

## Books Reviews / 書評

*Hermeneutical Tradition of Chinese Classics (1): In General*, edited by Chun-chieh Huang (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2004, 436pp.)

*Hermeneutical Tradition of Chinese Classics (2): In Confucianism*, edited by Ming-hui Li (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2004, 512pp.)

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China has long been engaged in hermeneutics of its Classics, but this is perhaps the first time in its history that reflections about such engagements are explicitly and publicly performed. We are presented with a trilogy of anthologies on Chinese hermeneutics: in general, in Confucianism, and in Taoism. The present critical review is on the first two volumes—ONE, on the first volume, TWO, on the second volume, and THREE, an appreciative conclusion.

### ONE

We first consider *Hermeneutical Tradition of Chinese Classics: In General* edited by Professor Huang, Chun-chieh, 2004, 《中國經典詮釋傳統（一）：通論篇》，黃俊傑編, a massive tome of xviii and 512 pages. It has twelve es-

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says, seven (essays 1 through 5, 7, and 8) on hermeneutics in the West and its researches on China, followed by five more on hermeneutics in China (essays 6 and 9 through 12). The volume concludes with records of discussions on the characteristics and the methodology of Chinese hermeneutics on Chinese Classics.

Three related misgivings must be registered at the outset. First, the Chinese hermeneutics of Chinese Classics has been practiced for thousands of years—in China. The reader is entitled to learn about Chinese hermeneutics. This is not to reject the West but to put the West in the context of China, as a foil to exhibit the distinctive features of China, not the other way around as done here.

Must China go through the West's circuitous, objectivist, and allegedly "mistaken" route to reach Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics and deconstructionist's meltdown? Actually, for thousands of years, China has been performing dialogical understanding of the beloved words of our revered sages, as the base on which to finally reach "objective" reading of the Classics in the Ch'ing era and to bypass deconstructionism today. Must China abandon its correct route to acquiesce in the West's mistaken one, instead of telling the West to look up to China?

Second, in this volume on Chinese hermeneutics on Chinese classics in general, Chinese hermeneutics on classical Confucian texts are prominently and repeatedly considered, but the classical texts in Taoism and Chinese Buddhism are curiously entirely absent. There is no mention of this fact, much less any justification in this volume. Does this fact betoken if not announce, a bias toward a sort of "Confucian imperialism?"

Third, the reader wants to know how Chinese hermeneutics is practiced, what its distinctive features are. But the reader is given long involved details of "who said what" on "who did what" in the West and China. We fight long and hard through the thick coating of reports before getting the precious little of Chinese hermeneutics. We must break through hard crab shells of details to get at very little meat. This 512-page book can be 200 pages.

What do we learn about Chinese hermeneutics from this book? Essay 6 on contemporary interpretations on the *Classic of Changes* 《易經》 says that inter-

pretations have been “added on” to the original texts as streams grow into mighty rivers (154-155). This is a refreshing insight on Chinese hermeneutics that raises some queries. The same water makes brooks and rivers; what “water” does the mighty “rivers” of Chinese hermeneutics have? Brooks grow into rivers; what is it that makes the “brooks” of the Classics grow into “rivers” of Chinese hermeneutical tradition? Brooks differ from rivers; how do the Classics differ from their interpretations? All this is a request of morphology of Chinese hermeneutics.

The author 鄭吉雄 just has four points. [a] Until 100 years ago, China has been trying to get at the nucleus of the 《易經》 either by commenting on the traditional commentaries or directly going back to the original texts. How they or we would know that what they said really elucidates 《易經》 is unclear. [b] During the past 100 years, infusion of Western ideas turned the interpretive tides to leveling all texts and comments equally to scientific and philosophical scrutiny. The appropriateness of such turning is unclear. [c] Another trend today is to take the texts as “history” that describes the social situations of the times (158-161). [d] Thirteen or so important varieties of interpretations are sadly relegated to Footnote 16 on p. 158.

This essay is verbose, repetitive, and unclear, vaguely reporting who said or did what without critically surveying the whole trend. The chapter is an encyclopedic collection of dry, informative readings that exhaust and seldom excite the reader, not a critical portrayal of Chinese hermeneutical tradition by way of 《易經》 interpretation. Similarly, Essay 11 describes how “理一分殊” fared in Chinese history of ideas, unrelated to Chinese hermeneutics.

Essays 9 (Asian hermeneutics in general), 10 (its historicity), and 12 (its principles) are by Huang, Chun-chieh; they also appear in his own book on the Confucian Hermeneutic Tradition in Asia. Since commenting in detail on all these essays would be too long and similar, just one pivotal point is raised here.

Essay 9 on comparative hermeneutics begins with a journalistic report of themes of volumes, monographs and conferences in China, Taiwan, and Japan, and of notion-comparison and person-comparison, all barely mentioning their contents. Instead, Huang should have deeply pondered on the complex issue of

“comparison” of varied cultural interpretations on the Chinese Classics. We see three themes, textual, personal, and basic.

First, cultural differences dictate different impacts of seemingly identical words, notions, and themes. “Water” in *Analects* 9/17 and *Mencius* 4B18 must connote in maritime Japan differently from peninsula Korea, continental China, and island Taiwan. “忠” is to oneself (seriousness) in China and to the ruler (loyalty) in Japan. “Orthodox” and “correct” must connote, imply, and apply distinctly in Japan; what are they in Korea, China, and Taiwan? Confucius’ sentiment expressed in “祭神如神在 (*Analects* 3/12),” “獲罪於天，無所禱也 (3/13),” “敬鬼神而遠之 (6/22),” “天厭之 (6/28),” “天喪予! (11/9),” etc., must connote something unique and distinct in pantheistic, polytheistic and naturalistic Japan. All these impacts and connotations in Japan must be quite different from those in Korea, China and Taiwan. And so on.

Second, person-comparison is no less complex. For what reasons was a scholar famous in Japan—what sort of position, in what sort of circumstances, and because of erudition of what sort? What were the major concerns of Mr. A in Japan in situations similar to Mr. B in China? In what themes was Mr. A in Japan interested and for what reasons in contrast to Mr. B in China? Why did Mr. A in Japan criticize Mr. B in China this way—and not that? Why did Mr. A in Japan criticize Mr. B in China on themes s, t—and not on u, v, etc.? And so on. Similar queries exist in scholars in Korea and in Taiwan.

Third, there are numerous basic topics to consider, that Huang all too casually mentioned, besides the above two: theme-comparison, person-comparison. Three at least can be cited. [1] Why cultural comparison? What are its rationales, presuppositions, and grounds? [2] What is cultural comparison for? What should be its goals? And then, which is a crucial one? [3] How is cultural comparison to proceed? What are its methodological procedures, framework, and principles? Such query includes exploration of possible differences in mode of thinking among cultures. Each topic requires volumes to explore.

So, obviously, simple collation of comments from many cultures on an identical Chinese Classical text is not only insufficient; it is quite misleading. Unless and until we reflect on all three themes above with considerate care and

in sensitive depths, cultural comparison remains a loud explosion of fireworks in an empty Asian sky, a superficial sensational “fashion” only to vanish all too soon without a trace.

It would be otiose to assert that the volume is on Chinese Classics hermeneutics, not comparative. Over half of the essays are on hermeneutics in the West, and many other essays insinuate the Chinese distinctness against other non-Chinese traditions. Thus the volume clearly points to comparative hermeneutics that is a *sine qua non* to manifesting the distinctness of Chinese hermeneutics.

## TWO

Now we consider *Hermeneutical Tradition of Chinese Classics: (2) In Confucianism*, ed. Li Ming-hui, 《中國經典詮釋傳統（二）：儒學篇》, 李明輝編, 2004, xi+357 pages. We can be brief here, since it is in general a repetition in thrust and sentiment of the above volume. This volume is a collection of nine miscellaneous essays on nine miscellaneous themes loosely “Confucian”; its principle of collection seems to be the maximum diversity of themes, mainly on how Confucianism was viewed (Essays 1, 7) or practiced (Essays 8, 9), and who did what on the Confucian texts (Essays 2-6).

Strangely, the *Classic of Changes* 《易經》 appears here as a Confucian classic and in the anthology volume in general as a Chinese classic. Does this fact mean a sort of “Confucian imperialism” again, unless explained and justified to the contrary? Besides, if the *Classic of Changes* 《易經》 is considered, why not many other classical writings that are Confucian?

Again, where is “hermeneutics on the Confucian Classics” as advertised? We want to learn to what the various Chinese interpretations of the Confucian Classics amount, what their typical shape and features are. This volume, however, simply retells many stories of who did what, when, and where, whether Confucianism is religious or not, how it was viewed by the West, how it was practiced in Taiwan, etc. Thus this volume also misses the “forest” of typical

shape and sentiment of Chinese hermeneutics for the “trees” of specific problems and specific “who did what, where, and when” in Chinese history of ideas.

### THREE

Now we must look at both volumes as a whole. And we are impressed. All the imperfections mentioned above notwithstanding—who is perfect, anyway?—these volumes remain important trail blazers in the virgin forests of Asian comparative hermeneutics, concentrated on Chinese Classics. As no human being can survive without consuming foods from outside, so a culture cannot survive, much less thrive, without continuous interactive comparison with other cultures. Here we have a series of volumes on cultural comparison with one focus, Chinese Classics. They constitute quite a handy pivotal “object lesson” to the world at large on how world cultures should come together amicably and critically to inter-learn and inter-enrich.

Therefore, as Huang himself mused as he concluded his Foreword to these volumes, this project of Chinese hermeneutics in critical dialogue with other cultures remains an urgent, historic, and decisive “first step” toward our interactive world culture in today’s small Global Village. We sincerely congratulate the Center for Studies of Asian Cultures on launching this landmark, series of volumes devoted, explicitly, exclusively, and entirely, to cultural hermeneutics—in general, in Confucianism, and in Taoism.