach to philosophical understanding as unstructured and indeterminate, reduce its holistic sensibilities to mysticism and the occult.

The consequence, then, of this overtly Christianized and then Orientalized reading of the Confucian vocabulary has located the study of this tradition within Western seats of higher learning in religion and area studies departments rather than as a proper part of the philosophy curriculum, and has relegated translations of the Confucian texts to the new age and suspect "Eastern Religions" corners of our bookstores.

In attempting to provide a more nuanced explanation of these same Confucian terms, the twentieth century Confucian scholar Qian Mu 錢穆 is adamant that this vocabulary expressing the unique and complex Confucianism vision of a moral life simply has no counterpart in other languages.[7] Qian Mu's point in making this claim is not to argue for cultural purism and incommensurability; on the contrary, he would allow that with sufficient exposition, the Confucian world can be "appreciated" in important degree by those from without. Qian Mu's claim is on behalf of the uniqueness and the value of a tradition that has defined its terms of art through the lived experience of its people over millennia, and anticipates the real

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7   Jerry Dennerline, *Qian Mu and the World of Seven Mansions*. New Haven: Yale University Press,1988, p. 9.

difficulty we must face in attempting to capture its complex and organically related vocabulary in other languages without substantial qualification and explanation.

Some earnest interpreters of this Confucian tradition who are as committed to the enduring value of Confucian philosophy as Qian Mu was, disagree fundamentally with his claims about the difficulty of translation. The erudite scholar Zhang Longxi 張隆溪, for example, states with confidence that while we will never find strict identify among cultures, we can find "equivalency:"

> Linguistic and cultural differences between China and the West are obvious, that is, in the etymological sense of "standing in the way" (*ob viam*) like obstacles, and it is the task of translation to clear the way for understanding and communication by discovering equivalent formulations underneath the changing surface of differences.[8]

What makes the formulation of such equivalents possible is an acknowledged sameness in thinking among cultures:

> Against such an overemphasis on difference and cultural uniqueness … I would like to argue for the basic translatability of languages and cultures. … Only when we acknowledge different peoples and nations as equal in their ability to think, to express, to communicate, and to create values, we may then rid ourselves of ethnocentric biases …[9]

We would insist that respect for interpretive context is integral to the project of translation, and would contest the resistance among such scholars to sanction the thick cultural generalizations being made by Qian Mu that we believe are necessary if we are to respect the rich differences that obtain among traditions and if we are to avoid as best we can an impoverishing cultural reductionism. We

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8   Zhang Longxi, "Translating Cultures: China and the West", in *Chinese Thought in a Global Context: A Dialogue Between Chinese and Western Philosophical Approaches.* Karl-Heinz Pohl (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 43.

9   Zhang Longxi (1999), p. 46.

certainly share Zhang Longxi's concern that "the other" not be seen as *wholly* other, but in our view unless and until their otherness is acknowledged and explored we will fail to appreciate their uniqueness, and hence not understand them. The canopy of an always emerging cultural vocabulary is itself rooted in and grows out of a deep and relatively stable soil of unannounced assumptions sedimented over generations into the language, the customs, and the life forms of a living tradition. And further, we would argue that to fail to acknowledge the fundamental character of cultural difference as an erstwhile safeguard against the sins of either "essentialism" or "relativism" is not itself innocent. Indeed, ironically, this antagonism to cultural generalizations leads to the uncritical essentializing of one's own contingent cultural assumptions and to the insinuating of them into one's interpretations of the ways of thinking and living of other traditions.

What separates we self-confessed cultural pluralists (rather than "purists") from Zhang are what we take to be several troubling implications of his basic assumptions about how the translation between and among cultural traditions is to be carried out. To begin with, one might argue that the bugbear of "essentialism" that properly worries Zhang is itself, like any strict philosophical notion of "universalism," largely a culturally specific deformation. Indeed, universalism is closely associated with "the transcendental pretense" acknowledged as a fallacy pervasive in the pre-Darwinian Western philosophical narrative that is immediately aligned with what John Dewey has called "*the* philosophical fallacy." After all, we can only "essentialize" (rather than analogize) if we are predisposed to believe there are such things as "essences," a way of thinking about things that did not recommend itself to the formative thinkers of classical China. Essentialism itself arises from familiar classical Greek assumptions about ontology as "the science of being," and from the application of strict identity as the principle of individuation. It is this notion of "essences" that grounds Platonic idealism and the Aristotelian doctrine of species (*eidos*) as natural kinds.

Again, Zhang's claim about peoples and cultures being "equal" in their ability to think is intended to be inclusive and liberating and respectful, and while such assurances might be so for some, such an assertion is anything but innocuous. To claim that other traditions have culturally specific modalities of thinking is *not* to claim that such traditions do not know how to think, unless we ourselves believe that in fact there is only one way of thinking, and that this way of thinking – that is, *our* way of thinking, is the only way. The uncritical assumption that other cultures must think the same way as we do is for us the very definition of essentialism and ethnocentrism. We would argue that it is precisely the recognition and appreciation of the degree of difference obtaining among cultures in living and thinking that properly motivates cultural translation in the first place, and that ultimately rewards the effort. Surely arguing that there are culturally contingent modalities of thinking can be pluralistic rather than relativistic, and can be accommodating rather than condescending. At the very least, if comparative studies is to provide us with the mutual enrichment that it promises, we must strive with imagination to take other cultures on their own terms and appreciate fully the differences that obtain among them. It is to this end that we have suggested above that different cultures have fundmentally different concept-clusters and ways of thinking about becoming consummate as a human being.

And acknowledging what Whitehead has described as "the perils of abstraction," we would argue that the kind of rich aesthetic harmony achieved when we are able to find the proper balance between concreteness and abstraction, between unique detail and a productive coherence, requires that we exercise our imagination in identifying and respecting the differences among cultures; without the possibilities made available to us by these protean differences, we are left with a lifeless and insipid sameness.

Thirdly, much of Zhang's exasperation seems to arise from interpreters such as Arthur Wright and Jacque Gernet (and us too) who in allowing for "fundamentally distinct ways of thinking and speaking" would claim (using Zhang's language) that the difference

between the Chinese and Western cultures is "the ability, or lack of it, to express abstract ideas."[10] For Zhang, those who would allow for alternative modalities of thinking that place a different degree of emphasis on the functional value of abstraction are guilty of a clear debasement of the Chinese language and culture:

> The Chinese language, as seen in this formulation, appears to be a language of concrete things and specific objects, a language bogged down in matter and unable to rise above the ground of materiality and literality toward any spiritual height. The judgment is thus not on Chinese translation of particular foreign words and concepts, but on the very nature and ability of the Chinese language as a whole.[11]

Here on our reading of Zhang, he is buying into two dualistic assumptions common to a tradition grounded in Greek ontology. First, in disallowing "distinct ways of thinking and speaking" he is locating cultural differences in the "content" and "objects" of thought rather than in its subjective instrument, as though thinking and what is thought about are somehow distinct, and that some definition of the human "mind" is not only an inclusive universal, but is also what is most distinctively and most valuably human. The implication of this distinction is that modes of thinking are essentially separable from the content of thinking by virtue of some pre-cultural faculties of the human mind and some *a priori* categories that structure it. Such mind/body and theory/praxis dualism has never been a distraction in a Chinese correlative *yinyang* cosmology in which mind/body (*shenxin* 身心) and theory/praxis (*zhixing* 知行) have been taken to be collaborative, coterminous,

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10 Zhang Longxi (1999), p. 44. Actually, in Ames and Rosemont (1998) pp. 39–43 and Appendix II, an argument is made that the written literary language is uniquely abstract in the sense that semantic overload contributes to a kind of productive vagueness requiring disambiguation on the part of the reader.

11 Zhang Longxi (1999), p. 45.

and mutually entailing aspects of experience. Indeed, the continuity and wholeness of experience is defined in terms of "forming" and "functioning" (*tiyong* 體用), and "flux" and "persistence" (*biantong* 變通) – cosmological assumptions that preclude any strictly dualistic categories.

A corollary assumption implicit in Zhang's critique, again itself profoundly dualistic, is that the theoretical and spiritual idealities entertained by this essentialized conception of mind are superior to practical efficacy in our everyday experience, and that entertaining these abstractions elevates us closer to the mind of God. Such abstraction as the work of intellection is somehow more real and refined than embodied concrete experience, providing us with a quality of knowledge uncontaminated by the changing world whence these abstractions arise, and from a Confucian perspective, to which they perhaps ought to owe their allegiance. Indeed Zhang is endorsing the superiority and the arrogance of a theo-ontological tradition that has defined itself as being preoccupied by abstractions – a tradition that assumes its interpretation of the human experience is more noble and spiritual than one that pursues practical wisdom and the alternative spiritual and religiousness sensibilities produced therefrom.

At the end of the day, the irony is that Zhang is affirming for Confucian philosophy precisely the long-lived and hobbling fallacy that many twentieth and twenty-first century Western philosophers have been struggling to put to rest within our own narrative. As players in the internal critique raging within Western philosophy today, contemporary philosophers are attempting to reverse the gravity of theoretical ascent, and to reinstate what had been left behind. Indeed, the recent compensatory turn in Western philosophy toward applied ethics, virtue ethics, particularism, care ethics, pragmatic ethics, and so on, not to mention fresh attention being paid to somaticity and the emotions, is directed at rehabilitating the wholeness of the lived experience and at reestablishing an appropriate balance

between the abstract and the concrete by reinstating the singular value of practical wisdom.[12]

But we are not done. Fourthly, Zhang Longxi is eliding an important distinction we might borrow from Saussure between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech), between the evolved, theoretical and conceptual structure of a language system that is shaped by an aggregating intelligence over millennia and that makes speech possible, and the application of any natural language in the individual utterances we make.[13] We pluralists need this distinction to galvanize

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12   For examples of care ethics, see the work of Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, Nel Noddings, *Caring.* Second edition. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003, Margaret Walker (ed.), *Mother Time.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, and the works mentioned in Joan C. Tronto, "Care Ethics: Moving Forward", *Hypatia,* Volume 14, Number 1 Winter (1999), among others. Similarly, there is also an attempt to reinstate the fundamental importance of context in recent work in Pragmatist ethics: for example Todd Lekan, *Making Morality: Pragmatist Reconstruction in Ethical Theory.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003 and Steven Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. For moral particularism, see Brad Hooker and Margaret Little (eds.), *Moral Particularism.* Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2000. Most recently Richard Shusterman in *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 and *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life.* New York: Routledge, 1997, and in many of his other books has argued for an educated and elegant somaticity as integral to the cultivation of the consummate life. Robert C. Solomon over a distinguished career led the discipline in arguing for and promoting literacy in the philosophy of the emotions.

13   We are "borrowing" this distinction from Saussure because we do not want to endorse the kind of structuralism that would allow for any severe separation between *langue* and *parole,* instead siding with the sentiments of Mikhail Bakhtin who would see these two dimensions of language as mutually shaping and evolving in their always dialectical relationship. Utterances gradually change the structure of language, and the changing structure orients and influences the utterances that it makes possible.

our claim that the Chinese language has not developed and does not have available to it either a concept or a term that can be used to capture the Abrahamic notion of "God," while at the same time allowing us to insist that the same Chinese language has all of the semantic and syntactic resources necessary to give a fair account of such an idea. What we are saying about this absence in the *langue* of the Chinese language is precisely what Qian Mu is quite properly saying about the want of a Western vocabulary to adequately speak Confucianism: you cannot say "*li* 禮" in English or German although you can say lots about it.

Finally, Zhang in disqualifying our claim of disparity in the relative value that different cultures invest in abstract conceptualizations inadvertently saves Confucianism from what we would take to be an entirely appropriate critique. It precludes what we would accept as a salutary criticism of the limits of Confucianism made by many scholars late and soon, Western and Chinese alike, the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the sociologist Jin Yaoji 金耀基 (Ambrose King) being prominent among them. In these pages we want to join these scholars in advocating for a revitalized Confucian moral philosophy adequate to the complexities of the modern world that complements its traditional emphasis upon family feeling as both the entry point and the substance of moral competence with a more robust framework of regulative ideals directed at preempting the all too frequent misuse of intimate relationships that gives rise to nepotism, cronyism, and other forms of social and political corruption. Just as intimacy needs the restraining complement of integrity, concrete family feelings require the guiding complement of some form of more general ideals.

This same argument against Zhang Longxi in favor of articulating an interpretive context might be summarized this way. We would contend that the only thing more dangerous than striving to make the responsible cultural generalizations that provide interpretive context is failing to make them. Generalizations do not have to preclude appreciating the richness and complexity of always evolving cultural traditions; in fact, it is generalizations that locate and inform

specific cultural details and provide otherwise sketchy historical developments with the thickness of their content. There is no alternative in making cultural comparisons to an open, hermeneutical approach that is ready to modify always provisional generalizations with the new information that additional detail yields as it is interpreted within the grid of generalizations.

Recently, and specifically in reference to the classical Chinese language, the distinguished sinologist Angus Graham concludes that in reporting on the eventful flow of *qi* cosmology, "the sentence structure of Classical Chinese places us in a world of process about which we ask … "Whence?" and also, since it is moving, "At what time?"[14] It is for this reason that we have consistently advocated a holistic, narrative understanding as being more revealing of underlying cultural assumptions than merely an atemporal and essentializing analytical approach.

How can we address this gap between our languages and their implicit worldviews? If Ludwig Wittgenstein is insightful in suggesting that "the limits of our language are the limits of our world," then perhaps we need more language. By developing a nuanced understanding of a classical Greek vocabulary – *logos, nous, phusis, kosmos, eidos, alethea*, and so on – we are able to get behind Descartes and in degree, read classical Greek texts on their own terms, and in a more sophisticated way. By generating and appropriating a glossary of key philosophical terms around which the Chinese texts are woven, we will be better able to locate these seminal texts in their own intellectual landscape.

Philosophical interpreters must sensitize the student of Chinese philosophy to the ambient uncommon assumptions reflected in concept clusters that have made the Chinese philosophical narrative so different from our own. It is these assumptions that inform the philosophical vocabulary and set parameters on their meanings. Are these

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14   Angus Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature.* Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 408.

generic assumptions essential and unchanging? Of course not, but that is not to say that we can venture to make cultural comparisons without a hermeneutical sensibility that guards against the perils of cultural reductionism. A failure of interpreters to be self-conscious and to take fair account of their own Gadamarian "prejudices" with the excuse that they are relying on some "objective" lexicon that, were the truth be known, is itself heavily colored with cultural biases, is to betray their readers not once, but twice. Just as each generation selects and carries over earlier thinkers to reshape them in their own image, each generation reconfigures the classical canons of world philosophy to its own needs. We too are inescapably people of a time and place. This self-consciousness is not to distort the Chinese philosophical tradition, but to endorse its fundamental premises, which, as is clear from our remarks herein, we employ in the process of translating and interpreting the classical texts.