
Review: "Sell it! Sell it!": Recent Translations of Lunyu

Reviewed Work(s): The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont,: Confucius: The Analects by D. C. Lau: Confucius: The Analects by Raymond Dawson: The Analects of Confucius by Simon Leys: The Analects of Confucius by Chichung Huang: The Analects: Confucius by David Hinton: The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors by E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks

Review by: David Schaberg

Source: *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Dec., 2001, Vol. 23 (Dec., 2001), pp. 115-139

Published by: Chinese Literature: essays, articles, reviews (CLEAR)

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“Sell it! Sell it!”: Recent Translations of *Lunyu*

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Works reviewed, in order of discussion:

Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1998.

D.C. Lau. *Confucius: The Analects* (Lun yü). Second ed., Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992.

Raymond Dawson. *Confucius: The Analects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Simon Leys. *The Analects of Confucius*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Chichung Huang. *The Analects of Confucius* (Lun Yu). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

David Hinton. *The Analects: Confucius*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998.

E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks. *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Behind the survival of any ancient text into the present century lies an initial investment of some sort, small or large, some commitment of resources to support the transmission of old words to new readers. At the very least, even where climate aids the conservation effort—as in Egypt or Central Asia—someone had to have acquired the tools and training to write, and had to have had something worth writing. Elsewhere, greater investments, whether in more durable media or in the construction of shelters where texts might be hidden away from damp and thieves, did promote survival, even if they could not ensure it; witness the unmatched importance of tomb and trove finds in the study of early Chinese writing. Above-ground manuscript transmission is costlier still: for any pre-Qin text to have reached us by this means, it must have been recopied at least enough times to outrun the decay of exposed bamboo, silk, or paper, and it must have been disseminated widely enough in every generation, and with enough prestige, to justify that recopying. Of all these requirements, perhaps the costliest is prestige, which implies a commitment from wealthy individuals or groups. However it is achieved, cultural memory is expensive.

In the world of texts as in the world of finance, the densest concentrations of capital do not dissipate overnight. They change hands and are converted in various ways, but their fame tends to encourage people to fight for them against entropy. If the end of an examination system or the coming of a revolutionary campaign changes the value of a text, it rarely bankrupts it, since investors are numerous and confident

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enough to ride out the threat. Contact with foreign cultures may flood the market with new writings, but it also inevitably brings in new investors for an important indigenous text, outsiders who recognize value and want a part of it. From this perspective, the prominence of a work like the *Lunyu*, and the continual publication of new annotations and translations in China and abroad, have little to do with the expression of a putative essence of the Chinese national character, and much to do with perceived opportunities to convert the text's value into new forms. Like other traveling texts—the Hebrew Bible comes to mind—the *Lunyu* has outlived many social, intellectual, and ethnic homelands, and owes its very existence to its adaptability.

The publication by major houses of six new English translations of the *Lunyu* in the last decade, with the reissuing of an older one in a revised, bilingual version, attests to the presence of a very strong profit motive. Neither this observation nor the phenomenon itself is crass. Translations can and should be measured according to standards of accuracy, accessibility, and elegance. However, these criteria hardly account for all of the factors that influence a complicated cultural exchange like the ongoing reception of Confucianism in the English-speaking world. Every one of the translations under review, from the least accurate to the most painstaking, appeals to a particular reading public and (if online retailers' sales figures are accurate) is reaching that public in a way that should please the publishers. With one or two exceptions, the process of intellectual product diversification that has brought the *Lunyu* to these niche readerships has not entailed any betrayal of the prevailing standards of translation. The question is not so much whether any of the works is good, or how good it is, but what and whom it is good for. And all of them are good for extending the *Lunyu*'s appeal to readers who otherwise might not have considered the text important. The translation of Ames and Rosemont will give encouragement to readers seeking a pragmatist alternative to dire warnings about a clash of civilizations. D.C. Lau's 1992 version differs from his 1979 Penguin version (still in print) in many details of phrasing, but in few basic matters of interpretation, and will continue to attract many with its well-rounded, sententious renditions of the aphorisms. Both of these translations include the Chinese text, and will be handy for readers who (like many of my Los Angeles undergraduates) come to the *Lunyu* with some knowledge of the language. Dawson's volume is slim, literal, affordable, and accompanied by scant but respectable explanatory material. Leys' is freer, tarter, and more readable as a model of English aphoristic style than any other. Huang's takes care to note the alternate interpretations of many passages that any serious student of the *Lunyu* must know, even if he or she is reading the work in translation. Hinton's, at a price, makes the *Lunyu* more colloquial than any other version, and may reach the burgeoning New Age readership more effectively than any other. Brooks and Brooks quite explicitly aim to engage both sinologists and non-specialist readers who are interested in the problem of precise dating of early texts.

To stop with a round of praise—diverse jobs, but jobs well done!—would hardly suffice. Even taking into account the exigencies of niche marketing, all of the translations presume a shared fundamental promise, that is, to turn over to us something of value

derived ultimately from Confucius and his earliest followers. They claim to deliver the goods. Yet all of them fall short in one way or another. In the more modest efforts, the failings are minor but unnecessary: principles adduced to justify the publication of a new version are carelessly subverted in the course of the translation. Predictably or not, the two most ambitious efforts—discussed in the first and last sections of this review—have produced the most remarkable failures, and differ from the others in that these failures derive from the stated motives of the projects. One might, in my view, choose the translation by Lau, Dawson, Leys, or Huang, depending on the circumstances, and present it to an interested friend or to a group of undergraduates (surely the largest market) with few qualms and few warnings. Not so with the studies by Ames and Rosemont and Brooks and Brooks, which without a good deal of qualification and critical preparation will only lead new audiences seriously astray.

Confucianism as a Language without History

The “philosophical” translation of the *Lunyu* by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. is billed on the cover as “a new translation based on the Dingzhou fragments and other recent archaeological finds.” Like other translations in Ballantine’s useful “Classics of Ancient China” series, including Ames’s excellent version of the *Sunzi*, it does reflect research in archaeologically recovered texts, and helpfully includes the Chinese original for the main text under translation. The philosophical project, carried out in a long introduction and in one of the two appendices (the first being devoted to an account of the Dingzhou finds), is linked to a hypothesis about written Chinese:

We believe that readers of this translation of the *Analects* will give it credence in proportion to the credence they give to our account of language, speech, and writing in general, the Chinese written language in particular, and to the cosmology we have described for all who employed this written language. (p. 285)

The cosmology in question is the one proposed in such well-known publications as *Thinking Through Confucius*, by Ames and David Hall; as it has been subjected to critique elsewhere, I will not address it except in passing.¹ The account of language, which has its clearest antecedents in earlier work by Rosemont, appears to have reached its fullest development in the course of this collaboration. It involves an extraordinary assertion about what the authors refer to as “the basically nonverbal nature of literary Chinese” (p. 294):

Our own thesis is that the classical Chinese language—the language in which the books of the *Analects* were composed—is unique, being sharply distinct not only

¹See, among other collaborative works, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987). For a recent critique relating to views of language, see Robert Wardy, *Aristotle in China: Language, Categories, and Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 30-34.

from all non-sinitic languages, but from spoken Chinese as well, both ancient and modern. (p. 36)

The reader of classical Chinese knows well that there is a subtlety and a richness to the characters and their arrangements that allow a communicative style that can be as effective as it is terse, and unattainable verbally. . . In classical Chinese this extraordinary kind of communication is made possible semantically by the fact that each lexical item carries all of its meanings with it on every occasion of its use, and the concatenation of two or more characters therefore associates all of the meanings of each one with the others. It is unlikely that many associations would be lost in reading, because even though word order was important, it was not *firmly* fixed in the literary language, so the reader would have to examine almost every passage several times, attending to multiple possible orderings of the characters before settling on an interpretation. This type of communication was further enhanced by the pictorial, imagistic, and aesthetic quality of the characters. One way to relate two or more characters in a passage would be to see that they all contained a certain element; the characters for “virtue (*de* 德)” and “thought (*si* 思),” for example, could be associated together at least visually because they both contain the character for “heart-and-mind (*xin* 心).” The majority of the basic 2500+ characters which formed the lexicon of classical Chinese are constituted in the same graphic way; hence, what might be overlooked completely or passed off lightly as mere punning or ungrammatical in an alphabetic language could be employed seriously for expressive and communicative purposes in an ideographic one. (pp. 42-43)

In short, Ames and Rosemont argue that the written Chinese of the *Lunyu* is an artificial language that conveys meaning not only through means borrowed from speech, but also through visual means, i.e. through the significant juxtaposition of pictographs, ideographs, and/or portions of same. On this hypothesis they stake the credibility of their translation.

Even if Ames and Rosemont made an effort in the course of their translation to show how the visual hypothesis might help solve problems of interpretation—and they do not—the hypothesis would be untenable, at least as presently expressed. It rests upon premises that few linguists or philologists could endorse, and ignores much in the way of contradictory evidence, including evidence from the Dingzhou manuscripts themselves. The vision of Confucian thought that it in turn is called upon to support may or may not be creditable, either as philosophy or as a quasi-religious declaration of faith in reinterpreted scripture. But one fundamental aspect of this vision—the claim that it is rooted in historical and linguistic realities—is poorly defended, and will serve mainly to perpetuate among Ballantine’s non-specialist readers a familiar but flawed vision of Chinese uniqueness.

The problems begin with a radically dehistoricized view of written and spoken Chinese. For all that readers of the introduction and appendices might gather, no distinction is to be drawn between “classical” and “literary” Chinese, terms that the authors use interchangeably. This language, whatever it is called, stretches unbroken and barely altered, from oracle bone inscriptions to certain contemporary genres of

formal writing. It is set apart from the spoken language (also largely dehistoricized, its grammatical and phonological changes ignored) by its supposed reliance upon pictographic and ideographic techniques that prevailed in its earliest stages. In its very origins, Ames and Rosemont argue, the writing system bypassed the spoken word by being “representations of objects and ideas” rather than of sounds (p. 290). As the “highly abbreviated linguistic forms” of the oracle bones became “models for all written composition over a period of time” (p. 292), origins became destiny:

The written patterns found in the Shang materials continued to be exemplified in the classical literature throughout the period of its paramouncy, a time span of thirty-five centuries. The assumption that there is a direct line between the linguistic patterns found on the oracle bones and the classical literature that emerged from these beginnings is generally correct. (p. 292)

One could hardly fault the reader who comes away with the impression that, apart from trivial differences in the form of characters, little distinguishes the language of a divinatory scapula from that of a Western Zhou bronze inscription, a *Lunyu* aphorism, a Han Yu 韓愈 essay, or *Sanguozhi yanyi* 三國志演義.

The “direct line” referred to in the passage cited above is a mirage, and one that comes into view only because of a refusal to define the “linguistic patterns” referred to further on in the passage. Ames and Rosemont assume, as if it were a given, that the relevant patterns are those characterizing the construction and syntactical arrangement of graphs as a visual system of signification. But even if this assumption were safe, their visual hypothesis would be questionable at best, and only for a brief period in the early history of writing; for the whole thirty-five century stretch it would simply be wrong. Consider the logic of the following passage:

David Keightley, reflecting on the insurmouable [*sic*] problem of pronunciation of Shang graphs, has observed:

Since there is no evidence of rhyme in the oracle inscriptions, the traditional and even modern approach to their study has been resolutely graphemic.²

Consequently, we have morphological as well as phonetic support for considering the early written forms to have their own communicative function without having been transcribed speech; at this stage, much information was communicated visually. (p. 290)

On the contrary: Keightley’s observation had only to do with the nature of scholarship about the inscriptions, not with the nature of the written language itself, and in no way supports the conclusions here drawn from it. Observed patterns in the historical development of the Chinese writing system—patterns almost entirely disregarded by

²The authors cite David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 67.

Ames and Rosemont—strongly suggest that a purely visual communication of information, if it ever existed, was almost immediately overwhelmed by the recycling of characters as rebuses, that is, for purposes that rendered the original visual referent wholly irrelevant.³ Without suggesting that early Chinese inscriptions and texts are merely direct transcriptions of speech—a view that the authors rightly reject (pp. 41-42, 304-05)—one must recognize that something other than visuality was playing a role in the development of the written language.

Features of the written language as it is known from the centuries just before and after the life of Confucius further undermine the visual hypothesis. Ames and Rosemont argue that an abundance of visual information in a written passage compensates for a poverty of phonetic information; phonemes being few and homonyms many, they say, written Chinese is often ambiguous when read aloud, though intelligible when seen (p. 297). But the survival of rhymed texts, including but not limited to the *Shi* 詩, has made possible approximate phonetic reconstructions of the readings of graphs, and has shown a greater wealth of phonemes than Ames and Rosemont seem willing to acknowledge.⁴ And in any case, even if it were true that written passages often yielded oral/aural ambiguities, that would not in itself prove the existence of a special language, or the dominance of visual semantics over ordinary modes of reference in written language.⁵ Further, several features of the early writing system revealed by

³See William G. Boltz, "Language and Writing," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, edited by Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 110.

⁴A passage on p. 297 is particularly alarming, and typical in its unjustified denial of historical change:

There exist now only about 420 different syllables in modern Mandarin. Thus the inventive scribe seeking a character to represent a new vocabulary item might have had from three to a hundred different forms to pick from, all of which were pronounced almost exactly the same. On what basis would the scribe pick one over another? Surely it would be a semantically motivated choice. For instance, if he wanted to represent in written form the sound /wu/ which meant "to lie and deceive," "to slander," he would obviously use the pictogram denoting speech (*yan* 言) as the radical element of compound character. And among the many lexical items pronounced /wu/, the scribe might have a range of homophones from which to choose. "To not have 無," "martial 武," "do not 毋," and "sorcerer 巫," for example, would all be pronounced the same. He might rather creatively pick the character *wu* 巫 which approximates "sorcerer" in meaning to be the phonetic element, especially if he remembered that sorcerers were usually considered to be suspicious folk in ancient China and were not to be trusted. Thus the character *wu* 誣 meaning "to lie and deceive" would be represented in written form as "the words of a sorcerer"—yet be classified among the phonograms and not the ideograms.

If one is not shocked by the bizarre (accidental?) suggestion that a modern Mandarin-speaking scribe could freely invent new characters, or by the citation of Mandarin readings in an argument that quite clearly calls for reconstructed Old Chinese readings, then one must at least be disappointed to learn that the graphs cited very possibly all had different readings in Old Chinese; while Karlgren gives them the same reconstruction in *Grammata Serica Recensa*, they are different in the system of Sergei Starostin, which can be consulted at <<http://starling.rinet.ru/intrtext.htm>>. The examples cited may handily disprove the case they are meant to prove.

⁵Ames and Rosemont argue that the price paid for brevity in written forms is ambiguity: their example is the sports-page headline "Salmon Biting Off Puget Coast" (p. 297). Terry

archaeologically recovered texts—ways of handling word families, historical changes in the phonetic components chosen for the representation of certain words, and extraordinary liberties taken by individual scribes, who occasionally wrote the same word with two or even three different graphs in the same manuscript—all challenge the authors' vision of a written language isolated from speech; and all go unacknowledged by the authors.

If the hypothesis were built upon an accurate view of the history of Chinese graphs, it would nevertheless have to take grammar into account. After all, the utterances that Ames and Rosemont are interested in are not monosyllables, as their focus on graphs might suggest, but strings of words; and grammar is the art of stringing words together meaningfully. One of the most surprising features of the defense of the hypothesis is that it does not—despite a brief discussion of “The Classical Chinese Language: Syntactical Considerations” (pp. 300-05)—address the glaring historical fact of grammatical change. It is only by lumping together all Chinese writing (with the exception of some relatively late vernacular texts) as “classical” / “literary” Chinese that the authors can make a case for the survival of an early visual language into later periods. Such a language, if it had existed, would presumably have been resistant or even impervious to grammatical change, since (as the authors claim in their account of syntax) it would simply repeat patterns found in memorized texts, presumably patterns tested out first on the Shang oracle bones. But anyone who has struggled to translate a Shang or Western Zhou inscription, or anyone (including Ames and Rosemont) who has read the archaic language found, e.g., in *Lunyu* 2.21 and 20.1, knows very well that written Chinese registered a great deal of grammatical change in the first millennium of its existence, and that this change was in no way dependent upon the strengths or weaknesses of the writing system. Readers who have compared *Lunyu* with *Shiji* 史記, or who have noticed that late and spurious *guwen* chapters of the *Shu* 書 play at early Zhou grammar and get it wrong, can make little sense of a theory of written Chinese that ignores grammatical change.

Written Chinese became a literary language when and to the extent that its grammar ceased to change, having fallen out of contact with spoken forms of the language. This moment of petrification is generally thought to have arrived sometime during the Han. It is rarely pushed back before the Han, and perhaps never—before now—to the Shang. In one typical periodization, the grammar of the oracle bones differs significantly from that of Western Zhou texts (bronze inscriptions and parts of *Shi*, *Shu*, and *Yi* 易), while the *Lunyu* and certain other Warring States texts represent yet a third stage, a properly “classical” period that provided models for later prose.⁶ Readers of Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 B.C.-A.D. 18) *Fayan* 法言, a text written in direct imitation of the language and style of the *Lunyu*, might favor an even finer periodization, one that

Eagleton, citing two equally amusing examples, rightly observes that “there is no kind of writing which cannot, given sufficient ingenuity, be read as estranging”; but no one is led astray by ambiguous headlines or public notices, since a social context guides interpretation. See Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 6-7.

⁶Boltz, “Language and Writing,” pp. 88-91.

reflects the differences between the archaizing *Fayan* and more standard Han texts. However you cut it, much of the *Lunyu* was written down before the coming of standard classical, with its relatively simple, fixed grammatical patterns; and it was written down well after a (perhaps imaginary) purely pictographic stage of the written language. If the written language of the *Lunyu* had any principles of order at all, beyond the mere wadding-together of brush-painted ideas, then these principles could have derived only from the grammar of speech. If it be argued that visual communication of meaning is secondary and supplementary to the representation of the spoken word and its grammar (a weaker form of the hypothesis, and one that Ames and Rosemont do not adopt), then one must ask again how the scribes of the Warring States could have taken such liberties in their writing—in which graphs are often chosen purely for their phonetic value—and how even a first century B.C. text like the Dingzhou *Lunyu* could have made free use of abbreviated variants of graphs that in standard forms of classical were normally written with disambiguating determinatives.⁷

Much of the fuzziness in the authors' discussion of the history of Chinese arises from their unqualified assertion that the language is an "analytic" one (p. 301). True enough, written and spoken Chinese now appear to lack inflection, and make meaningful sentences by controlling word order. But historical phonology, a discipline the authors never mention, has demonstrated the existence of a number of significant morphological features in spoken Old Chinese, certain of which certainly survived in the Warring States period, when the *Lunyu* was taking shape.⁸ A *Lunyu* aphorism read aloud in Mandarin may make little sense, at least for listeners whose education has not encouraged them to remember its sense; but the same aphorism read aloud in the Chinese of Confucius's day, or Mencius's, would have generated a good deal more phonetic information, and would rarely have been ambiguous, particularly given the specific contextual constraints that teaching and philosophical discussion no doubt imposed.

If, as the authors believe, the credibility of their philosophical argument and their translation depends upon the success of the visual hypothesis (see again p. 285), then the failure of this hypothesis casts doubt on everything that follows from it. As I have noted, however, the hypothesis all but disappears in the course of the translation, and is not adduced in the interpretation of specific passages from the *Lunyu*. This is perhaps because, as a false conjecture, it is useless. Where the hypothesis does appear to affect the translation is in the authors' choices of equivalents for certain key terms; it should be noted again that this level, the lexical level, has nothing to tell us about putative visual principles of syntax. Like many of the translations under review, this one includes a discussion of key terms ("The Chinese Lexicon," pp. 45-65). Starting in most cases with an analysis of the graph used to represent the word, the authors discuss *dao* 道

⁷See p. 231, n. 20; p. 235, n. 56; p. 265, n. 288.

⁸The subject is presented accessibly in Boltz, "Language and Writing," pp. 91-95. For a full treatment, see Laurent Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese*, Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Vol. 184 (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999).

("way" in their version), *tian* 天 (romanized, not translated), *ren* 仁 ("authoritative conduct"), *li* 禮 ("observing ritual propriety"), *yi* 義 ("appropriate, fitting"), *zhi* 知/智 ("to realize, realization"), *he* 和 ("harmony"), *de* 德 ("excellence"), *shan* 善 ("truly adept, ability"), *wen* 文 ("culture"), *xiao* 孝 ("filial piety"), and several less central terms.

The authors are to be applauded for offering clear justifications for their renditions of these key terms, and for using these consistently throughout their translation; some, like Lau, translate key terms inconsistently and thus make it practically impossible for non-Chinese-readers to consider the whole semantic range of a term. Yet, like most of the other translators, Ames and Rosemont confuse graphic analysis with etymology. Believing that classical Chinese was "like the good little boy: it was primarily to be seen and not heard" (p. 38), they reason from the components of graphs—not words, but conventional ways of writing words—while ignoring the real source of etymological evidence, which is found in word families. If the little boy was inclined to speak, they silence him by refusing to listen. There is a lost opportunity here, since a *Lunyu* translation that took scientific etymologies into account might well reveal many otherwise invisible relations among the words of the text. On the other hand, little new harm is done, since for the most part Ames and Rosemont do not allow interpretations derived from graphic analysis to supplant commonplace interpretations, which are more securely grounded in observations of uses and contexts.

One or two of Ames's and Rosemont's choices are jarring. "Authoritative conduct," for instance, is at once too vague and, despite disclaimers (pp. 50-51), too suggestive of some benign and blinding tyranny.⁹ This choice of translation, along with that of several other terms, is most clearly motivated by the philosophical aims of the project, which require that the virtue most stressed in *Lunyu* Confucianism be made relevant to a transnational communitarian perspective inspired by John Dewey's pragmatism.¹⁰ This is not the right place to evaluate the promise of that project, but I will observe that Ames's and Rosemont's translation and all its terms are—necessarily, like any other translation—suspended somewhere between origins and uses. All translations of *Lunyu* are efforts to rewrite the text for new ends, and the question is not so much whether they are faithful, but whether they promised to be faithful, and in exactly what way, and whether they kept that particular promise. A communitarian *Lunyu* might be worth a lot, even if it required certain blatant infidelities or secretly broken promises of fidelity. One would only fault it to the extent that it lied about having support in Warring States realities.

As it turns out, Ames's and Rosemont's translation itself is quite creditable, and holds its own even after the visual hypothesis is discounted. The *Lunyu* can do much

⁹"To realize" is also questionable, at least in its sense of "to make real," which Ames and Rosemont also intend. *Zhi* 知 does not, in the *Lunyu*, denote the transition of something from unreality to reality, but the new or continued awareness of something real that might have been unrecognized.

¹⁰This project is foregrounded in one of the several books Ames wrote with the late David L. Hall, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

of what they want it to do, and without egregious distortion of its original meanings. Consider the following passage from *Lunyu* 12.1:

顏淵問仁。子曰：克己復禮，為仁。一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉。為仁由己，而由人乎哉？

Yan Hui inquired about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁). The Master replied, "Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) one becomes authoritative in one's conduct. If for the space of a day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would defer to this authoritative model. Becoming authoritative in one's conduct is self-originating—how could it originate with others?"

This will not appeal to all tastes: it is wordy, and creates a jargony effect by turning verb-phrases into nouns and participles ("self-discipline," "self-originating"). It may lay too much emphasis on "becoming" authoritative, where *wei ren* 為仁 quite possibly means (to use their term) "being authoritative" or "acting authoritatively."¹¹ But it is plausible, and will further speak directly to readers who have picked up the *Lunyu* for the sake of its promise as communitarian scripture. What strikes one reader as jargon impresses another as a dignified terminology capable of supporting new types of East-West philosophical exchange.¹² And since Ames and Rosemont make their main innovations in their translations of individual terms, rather than in their handling of controversial passages, the accommodation of the *Lunyu* to this philosophy does not lead to many stunning departures from traditional interpretations. It only casts the latter in a new language.¹³

Ames and Rosemont set out to explain the truth about classical Chinese and its philosophical implications, then to translate the *Lunyu* in accordance with insights they have reached. It is a great irony that in positioning themselves against what they

¹¹The strongest indication that in this case *wei ren* meant "being" rather than "becoming" *ren* is a near parallel to this passage found in *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 12. Ames and Rosemont do cite this passage (p. 249, n. 188), but they mistranslate it as if it were identical to the *Lunyu* passage. In fact it reads 克己復禮，仁也: "To overcome one's self and to restore ritual propriety: that is *ren*." It apparently has nothing to do with "becoming," and suggests at least the possibility that the same is true in *Lunyu* 12.1, where *wei ren* is ambiguous.

¹²In the continuation to the note mentioned above, Ames and Rosemont discuss the phrase *ke ji* 克己: "... [T]he *Zuo* passage is rather clear evidence that it means 'self-discipline' in this instance. It is important not to 'naturalize' a notion of 'ego-self' that then has to be overcome. Rather, this is an inchoate, incipient, and radically embedded 'self' that needs cultivation and extension" (pp. 249-50, n. 188). Emphasis on the "processional" and "relational" aspect of entities is fundamental to the translators' philosophical project, and brings with it much language that will strike some readers as irrelevant, and others as full of promise.

¹³Minor problems with the Ames and Rosemont interpretation include the lack of an index, and the resulting impossibility of tracing the appearances of any disciple or term; the faulty transcription of certain names (e.g. "Guanzhong" for Guan Zhong 管仲, p. 87 *et passim*; "Zengxi" for Zeng Xi 曾皙, p. 149); and reference in notes and bibliography (p. 316, n. 13; p. 321) to a review article by Zev Handel, purportedly in *China Review International* for 1999, but in fact not yet published, there or elsewhere, at the time of this writing.

see as the essentializing tendencies of Western thought, they have given birth to a striking essentialization of Chinese language and philosophy. The translation is competent, and *qua* translation even the jargon is acceptable. But to the extent that the authors claim, through their untenable visual hypothesis, to have captured timeless truths about Confucian thought, and to have rendered these faithfully in the terms they have chosen, they have profited improperly from an illusion of historical accuracy and authenticity. Most symptomatic of this procedure is the treatment of the Dingzhou texts. The cover copy states that the translation is based upon these and other archaeological finds, and, with the back cover blurb, strongly implies that consulting these texts has made possible a nearer approach to the “spirit and values” of the real Confucius. But in point of fact, the translation is based upon the received text, not upon the archaeological finds; and while Ames and Rosemont cite such finds in their notes to the translation, they very rarely find significant variations, and even more rarely follow them. Thus, despite the appeal to history that mention of the Dingzhou texts represents, this translation is more completely divorced from early Chinese intellectual and textual history than most of the others under review. One is forced to wonder if the promise of Confucianism as a twenty-first century philosophy somehow depends upon a strategic neglect of many known particulars of early Chinese writing and thought.¹⁴ Must Confucianism lose its history in order to serve ours?

Tending the Classic

Most of the translations under review are less ambitious than Ames’s and Rosemont’s, and seek not to change the course of intellectual history, but only to make the *Lunyu* available to new readers in new contexts. To repeat, the commercial viability of these efforts in no way undermines their usefulness: presumably, the increased pace of publication reflects an increased demand for knowledge of the *Lunyu*, and the distinctions that make each new translation unique correspond somehow to differing tastes among readers. These distinctions are made for the most part on the level of English style, not on the level of translation: with one exception, all of the translations in this group stick closely to received interpretations, differing occasionally in their choice of one over another, but rarely straying from paths laid out in the *Lunyu*’s long commentarial tradition. As yet, no translation outdoes the commentaries through rigorous application of linguistic and epigraphic discoveries, and it is therefore natural that most contributions, including the most acceptable ones, are stylistically new variations on old themes.

Stylistic differences are not necessarily minor differences. At stake is the way Confucius will be heard by translation-readers, who may be expected to form opinions

¹⁴The introduction does include discussion of some historical matters: sketches of the lives of Confucius and his disciples, descriptions of canonical texts, and an account of Neo-Confucianism. None of these affects the basic assertion that their interpretation of the *Lunyu*’s message, like their account of the written language, is unchallenged by the historical changes of 2500 years.

about his thought partly on the basis of the elegance with which they are expressed in English.¹⁵ D.C. Lau, in his Chinese University Press bilingual edition of *Lunyu*, has not departed from the stylistic choices he adopted first in his Penguin translation, where the addition of much connective and explanatory material in sayings gives Confucius and other speakers a dignified Augustan pomp. As Stephen W. Durrant observed in his erudite review of that edition, there are good reasons to prefer English renderings that more accurately reflect the “hardy, concrete style” of the original.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in many ways, this new edition is among the best of the translations under review. It retains the Penguin edition’s accessible Introduction and appendices; even if the former somewhat misleadingly treats all *Lunyu* sayings as belonging to Confucius, the latter point the way to a more historicized view of the text. The addition of the original Chinese text, with notes on emendations also in Chinese, makes the edition especially handy for courses where some use might be gotten out of reference to original wordings. To be sure, style is not the only problem. As was the case when Durrant wrote his review, Lau still makes no reference to other translations, and he very rarely refers to possible alternate interpretations of a given aphorism. Although he has changed his interpretation of some passages, important problems with the original have gone uncorrected.¹⁷ Despite his statement that in this edition he has “tightened the translation” (p. vii), I have found that the many minor alterations (an average of more than one revised clause on each page of the translation) are fully as wordy as the translations they replace.¹⁸ Wade-Giles (with one consistent mistake, “*Tsuo chuan*” for *Tso chuan*) is retained where *pinyin* would have been desirable. Still, especially for readers who can benefit both from the dignity of this Confucius’s English and from the corrective influence of the facing-page Chinese, this translation will be extremely useful.

Raymond Dawson’s is a solid, no-nonsense translation, too sparsely annotated, but well recommended by the author’s brief, judicious introduction, which contains more good sense than several of the other works under review. In a “Note on the Translation of Key Terms,” Dawson discusses several of the same words Ames and Rosemont addressed, explaining the workable, somewhat conservative renditions that he will use throughout his translation. Notable among his choices are “humaneness” for *ren*, “rightness” for *yi*, and “understanding” for *zhi*; other choices are more predictable, none misleading. He explains the motives behind his translation at the end of this note:

Translation—at least of philosophical works—can at best only be an approximation. That does not mean that we should shrug our shoulders pharisaically and accept the

¹⁵English style matters all the more given the unfortunate existence of a joke type in which Confucius is made to speak pidgin truisms.

¹⁶“On Translating *Lun yü*,” *CLEAR* 3 (1981), p. 114.

¹⁷For changes, see 4.18, 5.7, 8.17, 12.19, 14.34, 15.17, 15.35. Durrant noted (“On Translating *Lun yü*,” pp. 115-16) that Lau’s choice of “gentleman” to translate *junzi* 君子, *fuzi* 夫子, and *shi* 士 led to trouble in 12.8, where the *fuzi* speaks of the *junzi*; it still does in the present publication. More seriously, key virtue terms are still translated inconsistently.

¹⁸I do not know what, if any, copyright issues are involved.

argument of those who believe that only a translation with full critical apparatus and exhaustive notes can advance the cause of knowledge. . . I believe that we should not always be trying to preach to the converted, but should do our best to try to achieve a piece of inter-cultural communication and make the *Analects* as intelligible as possible to people of our own culture. (p. xxvii)

The result is *Lunyu* as *vade-mecum*, minimally adorned, just over a hundred pages with notes, a tiny, cramped volume seemingly designed for frequent rereading. Dawson annotates accurately, but only when absolutely necessary; his goal seems to be to throw the reader back on his or her own resources.

Although I prefer translations (like Huang's) that list alternative interpretations when these are equally plausible, I find many of Dawson's solutions elegant. For 15.39, for instance, Dawson has "If there is instruction there is no categorization," reproducing the ambiguity of the original (*you jiao wu lei* 有教無類) and observing only in his note that *lei* has traditionally been taken to refer to class-distinctions; Lau, by contrast, translates "In instruction there is no grading into categories," and Ames and Rosemont go so far as to translate "In instruction, there is no such thing as social classes." Dawson's makes fewer assumptions, and does not slight the initial verb of the saying. His straightforward handling of 4.1 introduces a new twist in this well-known aphorism:

子曰：里仁為美。擇不處仁，焉得知？

The Master said: 'It is humaneness which is the attraction of a neighbourhood. If from choice one does not dwell in humaneness, how does one obtain wisdom?'

The final phrase is commonly understood to mean "how does one obtain a reputation for wisdom," but nothing rules out Dawson's literal rendering. If this translation does not fully achieve the author's goal of making the *Lunyu* intelligible, it is nevertheless admirable in finding a middle ground between interpretation and faithfulness to a barely intelligible original. In several senses it is the most economical translation under review.

The translation of Simon Leys (Pierre Ryckmans) has enjoyed the blessings of excellent publicity, which has resulted both from merits of the work itself and from the translator's reputation as a critic of Chinese Communist authoritarianism. Few would disagree with the judgment of earlier reviewers (including Stephen Owen and Jonathan Spence, both quoted on the back cover) that Leys has outdone his rivals in style, making his Confucius a more compelling English aphorist than any other. Yet his achievement entails certain sacrifices. Where he must choose between aphoristic grace and fidelity to original syntax and rhetoric, he chooses grace. As a result, his translation is hardly less stylistically marked than D.C. Lau's, though the two err in opposite directions. I regret, for instance, Leys's avoidance of parallelism in his translation of *Lunyu* passages (e.g. 2.18 and 3.21) that clearly hold up verbal patterning as a proud achievement. I regret his occasional slips into paraphrase (as in 7.18, where

he writes "Occasions when the Master did not use dialect" for *zi suo yayan* 子所雅言, better rendered "occasions when the Master spoke in elegant fashion"). I especially regret his decision to translate *ren* 仁 "good" in many places, a choice that leads to blandness in several sayings, to terminological inconsistency elsewhere, and to confusion in passages like 7.3, where the same word renders *shan* 善.¹⁹

What lies behind Leys's stylistic choices is his view of Confucius as a robust "man of action" (p. xxii), an ethical reformer whose view of education was "humanistic and universalist" (p. xxix), but whose philosophy was hijacked by imperial orthodoxy as a means of social control. According to Leys, "The *Analects* is the only place where we can actually encounter the real, living Confucius" (p. xix).²⁰ To those of us who doubt that the historical Confucius speaks through most of the *Lunyu*, Leys offers a comparison with the Gospels and a bit of glib mystification:

In the end, if modern scholars, progressive-minded clerics, and the docile public all surrender to this critical erosion of the Scriptures, the last group of defenders who will obstinately maintain that there *is* a living Jesus at the central core of the Gospels will be made of artists and creative writers, for whom the psychological evidence of *style* carries much more weight than mere philological arguments. (p. xx)

The problem with so-called "psychological evidence" is that, unlike philological arguments, it cannot be tested, and it drives out good evidence as bad money drives out good. Leys turns it to ostensibly noble purposes, shaping a Confucius who would stand by him in condemning authoritarian excess. But having dismissed "mere philological arguments," he puts himself in an ambivalent relation to the complexity of historical evidence, and cannot very well admit that the sayings of Confucius often contradict each other, or that they frequently bespeak a commitment to hereditary aristocratic hierarchies. The *style* one purportedly feels in the presence of the *Lunyu* Confucius is here in fact provided by the translator, whose curmudgeonly posturings—including, for instance, his gratuitous characterization of the gay community as "a rather grim lobby" (p. 126), and his frequent *o tempora o mores* laments—disingenuously claim an authority derived from history.²¹ Leys may be a better stylist than Ames and Rosemont, but he is as irresponsible a hermeneutician as

¹⁹See, however, Leys's note on *ren*, pp. 130-31.

²⁰Bizarrely enough, in supporting this and other falsehoods about the *Lunyu* ("on the whole, there are very few stylistic anachronisms: the language and syntax of most of fragments is coherent and pertains to the same period"), Leys cites "the forthcoming work of E. Bruce Brooks" (p. xxxii, n. 1)—a work that, for all its faults, contradicts nearly every point Leys has made in this paragraph.

²¹Leys's notes to the text are always interesting, but his claim to have uncovered an original Confucian humanist is hardly helped by his occasional historical slips: "Zang Suncheng" for Zangsun Chen 臧孫辰 (=Zang Wenzhong 臧文仲) (p. 21); his claim that the "earlier and more fundamental meaning" of *xing* 性 was "*natura rerum*, the essence of reality" (p. 142); and the notion that the meaning of *ru* 儒 in the time of Confucius "was a sort of archaic equivalent of our modern concept of 'intellectual'; the functions of the *ru* were either political administration or teaching" (p. 147).

they are, and like them seeks to obscure the differences between his own views and Confucius's. Like them, too, he lets us down by at last reintroducing a rosy vision of social subordination:

[Confucianism] is a teaching that, even today, has lost nothing of its relevance: the moral chaos of our age—with its infantile adults, precociously criminal children, androgynous individuals, homosexual families, despotic leaders, asocial citizens, incestuous fathers, etc.—reflects a collective drift into uncertainty and confusion; obligations attached to specific roles, age differentiations, even sexual identity are no longer perceived clearly. Before this alarming situation, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists are now rediscovering the *need for rituals* and the importance of role definitions, to ensure the harmonious integration of the individual into society" (p. 178).

By summoning the authority of style—whether his own or that of his Confucius, if there is any difference—in the interests of bringing a fundamentally hierarchical, role-bound correctness to the world, Leys resurrects a utilitarian, authoritarian view of the *Lunyu* that he had seemed to reject. One suspects that the historical Confucius would have dispensed with the egalitarian pretensions.

Huang Chichung's translation, like Raymond Dawson's, comes with a minimum of philosophical or reformist zeal. It claims only to be "literal," and largely succeeds in that aim, though not as consistently as Dawson does. What sets Huang's work apart from the others is his conscientiousness about citing alternative interpretations where these are viable. Much that is recorded in the *Lunyu* is quite obviously designed for a readership that already understands the import and context of a saying; large portions of the text might be described as esoteric, in the sense that they are designed for use in an educational setting that would have ruled out ambiguities. More consistently than any other translator, Huang uses his notes (helpfully placed, like those of Lau and of Brooks and Brooks, directly after each saying) to present evidence for his own interpretations and what he calls "variant readings," i.e. other ways of construing the sayings. As noted above, traditional commentary has settled on a number of such alternate construals, particularly for the most lapidary sayings, and it is both simple and helpful to present them along with the interpretation of choice, in a sort of variorum translation.

Where Huang's translation falls short is in its Introduction, which is full of historical simplifications and errors, and in its account of basic terminology, which exaggerates the coherence of a Confucian tradition encompassing *Lunyu* and much later texts. Like Ames and Rosemont, Huang understands "etymology" to mean graphic analysis, and he is comfortable citing late dictionaries like *Cihai* 辭海 for definitions of terms. His translations for these terms are mostly unsurprising, though "wholehearted sincerity" for *zhong* 忠 (pp. 21-24) seems misleading, and in any case may usurp the place reserved for another important Confucian term, *cheng* 誠. Major historical and philosophical errors include the assertion that "for more than 2,400 years" most Chinese people "always called [Confucius] Kong Fuzi" (p. 4), the equation of righteousness

and “reason” (pp. 5, 6), and the unlikely explanation of the title *Lunyu* as “Ethical Dialogues” (p. 12). Minor historical weaknesses include references to “Duke Dan of the Zhou Dynasty” (p. 10)—i.e. Zhou Gong 周公, who was the first of several “Zhou dukes” at the Zhou court in the same sense as Shao Gong 召公 was a “Shao duke” or Shan Gong 單公 was a “Shan duke”—and references to pre-Qin China as an “empire” (p. 9; cf. p. 58). Given these flaws, if forced to choose between Huang’s amply annotated edition and Dawson’s bare-bones edition for assignment to an undergraduate class, one would probably do better to pick the latter.

The last of the maintenance translations under review is David Hinton’s. With Leys, Hinton seems more committed than others to bringing Confucius’s voice to life. By use of contractions, dashes, sentence fragments, and a controlled diction, he does create an original effect:

子曰：士志於道，而恥惡衣惡食者，未足與議也。

The Master said: “Aspiring to the Way, but ashamed of bad clothes and bad food: such a person knows nothing worth discussing.” (4.9)

子曰：甚矣吾衰也。久矣吾不復夢見周公。

The Master said: “I’ve gotten so feeble! It’s been forever since I dreamed of the sage Duke Chou.” (7.5)

子曰：辭，達而已矣。

The Master said: “Language is insight itself.” (15.41)

But as these examples show, the stylistic effort leads the translator into imprecision and error. It is not that the *shi* 士 (“man of service,” left untranslated by Hinton) “knows nothing worth discussing;” he may know plenty, but his sense of shame disqualifies him as a conversational partner. “It’s been forever” is lively, but light. “Language is insight” imposes a meaning that *da* 達 cannot bear in this context.

In his Introduction, Hinton presents a communitarian and egalitarian Confucius with similarities to the versions both of Ames and Rosemont and of Leys. He surpasses those others in recognizing that “numerous versions of the Master’s sayings were edited over the course of centuries, a time when the concept of individual authorship had not been firmly established, and much extraneous material was included by various editors, sometimes with the apparent intent of smuggling their preferred ideas into the canonical text” (p. xx). Yet he tends, like them, to downplay the hierarchical aspects of Confucius’s notion of ritual propriety:

Confucius extended the use of ritual to include all the caring acts by which we fulfill our responsibilities to others in the community—hence the entire weave of everyday social life takes on the numinous aspect of the sacred. (p. xxii).

One can believe this view only by ignoring the texts surrounding the *Lunyu* (the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, for instance, or the *Xunzi* 荀子), which make it clear that *li* 禮 (Hinton’s

“Ritual”) imposed irreducibly hierarchical relations on its participants, and further excluded most people from participation on the basis of their birth. The notion that *Lunyu* proposes an egalitarian view of *li* is no more than a hopeful myth. In this version of it, as in others, it has its sinister side:

Confucius recast [*Tao*] to mean the effortless process of human society functioning according to its natural Ritual structure. This Confucian Tao shows a striking resemblance to the more familiar Tao of the ancient Taoist masters, who recast it as a spritual concept by transforming it into a kind of ontological Way. For them, Tao is the ontological ground or process (hence, a “Way”) from which the ten thousand things arise. In both cases, the term refers to a vast organic process. And in both cases, mastery of the Way involves understanding how to dwell as an integral part of that process. (p. xxvi)

Such interpretations forget that even as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 was developing the cosmological meanings of *dao* 道, the *Laozi* 老子 and the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 were exploring its usefulness as a tool and metaphor of secret control. As with Leys’s Confucius, one wonders here how to reconcile the egalitarian teacher with the proponent of a “natural Ritual structure” in which one must “dwell.”

“Going too far is as bad as falling short”²²

Among all of the recent translations, the only one that matches Ames’s and Rosemont’s in the breadth of its ambitions is *The Original Analects*, by E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks. To all appearances, the two projects could hardly be more different from each other. Where Ames and Rosemont dehistoricize, staking the credibility of their philosophical claims and their translation on a view of written Chinese as a timeless medium, Brooks and Brooks make historicizing the *Lunyu* an end in itself, and far surpass any previous scholar in the minuteness and confidence with which they date individual books and individual passages of the work. Ames and Rosemont—who have an obvious interest in seeing the *Lunyu* as a coherent philosophical work directly traceable, in word or spirit, to Confucius himself—finesse questions of layering in the text, noting that its compilation played out over some centuries, but avoiding the obvious question about how much of it derives from the first teacher.²³ Brooks and Brooks, on the other hand, rightly dispense with the biographical fiction and grapple with the problem of a text that clearly developed over a period of time and in response to complex historical and intellectual factors. Much that is lacking in Ames and Rosemont is given here in abundance: details of Warring States political

²²See *Lunyu* 11.16. The translation is mine.

²³On p. 9 and p. 67, n. 11, Ames and Rosemont mention the views of Brooks and Brooks, and assert that they are “consistent to an important degree” with the views of John Makeham. This is a suprising assertion, as I will show, and in any case it is silent about the Brooks’ insistence that most of the *Lunyu* derives from latter-day followers of Confucius, not from the thought of the historical Confucius himself.

and cultural history; reflections on grammar and other changing aspects of language use; connections between *Lunyu* thought and earlier traditional views; and discussion of debates and accommodations among intellectual "schools." Brooks and Brooks refuse, quite laudably, to remove the text from its context.

Despite these differences, however, there is a fundamental similarity between the "philosophical" and the "original" *Analects*. Brooks and Brooks do not merely historicize: they hyperhistoricize, and by continually arguing beyond the tolerances of their data, they create mirages of history where more cautious scholars see only a haze of historical uncertainty. Like Ames and Rosemont, though perhaps less openly, Brooks and Brooks stake the value of their work on a set of initial hypotheses, which, when they fail, threaten to bring down the whole edifice. Since these hypotheses have to do with dating, and since the project claims its primary worth as an investigation of dating (but only secondarily as a new translation), their collapse is even more crippling than the sequestering of Ames's and Rosemont's visual hypothesis. Ironically enough, the weakness in the Brookses' work, like the weakness in Ames's and Rosemont's, derives ultimately from neglect of inconvenient historical details: the hyperhistorical is tripped up by mere history.

First, a note on the contents of *The Original Analects*. Besides front matter (a brief preface and slightly longer introduction to Eastern Zhou history, schools, and texts) and translation of all passages of the received *Lunyu*, the work includes an introductory remark on each book and a fairly extensive comment on each passage. Following the translation are four Appendices: one on the Brookses' "accretion theory" as it applies to the *Lunyu*; one on the developmental patterns (e.g., the increasing wealth and power attributed to Confucius) that become apparent in the *Lunyu* when the books are put in what the authors take to be their original order of composition; one on connections between a historicized *Lunyu* and other texts of the so-called "Hundred Schools;" one on Confucius and his circle, which attempts to isolate historical facts about the man, his family, and his followers from amidst the welter of legend that has surrounded them; and, finally, a retranslation and commentary on *Lunyu* Books 1-4, showing how the received order differs in its philosophical implications from the "original" order. Other back matter includes a list of works cited, a romanization equivalence table (to elucidate the Brookses' "Common Alphabetic" system of transcription), index, and afterword, the latter explaining the origins of the work.

As with Ames and Rosemont, we begin with the ancillary matter that frames the translation, since this is where Brooks and Brooks present their hypotheses:

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 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. (p. vii, italics in original)

It is an awe-inspiring promise, hardly vitiated by the qualification “as nearly as possible,” a note of caution that will disappear for most of the rest of the work. But for “readers new to antiquity or things Chinese,” who loom large among the intended readers of *The Original Analects* (p. viii), and who can be expected to come to this translation with no knowledge of the relevant history, this promise is unlikely to seem surprising. While sinologists are asking what new trove of data could have made such a project possible, and are turning to the appendices for help, the nonspecialist readership will be watching the show begin.

As the appendices demonstrate—though not necessarily in a way that nonspecialist readers will notice—the spectacle is a costly one. What is the price of admission? To be shown what Brooks and Brooks have promised to show, one must accept the following premises, all of them faulty:

1. One must accept that ancient Chinese texts grew like trees, and can be dated by a variety of textual dendrochronology. The key passage here is the following, from near the beginning of Appendix 1:

Nothing in the Analects is spoken directly by Confucius (his sayings are introduced by the third-person formula “The Master said” 子曰), hence none of these sayings can have been written down before his death in 0479.²⁴ Taking that as the earliest date for the core chapter, the other 18 chapters to be distributed over the 230 years until 0249²⁵ give an average time span of 12.7 years per chapter, or half the average 25-year *birth* generation (*transmission* generations average 40 years). That is, the Lu Analects seems to have accumulated at an average rate of 2 chapters per generation. This version of the hypothesis thus implies that the beginnings of the Analects may indeed go back to a point of contact with the historical Confucius (a possibility doubted by several recent scholars), and that the *typical* leader of the school, whether later leaders succeeded by birth or were designated by their predecessors, contributed not one, but more than one, chapter module to the accumulating text. (p. 203)

To summarize: a person may never be quoted in the third person during his lifetime, therefore the earliest book of the *Lunyu* was written down after Confucius’s death; not just any time after his death, as one might expect, but immediately after his death. 230 years separate that year from 0249, putative date of completion for a 19-chapter version, and division of that figure by the number of books written during the period gives 12.7 (in fact, 12.8 with proper rounding), indicating two chapters per birth generation. Then, not surprisingly, two chapters per generation, times the number of generations, leads us right back to the starting point, the death of the historical Confucius.

²⁴A note here mentions various theories on the date of Confucius’s death. On the form of the date (0479=479 B.C.), see below.

²⁵Brooks and Brooks argue on p. 202 that “Lu Confucians were quiescent after the 0249 conquest of Lu;” but the argument carries little weight, since it is built upon the Brooks’ reconstruction rather than independently contributing to it.

This is tautology: the conclusion does no more than restate the premises. As a set of premises it may perhaps draw confirmation from other sorts of data, but as tautology it cannot be adduced in support of anything.

An undefended assumption behind the tautology is that the *Lunyu* grew as a single corpus, with each generation taking over and adding to the material passed on by the previous generation. A moment's reflection reveals just how unlikely this is as an account of the early transmission of the *Lunyu*. Even if there had been only one prominent group of self-identified followers of Confucius's way during the Warring States period (and it is common knowledge that there were many more than one), the Brooks theory would still require either (1) that all extant *Lunyu* texts were updated each generation to reflect the most recent additions—clearly an impossibility—or (2) that this group's one master text came into the hands of Han Confucians to serve as the basis of our received text, and at that moment displaced any defective or variant versions that had lingered from former times. At first sight this second possibility has some promise, since our *Lunyu* must after all have come from somewhere. But the evidence does not cooperate. If a single, authoritative group of Confucians had been engaged, over nine generations, in the enlargement and refinement of Confucius's aphoristic works, then we may not expect them to have advertised the fact (as we will see, theories of authorial subterfuge and interpolation figure heavily in the Brooks interpretation); but we would at least expect them to have begun referring to this corpus by a single name. The earliest appearances of *Lunyu* as a book title, indicating the existence of a recognized corpus of authoritative material, come in the middle of the second century B.C., and early citations of Confucius's words (e.g. in the *Mengzi* 孟子) show no particular fidelity to the materials now found in the *Lunyu*.²⁶ On the basis of the available evidence, one might argue that the *Lunyu* was put together from multiple collections of Confucian aphorisms sometime in the early Han, and that during the Warring States no single collection held sway.²⁷ The Brookses' assumption about a unitary corpus is barely acknowledged, perhaps because it must either be defended or abandoned if the strong form of the accretional hypothesis is to stand.

2. One must accept the use of evidence—linguistic, statistical, historical, and other—as symptom, with the most sweeping diagnoses made on the basis of near invisible or nonexistent evidence. The case for genuinely old versus interpolated sayings in *Lunyu* 4 is typical. Brooks and Brooks argue that part of the chapter is “unique in a way that would be plausible for an early 05c core text” (p. 204, italics in original). They point out that “Lu dialect sz 斯 ‘then’ occurs (but along with the standard dzv 則 ‘then’), as would be expected in sayings of Confucius” (p. 204).²⁸ They then judge two

²⁶On the first appearances of the title, see John Makeham, “The Formation of *Lunyu* as a Book,” *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996): 10-13.

²⁷I have made exactly this argument in my “Confucius as Body and Text: On the Generation of Knowledge in Warring States and Han Anecdotal Literature” (paper presented at the “Text and Ritual in Early China,” conference, Princeton University, October 20-22, 2000).

²⁸It has been impossible to reproduce the diacritics Brooks and Brooks employ, including those used in the Common Alphabetic system to represent the four tones of Mandarin.

passages (4.15 and 4.26) interpolations, because both include speakers other than Confucius, unlike the other sayings in the chapter. They continue:

It emerges from further study that the early *linguistic* features cited above occur *only in the area 4:1-17*, never in 4:18-25. Also the standard word *dzv* 則 'then' in 4:21 conflicts dialectically with the Lu usage *sz* 斯 'then' in 4:7. We may then conservatively suspect that 4:18-25 are an extended later addition.

Finally, LY 4:1-17 and 4:18-25 appear to belong to different stages within the long-term shift from postverbal (F) to preverbal (B) position for various types of adverbial expression (a linguistic process which is still not quite complete at the present time), and the induced shift toward verbs instead of nouns as sentence final elements. Of the 48 predicates in 4:1-17, a total of 39 end with a verb object or other noun element (81% *nominal endings*), while the 15 predicates of 4:18-25 have 40% *nominal endings*. This tends to confirm a later date for 4:18-25, leaving the sixteen sayings of 4:1-14 plus 4:16-17 as the probable nucleus. (p. 204)

Again, to summarize: two separate kinds of data, one concerning the speakers to whom sayings are attributed, another concerning the linguistic nature of the sayings themselves, seem to support the same conclusion about the content of *Lunyu* 4. Quantification and statistical manipulation suggest differences between early and later portions of that chapter.

Appearances are once again deceptive. The word *si* 斯 (to give it its *pinyin* romanization) may or may not be a sign of the age of a saying or its dialect associations. It is quite true that it does not occur in 4.18-25. But what of 4.26, which Brooks and Brooks have already dismissed as an interpolation? That saying, despite its attribution to Ziyu 子游, uses *si* twice, and with precisely the same sense as in 4.7.²⁹ Is 4.26 then more likely to be an early saying, or does the unsupported assertion that the core of *Lunyu* 4 contained only sayings of Confucius somehow trump the linguistic arguments? If *si* is an index of antiquity, then what are we to make of the use of this word, in the same sense, in 16.9, 20.2, and elsewhere in chapters generally agreed to be late?

In what is unfortunately a sort of unofficial sinological tradition, Brooks and Brooks employ quasi-statistical methods and expressions even where they have gathered too little data to support any demonstrably significant results. Just as looking at the behavior of *si* outside of *Lunyu* 4.1-25 undermines the Brooks analysis of the chapter, counting predicates elsewhere in the text also calls into question the statistical treatment of this chapter. In a randomly chosen sample from a chapter thought to be very late—19.1-10—I find a total of 36 predicates, 23 of them (or 64%) nominal. From this I can draw no conclusion whatsoever about the relative antiquity of these passages: no one, least of all Brooks and Brooks, has taken the trouble to quantify all of the *Lunyu*'s grammatical features, so it is impossible to say whether this figure belongs to a pattern,

²⁹4.7: 子曰：人之過也，各於其黨。觀過，斯知仁矣。 4.26: 子游曰：事君數，斯辱矣；朋友數，斯疏矣。

or how that pattern might help in dating. Nonetheless, the figure 64% does put paid to the claim that the purported decrease from 81% to 40% in separate portions of *Lunyu* 4.1-25 is a consequence of the relative age of those portions. This is not to say that the grammatical shift Brooks and Brooks refer to did not occur, only that it is of little or no use when applied in *ad hoc* fashion to isolated portions of text, without comparative evidence from similar passages, and without consideration of the contents of the text. Symptoms, when they are useful in diagnosis, are useful because they can be related to a disease with known, predictable characteristics; behind the particular act of interpretation lies a science, nosology, that discourages wild guessing. Diagnosis without science, without even an attempt to gather the relevant data, would be quackery.

3. One must accept that every saying in the *Lunyu* was invented, transcribed, and incorporated into the work in the time it took to add one chapter, a period ranging from four years (for Chapter 20, here dated to 0249) to 31 years (for Chapter 9). In no case do Brooks and Brooks envision the incorporation in one chapter of a saying that was invented before the composition of the previous chapter. In other words, they all but completely rule out oral transmission, shifting the burden of generating new text from the total group of followers to the "head" of the unitary "school," whose views are supposed to be represented in the chapters dated to his tenure. Like some other assumptions, this one is neither acknowledged nor discussed, and in several respects defies logic. The structure of the school(s) is not nearly as well understood as Brooks and Brooks imply, and if there ever was a single paramount leader, it is by no means certain that he exercised the authority to alter the putative proto-*Lunyu* at will, much less to suppress whatever knowledge of the past other followers were transmitting and inventing. To suggest that every saying is datable, and to a window of at most 31 years, is to ignore much relevant comparative evidence, which suggests that attempts to codify the teaching of a revered sage draw selectively from complex traditions of lore relating to that sage, and that no single act of transcription stops the transmission and variation of the lore. If lore can survive beyond the succession of a new school leader, then the very attempt to date *Lunyu* chapters precisely according to their contents is doomed. Since much of the point of *The Original Analects* is to identify "interpolations" (usually on the basis of the faintest hint of external historical evidence, or on the basis of the faulty assumptions already examined), the notion that one generation might write down a saying learned from a previous generation is fatal to the whole project.

4. One must accept a novel view of the internal structuring of *Lunyu* chapters. Brooks and Brooks argue the following:

Earlier commentators have noted close relations between specific pairs of Analects sayings, though it has not been appreciated that such pairing, admittedly often based on trivial features, characterizes *the entire text*, giving it a background against which disruptive interpolated sayings can be relatively easily recognized. (p. 207)

John Makeham, in his review of the work of Brooks and Brooks and Ames and Rosemont, has addressed this question in detail, and to my mind has shown that

pairing based on “trivial features” is a feature not of the *Lunyu*, but of *The Original Analects*.³⁰ If, as the strong form of the accretional hypothesis requires, sayings originated and were transcribed in the span of years separating successive chapters, what wealth of material did school-heads draw on as they constructed their pairs? If they had the liberty to make up material (as Brooks and Brooks sometimes seem to believe), then why did they not more frequently make less trivial pairings? Rather than postulating the silent continuation of a compositional practice over nine generations and 19 very diverse books, why not remark it where it is undeniable and leave it in question where it seems contrived? The only apparent justification for the totalizing assertion about pairing is the spurious support it gives to charges that one or another passage is an “interpolation”; since historical and linguistic data for these charges are minimal or nil, the pairing hypothesis is adduced as an independent source of information. But because the criteria adduced for identifying a pair are extremely loose and apparently made *ad hoc* (as they must be if the hypothesis is to be defended throughout the *Lunyu*), the hypothesis is ultimately unfalsifiable: the paragraphs of my review are every bit as “paired” as the aphorisms of the Brooks and Brooks *Lunyu*.

5. One must accept tendentious, largely unsupported datings of other early Chinese texts. In a two-page “checklist of texts,” Brooks and Brooks do not bother to cite alternative views, or often even to hint at the complexities of dating issues:

DJ (Dzwo Jwan) [i.e. *Zuozhuan*]. A supplement to the CC [*Chunqiu* 春秋], begun in Lu in c0350; the present text is a Chi-adapted expansion of c0312. Gives a retrospective picture of Spring and Autumn life, apparently blended with details from the late 04c. Justly esteemed as a narrative, but must be used cautiously as a source. Translated in Legge **Ch'un**. (p. 8)

Shr (The [Classic of] Poetry) [i.e. *Shijing*]. Compiled (and, we argue, mostly written) from the middle 05c to the late 04c; one can watch from the evolving *Analects* as it reaches its final 305-poem size. Translated in Legge **She** and Waley **Songs**. (p. 9)

Brooks and Brooks cite no defense for these surprising claims. The untutored and the credulous will assume either that the relevant dating questions were solved long ago, or that Brooks and Brooks have solved them themselves. The critical will hesitate to credit the assertions, given the quality of historical arguments advanced elsewhere in the work. Anyone, specialist or not, may be forgiven for wanting to see some evidence.³¹

³⁰See Makeham in *China Review International*, 6, no. 1 (1999): 1-33.

³¹As most early China scholars know, Brooks and Brooks run an active, very interesting online discussion, the Warring States Project <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wsw>>, and also maintain a useful webpage at <<http://www.umass.edu/wsp/>>. Under “Warring States Texts,” the webpage includes an updated account of their views on the dating of several texts. Although this is the place where one would expect to see evidence for their views on the dating of *Zuozhuan* and *Shi*, the relevant page at present (June, 2001) gives nothing on the dating of *Shi*; for *Zuozhuan* it gives only a set of barely elaborated assertions, which are, moreover, contradicted by much uncited contemporary work on the text.

6. More trivially, one must believe that *pinyin* is inaccessible enough to the ordinary reader to justify the invention of a new, putatively more accessible system, the Common Alphabet:

Chinese words are here spelled for maximum "guessability" by readers with English-alphabet reflexes. The rule is "consonants as in English, vowels as in Italian," with a few special conventions, such as *v* (an analogue of the linguist's *inverted v*) for the central vowel of "gut," plus *æ* as in "cat," *r* as in "fur," *z* as in "adz," and *yw* (after *l* or *n*, simply *w*) for "umlaut *u*." (p. 2)

This system might possibly be an improvement over *pinyin* if all of us, generalists included, were starting from zero. But anyone who has, say, watched network news or listened to the radio a few times during the past years already knows how to approximate the *pinyin* "e" and "x" (as in "Deng Xiaoping"), "j" and "z" (as in "Jiang Zemin"); he or she can also distinguish two types of -ia- ("Tiananmen" versus "Jiang"), and may plausibly slur through "Zhou Enlai." If people have not drunk enough imported beer to know how "q" might work, it is only a matter of time before a high-profile leader or crisis makes this and the rest of *pinyin* easier for most educated Americans to deal with than French.

Since *pinyin* is for practical purposes already pretty well-known, the Common Alphabet defeats its own purpose. It will not "help to dispel the 'Oriental mystique' which several aggressively nonphonetic Chinese spelling systems have helped to promote" (p. 2), but will instead begin to restore a mystique that *pinyin* is on the verge of losing. Pronouncements about the Common Alphabet do, with other elements (such as the checklist of texts, the unique dating and citation conventions, and the special signs used to represent pairings and interpolations of sayings), lend a scientific feel to the project, as if a new rigor were being introduced into a disorderly old field. But for most readers, the romanization conventions will serve only as a distraction and an annoyance, and will tend to divert attention from truly scientific questions of philological method.

This list could perhaps be extended. *The Original Analects* is so bold, so original, and so conjectural that it demands a sort of surrender, even from readers who have not already invested in the disciplinary commonplaces of sinology. To my mind, however, any one of the listed concessions requires too great a sacrifice of methodological rigor on the reader's part, and the whole performance costs much more than it is worth. The translation itself—once one gets used to the Common Alphabet—is both accurate and readable, and benefits from the same clarity and vigor that characterize the Brookses' English elsewhere in the book. Although the comments Brooks and Brooks append to each saying are too frequently dominated by specious arguments for pairing of sayings or by irrelevancies (like citations from British texts on aristocratic life, supposed to illuminate Warring States attitudes by comparison), they are admirable in being designed to "slow the general reader down" (p. viii), and often contain useful insights. Finally, however, *The Original Analects* lives and dies by its claim to give us the sayings of Warring States followers of Confucius in their original historical order.

Read against itself—as a hoax, for instance, if that were possible—the book would deliver a stinging reproof to practitioners of many of the laziest techniques of provenance studies. But as a serious effort to historicize the *Lunyu*, the book does not support its own arguments, much less the larger project of dating all Warring States texts.

To conclude, if this survey of the *Lunyu* translations currently on offer seems almost unrelievedly negative, that is because what this important text deserves it has not yet gotten: a translation that combines linguistic, philological, and historical competence in equal measure, that appeals without pandering, and that does justice to the work's intellectual force without seeking to denature or dilute it. The several strengths of the translations under review, and the fact that so many translations could have been published in so short a time, are an encouragement, and will no doubt do much to advance the reputation of the *Lunyu* among English-speaking readers. But as we look forward to some translation that will outdo them all, let us not be deceived. If someone offers to sell you the real Confucius, the original, the literal, the acceptable, the reformist, even the historically and linguistically competent, be suspicious: the article itself, the true jade, is lost, and the honest merchant will tell you so. *Caveat emptor*.