

INTRODUCTION

Chinese Philosophy and the Translation of Disciplines

For centuries, Western scholars have recognized the fundamental relevance and importance of texts like the *Analects* of Confucius (*Lunyu* 論語) and the rich tradition that followed in Confucius's (孔子, 551–479 BCE) wake. Yet from the sixteenth century onward when Jesuit missionaries first began to translate these works, the Western understanding of this tradition has involved intractable problems of translation—not only in lexical terms, but in disciplinary terms as well. Just what *are* these texts? Often they have been considered under the rubric of “Chinese philosophy,” and yet this categorization—already problematic in the days of the early Jesuit missionaries—only became more problematic with the rise of philosophy as an academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, a discipline that was to be dominated in the twentieth century by analytic philosophy.

Chinese and Western scholars alike have sought to show that the Confucian texts could be read as philosophy in the modern Western disciplinary sense, and yet the *Analects* and its progeny rarely resemble analytical treatises, seeming to often fall more on the side of gnomic wisdom or crafty persuasion. To the extent that they do so, they have often come under the shadow of the invidious distinction between “philosophy” and “rhetoric,” an imagined dualism of two unequal realms that ultimately goes back to Plato's criticism of the sophists and their reputed strengths as teachers and orators. Around Plato's time in the fourth century BCE, philosophy was an anxious young discipline looking for ways to establish its

value against older, more trusted forms of knowledge such as public speech and poetry.¹ But Plato's agenda did not go unchallenged. Although filled with admiration for Socrates and Plato, Cicero—eminent politician, orator, and philosopher of the Late Roman Republic—took up the issue from the perspective of the Roman civic virtue of oratory and forcefully attacked what he considered Socrates' (and by extension Plato's) lamentable schism between philosophy and rhetoric:

The people who discussed, practiced, and taught the subjects and activities we are now examining bore one and the same name (because knowledge of the most important things as well as practical involvement in them was, as a whole, called 'philosophy'), but he [Socrates] robbed them of this shared title. And in his discussions he split apart the knowledge of forming wise opinions and of speaking with distinction, two things that are, in fact, tightly linked. [. . .] This was the source of the rupture, so to speak, between the tongue and the brain, which is quite absurd, harmful, and reprehensible, and which has resulted in our having different teachers for thinking and for speaking.²

In this passage from *On the Orator*, Cicero first cleverly concedes that philosophy should indeed encompass all the liberal sciences, but by the same token he argues that Socrates did not stand by his own convictions but robbed philosophy of its general sway by separating it into "rhetoric" and "philosophy" proper. Second, Cicero laments that students of his day have one teacher too many—a waste of resources. Third, and most significantly, Cicero accuses Socrates of disciplinary amputation. Severing "tongue" from "brain" is a crime against anatomy, against the unity of the human body as much as against the integrity of human wisdom, *sapientia*. Cicero populates his all-embracing realm of *sapientia* with Iliadic heroes, early Greek sages, and politicians who revel in the "amazing communion" of their tongues and brains. Against this backdrop of wise archaic Greek harmony, Cicero portrays Socrates as the mischievous surgeon of divisiveness. But he would not be Cicero if he did not turn the tables on himself, suggesting in the end that the schism induced by Socrates is not entirely disadvantageous to the Romans:

So, just as the rivers part at the watershed of the Apennines, the disciplines parted when flowing down from the common ridge of wisdom. The philosophers flowed into the Ionian Sea on the East, as it were, which is Greek and well provided with harbors, while the orators came down into our barbarian Tyrrhenian Sea on the West, which is full of reefs and dangers, and where even Odysseus himself had lost his way.³

The deplorable division is here transformed from an anatomical severance into a geographical watershed. In this new aquatic geography of the Eastern and Western seas—which springs, significantly, from the Italian Apennines and not from Greek territory—Rome seems quite content to contribute an equal share to the map. Since Cicero was instrumental in the appropriation of Greek philosophy and the creation of a Roman philosophical tradition, such a geography was understandably attractive: the disciplinary segregation along ethnic lines relieved the Romans of the anxiety they felt over the absence of a properly Roman philosophy, while also guaranteeing direct access to pristine philosophical wisdom, at least in its incarnation as the civic virtue of rhetoric and oratory.

Cicero alerts us to the fact that, like texts themselves, disciplines need translation when they cross borders, and he suggests that they can actually gain in the process. How do disciplines "translate" cross-culturally? How do we confront on the disciplinary level the truism that every generation needs its own translations of old masterworks? How can we decide which translations are more fruitful than others? Can multiple translations be beneficial? This book explores these questions with regard to the discipline of "Chinese philosophy" and the understanding of early Chinese "Masters Literature" (*zishu* 子書), a text corpus from the pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE) attributed to master figures such as Confucius and Mozi 墨子 (ca. 480–390 BCE), Laozi 老子 (?) and Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 369–286 BCE), Mencius 孟子 (372–289 BCE), Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310–215 BCE), and Han Feizi (ca. 280–233 BCE). We seek to understand first what modern proponents of a "Chinese philosophy" have gained from creating a Chinese equivalent of philosophy for their time and concerns, and second what we may gain from framing our inquiry into this text corpus through the lens of other disciplines, questions, and concerns for our time.

1. Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*.

2. Cicero, *De oratore* III.60–61. Translation by May and Wisse, *Cicero: On the Ideal Orator*, 241–42.

3. *Ibid.*, 245–46.

The Invention of "Chinese Philosophy" in Europe

In contemporary China, "Chinese philosophy" is a well-established academic discipline practiced in philosophy departments that also teach "Western philosophy." This can be traced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Chinese overseas students studying in the West or Japan—as well as a massive influx of Western books—sensitized Chinese intellectuals to the supreme status of philosophy in European cultural history. Chinese and Japanese intellectuals greatly admired Western philosophy, in particular logic, as the key to scientific progress, modernization, and thus ultimately as a tool of self-defense against Western imperialism, and they coined the neologism "wisdom learning" (Ch. *zhexue*, J. *tetsugaku* 哲學) to translate the Western concept of "philosophy." Thus the birth of the academic discipline of "philosophy" in China is intimately connected to the definition of philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the West, a definition that was very much in flux as philosophy was undergoing a radical reduction from the master science that it had been until the eighteenth century and was becoming a secularized academic discipline trying to secure its place in the new struggle between the two cultures of the natural and humanistic sciences.

But the concept of a "Chinese philosophy" in Europe originated earlier, namely with the Jesuit mission in China.⁴ Although early Jesuit missionaries such as Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) dressed in Buddhist garb, his successor Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) recognized the importance of targeting the literati class for the purpose of Christian proselytizing and consequently decided to appear in literati dress. He familiarized himself with the Confucian Classics and started translating the Neo-Confucian canon, Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) *Four Books*, into Latin, a translation that was not published until 1687 in Paris under the suggestive title *Confucius, the*

4. For a thought-provoking history of the more than four hundred centuries of "translation history" of Confucianism between West and East, see Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*. See also Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?* Nicolas Standaert criticizes Jensen's claim that the Jesuits invented the concept of "Confucianism," but he agrees that they invented Confucius as a "philosopher." Standaert, "The Jesuits Did Not Manufacture 'Confucianism,'" 127. A standard Sinological account of the China mission is Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800*.

Chinese Philosopher or: Chinese Science Explained in Latin (Confucius, Sinarum Philosophus sive Scientia Sinica latine exposita).

Confucius, the Chinese Philosopher was rapidly translated into various European vernaculars, and it shaped the European vision of both Confucius and Chinese thought until the nineteenth century. Assuming that the Neo-Confucian "Four Books"—namely the "Great Learning," the "Doctrine of the Mean," *Analects*, and *Mencius*—were all authored by Confucius or at least, indirectly, by his disciples, it presents the figure of the sage, with an extended biography and elaboration on his works. The "Great Learning" and the "Doctrine of the Mean" are not translated but are presented to the European audience through the voice of a Jesuit narrator in indirect speech. Text passages are paraphrased, and commentary snippets are adduced and systematized into a flow of argument that is more convincing as a philosophical tract of enlightenment morals than a rendering of any Chinese original.

It is significant that only the *Analects* are presented in translation proper, yet only in selection.⁵ Although the Jesuit narrator's voice at first explains passages from the *Analects* in straightforward paraphrase, at times echoing the language of Renaissance manuals for the conduct of rulers and princes, the narrator then leaves the stage to a direct translation of some of Confucius's "maxims." This is the only moment in *Confucius, the Chinese Philosopher* when the European reader encounters the newly baptized "Chinese philosophy" without narrative reshaping. Not surprisingly, the Jesuit narrator seems particularly worried that the aphoristic nature of the *Analects* might discredit the text as a tract of moral philosophy:

Confucius's third Book is quite of another Character than the two former, as to the Method and Expressions; but in the ground it contains the same Morality. 'Tis a Contexture of several Sentences pronounc'd at divers times, and at several places, by Confucius and his Disciples. Therefore it is intituled *Lun Yu*, that is to say, *Discourses of several Persons that Reason and Philosophize together*.⁶

5. On issues of translation and the role of allegory in the cultural encounter between Jesuit missionaries and Chinese audiences and texts, see Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*, particularly ch. 1, "The Question of Chinese Allegory."

6. I use the English edition with the title *The Morals of Confucius, A Chinese Philosopher, who flourished above Five Hundred Years before the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Being one of the most choicest Pieces of Learning remaining of that Nation*

The Jesuit narrator emphasizes that it is not method but morality that counts, and he is all too eager to present the *Analects* as a decidedly philosophical text. He successfully exploits the double meaning of "discourse" as both more casual "conversation" and a more strictly "systematic treatise," and he also plays on the double grammar of "reason" as the particular human faculty that enables the particularly philosophical activity of "reasoning."

After the arrival of Dominican and Franciscan missionaries in the early 1630s, Rome began to question Jesuit practices of accommodating the Confucian ancestor worship of their Chinese converts. Ricci's followers were put on the defensive.⁷ Consequently, China missionaries had an even stronger interest in presenting Confucius as a secular "philosopher," not as leader of a rival cult, in order to avoid confrontation with Rome. At the same time, like the sages of Egypt, Babylon, or Judea, China's cultural heroes and great thinkers were accommodated as precursors to a natural Christian theology, who presumably knew of god and the principles of faith by way of natural reason, not through the divine revelation Christians had received.

Although the China mission was mainly concerned with whether the Christian faith was being misrepresented to Chinese converts, European intellectuals with no direct ties to the mission occasionally worried about

(London, 1691). It is translated either directly from Intorcetta et al.'s Latin version or through an intervening French translation attributed to Louis Cousin or Jean de La Brune (Cordier, *Bibliotheca Sinica*, 1392–93). The preface to the English edition contains a telling illustration of how much a fight in China over practical questions of accommodation versus Christianization contributed to a proxy war among European intellectuals about allegations of atheism versus ecclesiastic orthodoxy. The author lashes out against Nicolas Malebranche, who was accused of favoring Spinoza's philosophy that had been condemned as materialist and atheist. To dissipate the allegations, Malebranche had a "Christian philosopher" defeat a Chinese "atheist" philosopher in a fictional debate in his *Entretien d'un philosophe chrétien et d'un philosophe chinois* (Conversation between a Christian and a Chinese Philosopher). In a populist gesture that criticizes the scholastic futility of contemporary metaphysics, it praises the refreshing simplicity of the Confucian writings: "There is nothing Extream, none of those frightful Subtilities, which are observ'd in the Moral Treatises of most Modern Metaphysitians (Voyez le Traitté de Morale de l'Autheur de la Recherche de la Verité, "See the moral treatise of the author of the "Search for Truth," that is Malebranche).

7. Brockey gives a vibrant account of the Jesuit mission in China from the perspective of European church politics in *Journey to the East*.

the misrepresentation of Chinese "philosophy" to the Western audience. In his influential four-volume history of philosophy, Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770)⁸—a Lutheran living in the diaspora as director of the Latin school in the (Catholic) Swabian Kaufbeuren—strongly criticizes the Jesuit interpretation of Chinese texts:

There have indeed been several controversies among scholars as to the trustworthiness of those collections, whereafter the Jesuits were suspected of not having given an accurate interpretation of these Chinese monuments [i. e. texts], but of having adulterated much to forward their own cause.⁹

Brucker seems especially worried that the Jesuits disqualify themselves as mediators of Chinese culture by their excessive adoration for things Chinese and their "adulteration" of Chinese texts. He suspects that they distort their sources through their desire to produce the impression that the Chinese texts contain a coherent, systematic philosophy:

Indeed, what is magnificently preached by not just a few about the "philosophy" of the Chinese has to be examined with utmost accuracy; and given their abject study of every part of it and their wrong-headed love for things foreign, one has to ask whether the uncertain notions of the Chinese that may be confused and do not signify anything specific, are explained with certain-sounding and clearer ut-

8. Although a visionary eighteenth-century history of philosophy, which in his day circulated in Latin, German, English and Russian, Brucker's work has received little attention since the nineteenth century. One of the major reasons for this neglect is the radical conceptual change in the nineteenth century that accompanied the birth of the academic discipline of "philosophy." To date, the only larger monograph about Brucker, though more about his biography than his work, is an early twentieth-century dissertation by Karl Alt, a Lutheran minister from Kaufbeuren, thus clearly the work of a local aficionado with all the predictable symptoms of personal enthusiasm and patriotic provincialism: see Alt, *Jakob Brucker*. In order to understand the Western concept of "philosophy" that underlay the Jesuit creation of "Chinese philosophy," we have to reach beyond the radical transformations of the concept of philosophy as a discipline that occurred in the nineteenth century. Nicolas Standaert has made an advance in this direction by considering philosophy within the seventeenth-century spectrum of sciences and Jesuit education. See Standaert, "The Classification of Sciences and the Jesuit Mission in Late Ming China," 287–317.

9. Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae*, 849: "Plurima vero de fide harum collectionum controversia inter eruditos fuit, postquam Iesuitae in suspicionem venerunt, eos monumentorum Sinicorum interpretationem genuinam non dedisse, sed multa ad iuvandam causam suam adulterasse." Here and below translation of and emphasis in the Latin text are mine.

terances? Whether disparate meditations may be in no way related, but are forced by passion into one system by a contrived connecting line of thought? Whether allegory, sacred symbols and secrets are not often explained in line with rather recherché and well-cherished hypotheses? And so many things repressed into silence are simply conveyed into a more tolerable meaning by convenient interpretation?¹⁰

Brucker disapproves of the Jesuits' putting Chinese thought, whose obscurity he never ceases to emphasize, into a straitjacket of philosophical systematization that appeals to the Western eye. But he also implicitly criticizes the Jesuits for fervently "preaching" (*praedicantur*) Chinese philosophy when they should instead be applying their proselytizing enthusiasm to the propagation of the Christian faith.

For those who opposed Ricci's accommodationist agenda in order to protect China from a too possessively European appropriation, the Jesuit invention of a systematic Chinese "philosophy" behind Confucian texts was not the only worry. The Jesuits' preoccupation with Confucius as the transmitter of the "Classics" appeared one-sided to a growing group of scholars in Europe who were trying to fit the overwhelming figure of Confucius into the pantheon of other "Masters." One such scholar was Joseph de Guignes (1721-1800), who had studied Chinese under Etienne Fourmont (1683-1745)¹¹ and had served as secretary interpreter at the

10. *Ibid.*, 850: "Maxime vero, quae de philosophia Sinensium ab haud paucis magnifice *praedicantur*, examinanda accurate, abiectoque omnis partis studio, et *inepto* peregrinarum rerum *amore* explorandum, anon notiones Sinensium incertae, confusae nihilque distincti significantes certis et clarioribus definitae sint vocibus? annon meditationes dispersae et nullatenus cohaerentes, in unum systema, excogitato connexionis vinculo, ire coactae sint? An non allégoria, hieroglyphica, aenigmatica multa secundum electas deamatasque hypotheses sint explicata? annon suppressa silentio multa, vel commode interpretatione in tolerabiliores sensus peracta sint?"

11. Etienne Fourmont was among the first to acquire a thorough knowledge of Chinese at home in France, and he challenged missionary scholarship from his position as a member of the *Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*. He was taught by Arcade Huang, a Chinese scholar who had come to Paris and was ordered by Louis XIV to work on a Chinese dictionary. For Fourmont's extensive correspondence with the figurist missionary Joseph de Prémare, see Knud Lundbaek, *Joseph de Prémare (1666-1736)*, 25-104. For his biography and his linguistic works, in particular his presentation of the 214 radical system of the recently compiled Kangxi Dictionary to a European audience, see Cécile Leung's *Etienne Fourmont*.

Royal Library under Louis XV. He taught oriental languages at the Collège de France and was associated with the eminent *Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* in Paris. In an essay published in 1777, he confidently voices his dismay about the missionaries' biased focus on Confucius:

The Chinese do actually not believe that philosophy has been cultivated by anybody else except for them; but they place their first philosophers in such remote times and the history they make of it is so obscure and uncertain that it is necessary to examine its solid truth. Because the missionaries have only provided us with very little information about the subject and they talk only, so to speak, about Confucius and his doctrine, I intend to assemble in these studies what concerns the philosophers before Confucius and to talk more extensively about Laozi, whom they only mention by name. The age of this philosopher is fraught with more difficulties than they allow us to see.¹²

Most of de Guignes's essay is devoted to the argument that Confucianism and Daoism, which he sees as the two great schools of Chinese philosophy, are two different versions of Pythagorean philosophy, the former oriented toward moral self-cultivation, music, cosmology, and numerology, and the latter pursuing magic and alchemy.¹³

De Guignes was an outspoken defender of the widespread belief that China had been a historical colony of ancient Egypt, and that its writing derived from Egyptian hieroglyphs.¹⁴ It is therefore not surprising to see him arguing that Chinese philosophy was a form of Pythagoreanism, an esoteric philosophy said to have been deeply influenced by Pythagoras' travels in Egypt. Yet, in order to counteract the exaggerated focus on

12. Les Chinois ne croient pas, à la vérité, qu'on ait cultivé ailleurs que chez eux la Philosophie; mais ils placent à des temps si reculés leurs premiers Philosophes, & l'histoire qu'ils en font est si obscure & si incertaine qu'il est nécessaire d'en examiner la solidité. Comme les Missionnaires ne nous ont donné que très-peu de connoissance sur ce sujet, & qu'ils ne parlent, pour ainsi dire, que de Confucius & de sa doctrine, je me propose de rassembler dans ces recherches, ce qui concerne les Philosophes qui ont précédé Confucius, & de parler plus amplement de Lao-tse qu'ils se contentent de nommer. L'époque de ce Philosophe souffre plus de difficultés qu'ils ne nous en laissent apercevoir. Joseph de Guignes, "Essai historique sur l'étude de la philosophie chez les anciens chinois," 269.

13. *Ibid.*, 311.

14. The most influential proponent of this theory was Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680). On his theory in the context of his vision of China see Boleslaw Szczesniak, "The Origin of the Chinese Language According to Athanasius Kircher's Theory," and Paula Findlen, ed., *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*.

Confucius, he unveils ancient Chinese “philosophical” Daoism—as distinct from the missionaries’ presentation of it as a popular idolatrous cult—only to unravel it as a pretentious forgery:

The adepts of the Dao would not want to give precedence to the Confucian scholars. The latter presented their ancient canonical scriptures, such as the *Book of Changes* and *Book of Documents* etc., whose antiquity they praise; the former have proposed books and authors, whom they place in highest antiquity. This is how one attributes several philosophical works to Hermes Trismegistos; the partisans of this great corpus of texts regard him as their leader. Likewise, the adepts of the Dao have been equally preoccupied by their great work and have had similar ideas and the same pretensions.¹⁵

De Guignes draws an analogy to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a voluminous text corpus of the Hermetic tradition that amalgamates Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, and Egyptian ideas. Because its documents claim to come from highest antiquity and to reflect divine revelation, the Church dated it to a much earlier time and held it up to be a precursor to Christianity, but the corpus was exposed in the early seventeenth century as a forgery postdating the advent of Christianity. Similarly, de Guignes claims, Daoism laid a false claim to antiquity out of jealousy of Confucianism’s hegemony. Considering de Guignes’s introduction to Daoist philosophy, which sprang from a similar envy of the missionaries’ monopoly on the meaning of Confucianism and Chinese “philosophy” in general, it is ironic that he brought into play a rather suspicious rival school of thought, an irony he himself admits to.¹⁶

15. Les sectateurs du Tao n’auront pas voulu le céder aux Lettrés. Ceux-ci présentoient leurs ancient King, tels que l’Y-king, le Chou-king, &c. dont ils vantoient l’ancienneté; ceux-là ont supposé des livres & des auteurs qu’ils placent dans la plus haute antiquité. C’est ainsi qu’on attribue à Mercure-Trismégiste plusieurs ouvrages sur la Philosophie; les partisans du grand-oeuvre le regardent comme leur chef: de même chez les sectateurs du Tao, également occupés du grand-oeuvre, on a eu de semblables idées & de pareilles prétentions. *Ibid.*, 299.

16. Brucker seeks to counterbalance the Jesuits’ devotion to Confucius with a careful treatment of the mythical Fu Xi 伏羲, whom he considers the first “Chinese philosopher.” Fu Xi was traditionally credited with the invention of the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* and was much favored by French missionaries, in particular Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730) and Joseph de Prémare (1666–1736), who used the *Book of Changes* as a semi-otic master tool to unravel all secrets of Chinese culture. But the renown of the *Book of Changes* in Europe stemmed mostly from Leibniz’s association of the hexagrams with his

Although there was certainly disagreement about who were the most preeminent early philosophers in China and how to interpret their teachings, European observers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not fundamentally question the existence of philosophy in China. Like the “thinkers” of ancient Egypt, Babylon, or Judea in Brucker’s history of philosophy, China’s cultural heroes and great thinkers were accommodated under the spacious roof of a “Christian philosophy,” or else a natural theology that likewise housed outright Christians, natural Christians who had forgotten positive divine revelation and only needed to be liberated from their ignorance into positive Christian belief, and full-fledged pagans; from the perspective of the eighteenth-century mission, it was particularly important to liberate natural Christians from their obliviousness of divine revelation and from their state of denial. Thus, one cannot emphasize enough that until the nineteenth century, the existence of a Chinese philosophy was unquestioned because philosophy encompassed a host of religious, moral, and intellectual sensibilities, which could definitely—even if in strongly contested ways—be mapped onto early China.

Masters Literature and “Chinese Philosophy” in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century China and Japan

The concept of a “Chinese philosophy” was attractive in Enlightenment Europe because it could help resolve religious disputes over the accommodation of foreign beliefs and customs and help reflect on pressing concerns of the day related to revelation and reason, ideal government and civil institutions, and education and moral self-cultivation. In contrast, in East Asia the idea of a “Chinese philosophy” became urgent only in the

discovery of binary logic. Brucker repeatedly expresses his puzzlement over Fu Xi’s scientific clairvoyance and deplores the Jesuits’ neglect of his philosophical significance: “Yet, they [i.e., the Chinese] do not just consider Fu Xi a legislator, but also a great philosopher and theologian, and those who are totally full of admiration towards the Chinese, as well as those who pour cold water over the Jesuits, think all the very best of the philosophy of the Chinese.” (Ast non legislatorem modo Fohium faciunt, sed et magnum philosophum atque theologum, quotquot in Sinensium admirationem rapti, frigidamque Iesuitis suffundentes maxima quaeque de Sinensium philosophia cogitant.) Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae*, 853.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the context of debates about modernization and reform triggered by European military intrusions and the faltering of the Qing state.

Only a couple of decades separate Liu Xizai's 劉熙載 (1813–1881) *Outline of Prose* (*Wengai* 文概) from Matsumoto Bunzaburō's 松本文三郎 (1869–1944) *History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Shina tetsugaku shi* 支那哲學史), but their interpretations of Chinese Masters Literature could hardly be more different. This difference can give us a sense of the stunning gap between the traditional emphasis on reading the masters as both moral and stylistic models and the vertiginously novel use of the Masters Texts for building a “Chinese philosophy” and a mode of thinking that could help reform the nation.

Liu Xizai was a philologist and literary critic from Jiangsu who had passed the civil examination in 1844 and worked as a scholar at the State Academy and the Shanghai Longmen Academy. His *Outline of Prose* (*Wengai* 文概) was one part of his *Outline of Art* (*Yigai* 藝概), printed in 1873 as a collection of treatises on traditional Chinese literary genres such as the exegesis of the Classics, *shi* poetry, rhapsodies, *ci* song lyrics, and *qu* ballads. His prose treatise covered historical writings as well as pre-Qin Masters Texts and great prose writers of the Tang and Song. His treatment of the Masters Texts is based on a traditional model that goes back at least to the Six Dynasties Period (220–589) and Liu Xie's (ca. 465–522) *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍). In Liu Xie's treatise on literature, *wen* (“pattern,” “belles lettres,” or in Liu Xizai, “prose”) is an ultimate pattern that underlies the cosmos, ruled by the Way (*dao* 道). Unlike the overly literary term *belles lettres*, *wen* encompasses the traditional Chinese genre spectrum of the Classics, Histories, Masters, and Literary Collections. In his chapter on the Masters Texts, Liu Xie explains how they “enter the Dao and show one's intentions. Most importantly, they establish one's virtue, next they establish one's words” (*ru dao xian zhi zhi shu. Tai shang li de, qi ci li yan* 入道見志之書. 太上立德, 其次立言). Although this lofty formulation gives ample leeway for interpretation, Liu Xie claims two functions for the Masters genre: as a repository of moral values for self-cultivation and a model for eloquent writing, helping one to learn how to best express “one's intentions.” This traditional model made perfect sense in a world where the Masters Texts were models of moral and literary education,

tools to help one's writerly creativity and cultivation. To illustrate the moral values one can learn from various canonical prose texts, he gives us at times pithy summaries of which texts “transgressed” or “embraced,” “avoided” or “conveyed” the moral law.¹⁷ To convey the miraculous nature of literary creation, he explains the liberating and exuberant flying of the giant Peng Bird in the first chapter of *Zhuangzi* as a metaphor for the writing process and discusses stylistic features such as the use of allegory and the shifting prosody of continuity and disruption of *Zhuangzi*.¹⁸ Reading the Masters Texts as canonical literature, in the broadest sense, was the traditional model of interpretation against which the propagators of a notion of “Chinese philosophy” formulated their vision for these texts.

We can see this novel vision in Matsumoto Bunzaburō's *History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Shina tetsugaku shi*) published in the 1890s in Tokyo, some two decades after Liu Xizai's essay on Chinese prose writings. The use of the word “Shina” 支那 for China in the title shows that China had become an object for a modern type of “sinology” in Japan that differed from the premodern *kangaku* 漢學 studies of China. In the rapidly modernizing and Westernizing Japan of the late nineteenth century, “China” had suddenly become a foreign object for scientific exploration, and an object of new national interest. Although in 1623 the Jesuit missionary Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) had already coined the term *feilusuoifeiya* 斐錄所費亞 to phonetically translate *philosophia* and nineteenth-century translators of Western texts used a host of terms to translate “philosophy” into Chinese and Japanese, in the 1880s and 1890s the ultimately successful neologism *zhexue* 哲學 (J. *tetsugaku*) became dominant in translating “philosophy” into Chinese and Japanese.¹⁹ This “wisdom study” or “study of sagehood” was not only a new word based on the venerable notion of the *zhe*, the wise person or sage, but it also encapsulated a new program of inquiry in which the pre-Qin Chinese Masters Texts were to play a crucial role. Mostly known for his scholarship on Indian philosophy and Buddhism, Matsumoto was born a year after the Meiji Restoration and

17. Liu Xizai, *Liu Xizai wenji*, 61.

18. *Ibid.*, 60.

19. See Lackner et al., *A Repository of Chinese Scientific, Philosophical and Political Terms*.

grew up to become a professional academic teaching at Kyoto University, a modern educational institution. In resonance with nineteenth-century beliefs about the relationship between race and place, he interpreted the Confucian school of Lu 魯 as a philosophy of rough and simple Northerners interested in questions of moral substance, whereas Laozi and the “school of Chu 楚” were developed by hot, exuberant Southerners interested in literary embellishment and cosmological speculation.²⁰ Although his presentation of the various Masters Texts follows the traditional biographical template, which would give names, birthplace, and a short chronological biography of the master to which the text was attributed, the vocabulary he uses to describe the Masters Texts vibrates with novel concepts such as a “political theory” (*seijiron* 政治論) of Mencius, and a “cosmology” (*uchūron* 宇宙論) or “dialectics” (*benshōhō* 弁証法) of Zhuangzi 莊子.²¹

The contrast with Liu Xizai’s account could not be more pointed: in Matsumoto’s history of “Chinese philosophy,” the Masters had become historical authors with biographies rather than textual models for one’s own writing practice, and understanding them required a new set of tools that would help extract the true content of the “philosophy” (*tetsugaku*) and “thought” (*shisō* 思想) that these philosophical “scholars” (*gakusha* 學者), the masters, wrote about in their texts.

In Matsumoto’s history of Chinese philosophy, the notions of “philosophy,” “thought,” and “scholarship” overlap. This is also evident in Liang Qichao’s (1873–1929) *Lun Zhongguo xueshu sixiang bianqian zhi dashi* 論中國學術思想變遷之大勢 (On the broad trends of changes in China’s scholarship and thought) of 1902, where he discusses the Masters Texts under the label of “scholarship” and applies the concept of “scholarly schools of thought” (*xuepai* 學派) to Chinese schools of masters, Buddhist sects, and Greek and Indian philosophical schools alike. Like Matsumoto, he reconceives the pre-Qin Masters Texts as *comparanda* for Greek and Indian thought. When juxtaposing Greek, Indian, and Chinese thought, however, he has little to say about shared intellectual concerns and questions, instead supplying a comparative timetable of how prominent figures in each tradition such as Confucius, Plato, and the

20. Matsumoto Bunzaburō, *Shina tetsugaku shi*, 32–33.

21. *Ibid.*, 80, 176, 176.

Buddha related to each other in time. The construction of synchronisms that could help place the unknown—Greece and India—within a chronological framework of the known—China—seems like a symptom of a fledgling comparative approach that failed to fully unfold in the book, also indicated by the fact that Liang did not elaborate the Indian part but left it unfinished for lack of a deeper grasp of Indian intellectual history. Still, the presence of a slot for an absent section on Indian thought is significant, because it shows that the comparison with not only Greek but also Indian philosophy drove Liang Qichao’s concept of Chinese thought. One of the earliest Chinese works to bear the novel programmatic title of “History of Chinese Philosophy” was Xie Wuliang’s 謝无量 *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史, published in 1915. It was quickly overshadowed by Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891–1962) highly successful *Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱 (*Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*), published in 1919 and reprinted within two months of its initial publication. Little known today, Xie Wuliang’s book was groundbreaking in a different way, in a way that might even explain why it quickly fell out of favor with contemporary Chinese readers. Unlike Matsumoto, Hu Shi, and many later Chinese scholars who wrote “Histories of Chinese Philosophy,” Xie highlighted the fact that “philosophy” was a Western concept. He did not take it for granted that “philosophy” was a universal phenomenon, embodied in the Chinese case in the pre-Qin Masters Texts among others. Instead he explains: “The name of *zhexue* does not exist in ancient writings, but takes its name from the West; in the East it is a translated term 哲學之名, 舊籍所無. 蓋西土之成名. 東邦之譯語.”²² Xie explains further that it comes from the Latin term *philosophia* (spelled in the Roman alphabet) and quotes Socrates for further explanation of the etymology of “philosophy”: “I am not wise, but love wisdom 我非智者, 而愛智者.”²³ He goes on to gloss *zhi* 智 “wise” as *zhe* 哲 (like *zhexue* 哲學) “sage” and adduces evidence from the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經), *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), and the ancient dictionary *Erya* 爾雅 for the ancient form of *zhe* that had become the flagbearer of the novel concept of a “Chinese philosophy.”²⁴ Thus he

22. Xie Wuliang, *Zhongguo zhexue shi*, 1.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

both foreign-izes the term but also familiarizes the concept of “love of wisdom” by showing Chinese canonical occurrences of the word *zhe*. In a similar act of familiarization, he uses pedagogical similes to describe philosophy for his Chinese audience, saying that it is “like” Confucianism, like the “learning of the Way (*daoxue* 道學),” like the “learning of principle (*lixue* 理學),” like Buddhism and other intellectual movements with which Chinese readers would be familiar. Conversely, the novel term *zhexue* is tagged onto traditional Chinese phenomena: *zhexue* starts with the mythical Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi* 黃帝) of hoary antiquity and is thus as familiar as it is foreign.

It was the intellectual and literary critic Hu Shi who moved from a pedagogical simile to the full-fledged construction of a Chinese philosophy. In 1919 Hu Shi wrote a history of philosophy based on universal claims of method and proof, objectivity and systematization. It was the fruit of his experience of studying philosophy with John Dewey at Columbia University in the 1910s and having access to first-hand knowledge of Western philosophy as taught in early twentieth-century U.S. universities, as well as access to reference works such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the popular *History of Philosophy* by the German Neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915), which he often relied on in his work. Hu Shi makes his Western focus clear in his methodological preface written in the fledgling vernacular, which he had forcefully advocated in his influential “Preliminary Discussion of Literary Reform” (*Wenxue gailiang chuyi* 文學改良芻議) two years earlier: “The definition of philosophy has not been ascertained. I will temporarily suggest the following definition . . . (*zhexue de dingyi conglai mei you yiding de. Wo ru jin ye zan xia yi ge dingyi . . . 哲學的定義從來沒有一定的。我如今也暫下一個定義 . . .*).”²⁵ After this Aristotelian start on the subject with the gesture of a definition, a systematic explication of the treatments and goals of philosophy—from universal history, to period history, to monographs on thinkers or subdisciplines—follows.

Hu Shi accomplished a breakthrough, paving the way for the many historians of Chinese philosophy in the twentieth century who wished to join the great conversation between Western philosophers dead and alive while bringing in Chinese materials and thinkers. Their urgent desire to

25. Hu Shi, *Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang*, 1.

construct a “Chinese philosophy” can only be understood in the context of the political upheavals of the late Qing empire and the new Republic. The frantic search for national reform triggered an enormous amount of soul-searching and reflection on how, where, and when Chinese civilization had gone wrong. Laying claim to a royal discipline such as *philosophia* for China seemed at once an explanation, a solution, and a consolation. Only the spirit of scientific method and systematic inquiry could help save the nation.²⁶ By giving these newly propagated values a precedent in traditional Chinese scholarship, these modern thinkers were attempting no less than to construct a discipline of “Chinese logic” and uncover proof for its existence in early Chinese texts.²⁷

Although their crusade is understandable in light of historical developments taking place in the first half of the twentieth century, the existence of a Chinese philosophy is still hotly debated today, with the waning of the notion of philosophy as a guiding discipline of scientific progress (which had forced the question in all its acuteness on Chinese intellectuals a hundred years ago).²⁸ Unfortunately, the concept has also contributed to prejudices harbored by Western analytic philosophers against what they see as a false claim to philosophicality in the Chinese tradition. As Lin Tongqi, Henry Rosemont, and Roger Ames have recently put it:

[T]he Eurocentric and chauvinistic character of most modern Western philosophy has been reinforced [. . .] The philosophical dimensions of Chinese thought, or lack thereof, should be an open-ended question, subject to discussion [. . .]; instead, the question has simply been begged against the Chinese.²⁹

The most ardent proponents for a “Chinese philosophy” have unwittingly reinforced such prejudices, because most of the debate over the existence of a “Chinese philosophy” continues to maneuver in a framework that unconsciously universalizes the reception of an early twentieth-century

26. For the relation between national failure, reform, and literary culture in this period, see Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature*.

27. For the early twentieth-century debate about “Chinese logic,” see Kurtz, “Matching Names and Actualities.”

28. For an overview of the arguments and relevant scholarship, see Carine Defoort, “Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy?” 393–413.

29. Lin Tongqi, Rosemont, and Ames, “Chinese Philosophy,” 747.

notion of Western philosophy in the particular historical milieu of early twentieth-century China. Among scholars today there often seems to be little awareness that historicizing the moment of the modern birth of “Chinese philosophy” would not only help answer the question of whether there is or is not a Chinese philosophy, but would also allow us to ask more relevant questions about the future of philosophical thought around the world.

The early twentieth-century Chinese notions of Western philosophy were closely tailored to the national agendas of their proponents. These thinkers were not equally interested in the richness of philosophical traditions in the West: Socratic maieutics, Aristotelian categoricals, Neoplatonist mysticism, Stoic styles of living, Medieval Christian philosophy, Viennese logical empiricism, Bergsonian philosophy of life—which one do we mean anyway when we say “Western Philosophy” with a capital P? Moreover, the reductive notion of what a “Chinese philosophy” could entail leads Western and Chinese scholars alike to suppress a significant part of the Chinese texts and the early Chinese worlds of thought. The text attributed to Xunzi is most often read for its critique of previous notions of “human nature,” a theme that seems to resonate with Western discourses about human psychology since Aristotle. However, its two poetry chapters—the “Rhapsodies” (*fu* 賦) and “Working Songs” (*chengxiang* 成相)—are not only not discussed by historians of “Chinese philosophy,” but they are almost never mentioned as part and parcel of the *Xunzi*, which I will try to show them to be. From the *Han Feizi* 韓非子, the most prominent text of the presumable “Legalist school” represented by Han Feizi, only the chapters that portray authoritarian governance are taken into account as echoing questions of political philosophy, and the voluminous chapters of rhetorical case studies and anecdotes that would not belong in a philosophical project focused on scientific method are ignored. Furthermore, the singular quest for a “Chinese philosophy” means that even those portions of the Chinese texts that are streamlined to fit its construction are pushed into a narrow corner of self-defense. From there they are marshaled to testify for a question that was asked only out of the historical coincidence that China’s modernization and its desperate opening to Western knowledge happened just around the time when analytical philosophy came to the fore in the West.

Toward a World Philosophy?

Scholars of various stripes study the Confucian *Analects*, the *Mencius*, or the *Laozi*, that is, those texts that were archived in the imperial library under the label of “Masters Texts” (*zishu* 子書, *zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家) starting in the first century BCE. Historians, anthropologists, religious scholars, literary and intellectual historians, historians of science, and paleographers all rely on the “Masters Texts” in their study of Early China, but the group of scholars who have laid the strongest and most prominent claim to the corpus are comparative philosophers. What can comparative philosophy contribute to the study of the Chinese Masters Texts and what do these texts in turn have to offer to comparative philosophers?

One direction of “comparative philosophy,” conceived as a well-intentioned globalism that gives equal access to the accomplishment of philosophy for all peoples and histories, has taken the name of “World Philosophy.” This is an important and admirable project in the globalization processes we are currently witnessing in which states and peoples compete over hegemonic resources such as oil and food, political power and economic advantage, histories and identities. Yet, there is a danger that this approach ends up being a mixture of Enlightenment-era practices of cultural translation with more recent postcolonial apologetics (expressed both by non-Westerners and by Westerners to obviously different effect) arguing for the right of non-Western traditions to become respectable members of a fictive pantheon of “Universal Philosophy.” The earlier Jesuit practices of accommodating Chinese texts and beliefs received a more radical formulation by a group of missionaries in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries who believed that the Chinese *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) was the oldest text of the world and contained the main tenets of Christianity. These so-called “figurists” led by Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730) and Joseph de Prémare (1666–1736), were eager to match up figures and events of Chinese high antiquity with corresponding biblical phenomena: Adam, the first man, corresponded to the mythical Yellow Emperor and so on. The “figurists” produced synoptic tables of parallel histories to prove the long-forgotten presence of divine reve-

lation in China.³⁰ Similarly, some world philosophers today—coupling “ideas” and presumably archetypal “themes” rather than biblical paraphernalia—call for a high degree of abstraction to ensure comparability:

[The] reason for focusing mainly on ideas is to allow us to begin at a level of abstraction high enough to allow the ideas to be compared at all. This freeing of the ideas for comparison—equivalent to the clearing away of “noise” that makes the exact sciences possible—requires us to disregard as temporarily irrelevant the ideas’ simply local or individual characteristics.³¹

We should not forget that attempts to ensure comparability follow an important ethical and political agenda; comparability serves to strive for the compatibility of the world’s thought traditions and their representation in a coalescing horizon of globalized human values and rights. Yet a drive towards reductive comparability of Eastern and Western philosophies might ironically achieve the opposite effect and bolster Eurocentric claims in the guise of establishing “universal parameters”:

The body of world-texts provides us with the great books through which we can discover the archic variables of philosophical discourse in general. But we can establish these transcendental points of contact only by a hermeneutical theory general enough to account for the comparability of such texts. Aristotle’s metaphysical causes, I submit, can be reinterpreted as such generic hermeneutical controls.³²

Even if Dilworth’s perspective of 1989 sounds dated today, his presuppositions are still skeletons in the closet of approaches to “World Philosophy.” This should remind us that we need to find better ways to conceive of a

30. For an example of such a synoptic graph see de Prémare, *Vestiges des principaux dogmes chrétiens, tirés des anciens livres chinois*, 402. For figurism and Bouvet see Claudia von Collani, *P. Joachim Bouvet SJ*.

31. Scharfstein, *A Comparative History of World Philosophy*, 55. Ram Adhar Mall (*Intercultural Philosophy*, 5) even seems to believe in the possibility of a *universal philosophy* when he talks about interculturality: “[I]n the field of purely formal disciplines, it stands for the internationalism of scientific and formal categories.” The mélange of the concept of “interculturality” with an untrammled conviction that the humanities should participate in their own “scientification” stands out as a quite impossible amalgam of two *fin-de-siècle*, the most recent and the end of the nineteenth century.

32. David Dilworth, *Philosophy in World Perspective*, 26.

paradigm for world thought or philosophy that is global, worldly, and reconciliatory and at the same time culturally specific, locally relevant, and excitingly different.

“Chinese Philosophy” as “Literature”?

After a good century of spirited institutionalization of “Chinese philosophy” in the East Asian and Western academic landscapes, the institutional success of the academic subject of “Chinese philosophy” has created its own *raison d’être* within the confines of history. Yet, some Chinese scholars have grown increasingly uncomfortable with the philosophical sway over the early Chinese Masters Texts.³³ They have chosen to regard them as a literary genre and transplant them into the discipline of *belles-lettres*—a rather paradoxical attempt at liberation from Western paradigms, since the study of “literature” itself has been institutionalized in Chinese academe over the past century under Western influence. Accordingly, there has been a wave of interest in sophisticated stylistic appraisals of the pre-Qin Masters since the 1980s by scholars such as Chu Binjie, Tan Jiajian, and Zhang Cangshou. Understanding the Masters as “literature” seemingly resonates with the traditional understanding of the Masters as moral and literary models that we saw as late as with Liu Xizai’s *Outline of Art*. Most of these studies trace the development of narrative framing and argumentative strategies. They see the beginning of “Masters Literature” in short “scenes of instruction” in which a master is represented as instructing disciples or rulers, a form predominant in the Confucian *Analects* and *Mencius*. The first opponents of Confucius’s followers, Mozi and the later Mohist school, developed a longer expository prose format that the Confucian Xunzi transforms into a consciously crafted essay form with a self-assertive authorial voice. Later, anecdotes, court petitions, or exempla for rhetorical practice could all become part of the “collected works” of a master, as in the case of the Legalist Han Feizi. The rise of more systematically arranged multi-author compilations such as *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Mister Lü* (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋)

33. For an overview of research developments on pre-Qin prose and the pre-Qin Masters’ texts throughout the twentieth century in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, see Chang Sen, *Ershi shiji xian Qin sanwen yanjiu fansi*.

and *Master Huainan* (*Huainanzi* 淮南子) rivaled the model of “collected works” by one master and conveyed cosmological efficiency through their encyclopedic representation of knowledge about the cosmos.

Although the teleologies are sometimes too clear-cut, these studies have the great merit of interpreting Masters Literature as an internal progressive dialogue among various Masters Texts. Yet I would argue that most Chinese studies that seek to translate “Chinese philosophy” into “*belles-lettres*” do not go far enough. First, the majority of them show surprisingly little revisionist momentum: they do not attempt, say, to actualize Liu Xizai’s traditional understanding of the Masters Texts by introducing it into the current discipline of “Chinese philosophy” and thereby revolutionizing its early twentieth-century assumptions. Instead, they seem written by literary scholars with the intention to take “Chinese philosophy” out for a rhetorical stroll, for a break from the recent guardians of an old tradition—namely academic departments of “Chinese Philosophy.” It is crucial to go beyond identifying and archiving literary strategies and move to questions that engage literary strategies with intellectual agendas: to explore, for instance, how certain rhetorical tropes such as tautologies, metaphors, or paradoxes relate to the intellectual enterprise of certain Masters Texts. How do narratological tropes such as the author function, narrative authority, or the dialogue form change throughout the history of the genre? How will our vision of the Masters Texts, and Early China in general, change if we read the corpus immanently, that is as an embedded inner dialogue with highly sophisticated rhetorical encoding of intellectual concerns? In short, we need to find more creative ways to capture the symbiosis of rhetorical strategies with intellectual claims.

An Immanent Historicist Approach: “Masters Literature” as Discursive Space

To read the Masters Texts either as “Early Chinese philosophy” or as “Early Chinese *belles-lettres*” means to force them into a disciplinary spectrum that has only recently developed in China according to patterns that are particular to the reception of Western culture in China in one relatively short span of time—the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A natural way to steer clear of such anachronistic approaches is to turn them on their head and instead ask how and why the text corpus was

first identified in the Chinese tradition. The first label for texts by Early Chinese thinkers was simply *zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家 (“The Various Masters and Hundred Lineages/Schools”). This label was consolidated by Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) bibliographers who divided them into various schools such as Confucians (*Rujia* 儒家), Mohists (*Mojia* 墨家), Daoists (*Daojia* 道家), Yinyang specialists (*Yinyangjia* 陰陽家), Legalists (*Fajia* 法家), and Logicians (or “Names-School,” *Mingjia* 名家). The name “Masters Texts” became one of the four headings of traditional Chinese bibliography: “Classics” (*jing* 經), “Masters” (*zi* 子) “Histories,” (*shi* 史), and “Literary Collections” (*ji* 集).

We should keep in mind that Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE), who was ordered to produce a catalogue of the Han imperial library in the first century BCE, faced practical problems of archiving documents that were then still predominantly in the cumbersome format of rolls of bamboo slips and silk. Therefore, schools such as the “Miscellaneous Masters” (*Zajia* 雜家), which are often understood as a specific intellectual formation with an eclectic or “syncretist” outlook, may simply describe a category for books that did not fit anywhere else in the library. Scholars are increasingly aware that traditional Chinese divisions of Masters Texts into particular schools say more about Han librarians than about the authors of the texts. This is congenial to recent classicist scholarship that reconsiders the beginnings of philosophical traditions in Greece by going beyond Platonic and Aristotelian constructs of “pre-Socratic philosophy” and placing these early figures in a broad matrix of other “masters of truth”—in Marcel Detienne’s words—such as divination specialists, poets, or cultic leaders.³⁴

Unfortunately, most of our contextual evidence about the identity and pursuits of the masters comes from Han times, so we are trapped again in anachronistic visions that postdate the genesis of the texts, sometimes by several centuries. Thus, the strictest immanentist historicist approach has to rely on the texts themselves in reconstructing their context. Yet, the ultimate circularity of this most pure framework, which is anyway illusory because the Han transmission of these texts also shaped their content, is not its worst vice. Rather, it is both utopian and intellectually totalizing to attempt to unthink all later “contaminations” such as the penetration of

34. Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*.

earlier Confucianism by Buddhism culminating in the Neo-Confucian movement in the Song dynasty (960–1279) or the reception of the Western disciplinary spectrum over the past couple of centuries.

Although a lack of contemporary sources prevents us from giving a full-fledged historically contextualized reading of the Masters Texts, the texts themselves and their mutual references to each other provide ample context for their historical understanding. Their fierce attacks on opponents and their clever strategies to entice their audience in their own favor constitute a discursive space of shared words and concepts, dissonant interpretations, and disputed implementations. We are thus granted a most intimate view of the internal historical development of the genre of “Masters Literature” through the rhetorical maneuvers of the authors themselves.

To avoid an overly literary and narrow definition of genre for the purpose of this study, it may be helpful to recall Mikhail Bakhtin’s suggestive concept of “speech genres.” He generously accommodates under that expression almost any utterance ranging from set phrases of conversation to highly elaborate literary or—as he calls it—“ideological” genres with a complex genre history. Bakhtin’s vision of a speech genre is an attempt to fight the deeply engrained perception of speakers as “biblical Adams” who utter each word with virginal candor for the first time in the history of humanity.³⁵ In contrast to the primordial speech of Adam in Eden, speech genres are those parts of an utterance that have already been spoken before—possibly many, many times. By virtue of being uttered and recognized as speech genres, they function as frames and triggers of the audience’s expectations. According to Bakhtin, it is this “addressivity” that makes a speech genre into an utterance rather than a sentence, and that makes a text into a work.

Although one may feel tempted to reduce these phenomena to the catchphrases of “intertextuality” and “dialogism” produced by the mediators and appropriators of Bakhtin’s messy written legacy, crucial distinctions would get lost in the process. I would argue that a speech genre is a particular case of intertextuality, because it implies textual echoes not only among different texts, but among different texts that nevertheless share similarities of scene and function of enunciation. Thus, Masters Literature constitutes a “speech genre” not just by virtue of particular inter-

35. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 93.

textual echoes, but by readerly expectations about the positioning of the master figure within each instantiation of the genre.

On a literal level the term “speech genre” captures well the oscillation—which is so characteristic of Masters Literature—between representations of oral speech on the one hand and the assertion of the authorial voice of written discourse on the other. Still, Bakhtin’s notion of speech genres holds a more important advantage for the study of this particular corpus of texts. Russian Formalism, a movement of literary criticism that thrived during the first half of the twentieth century and included figures like Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Vladimir Propp, and Boris Eichenbaum, vacated the function of authorial intention. But Bakhtin, a thinker on the fringes of this movement, reserved an important spot for the reader, thanks to his notion of “addressivity.” Yet, unlike reader-response theories such as Wolfgang Iser’s, which operate with imagined profiles of implied readers who are observed in the process of filling in the text’s “gaps” (*Leerstellen*), Bakhtin’s addressivity also eliminates the notion of readerly intention by already incorporating it into the genre economy of each text.³⁶ By virtue of their addressivity, speech genres provide triggers that guide the reception by their audience.

It needs no further emphasis that a concept that reduces the role of unfathomable authorial and readerly psychology is extremely useful in dealing with a corpus of texts for which we possess little information with regard to either authors or readers. Bakhtin’s notion of addressivity as part of the genre economy aids us in regarding authors of Masters Texts primarily as creative and often brilliant readers of earlier instances of the genre.

The rise of Masters Literature with and after Confucius falls into what is regarded as the formative classical age of Chinese civilization. This period constitutes the Chinese share of the “axial age” (*Achsenzeit*), to use the concept Karl Jaspers coined in his influential 1949 book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (*The origin and goal of history*). In the wake of the unprecedented destruction of the Second World War, Jaspers sought for common human ground and saw the first millennium BCE as the pivotal period during which basic philosophical systems and religions that still define today’s world and shared values formed in Greece, the

36. See Iser’s *Der implizite Leser* and *Der Akt des Lesens*.

Near East, India, and China. Seen through Jaspers's concept, the pre-Qin period is considered the Chinese variant of the origin of human consciousness and philosophical reflection, an assumption that puts considerable pressure on the corpus of Masters Literature as foundational texts out of which to extract evolutionist claims about presumable Chinese "cultural orientations" as they unfold in later Chinese history or even beyond history. Although taking the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) as a cut-off point for inclusion in the Masters canon was already common in nineteenth-century treatments of Chinese philosophy, Jaspers's notion of an "axial age" has enhanced parameters for survey histories of pre-Qin Chinese thought, which usually start with Confucius and end before the Han. This has less to do with the internal development of the genre of Masters Literature—which continued to thrive in the Han and even into the Six Dynasties Period³⁷—than with the later scholars' perception that the philosophically productive period of Masters Literature ended with the Han.

Benjamin Schwartz's commanding study *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1985) is strongly inspired by Jaspers's understanding of the axial age, in particular by the conviction that this period laid the foundation for basic orientations in later Chinese cultural history. In accord with Jaspers, Schwartz sketches the rise of Masters Literature against a background of pre-Confucian "cultural orientations" such as Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) ancestor worship and feudalism during the early part of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE). He emphasizes the new "axial" consciousness arising with and after Confucius that is no longer dominated by "untaught feelings," in Edmund Burke's terms, but finds its expression in the Masters Texts which reshape earlier cultural orientations.³⁸

Schwartz arranges his narrative largely along the lines of Sima Tan's "Six Schools," although he explicitly criticizes the use of Han "school" labels for pre-Qin realities. To supplement the framework, which he apparently uses with mixed feelings for want of anything better, he includes a suggestive chapter on key discursive terms such as human nature (*xing* 性), breath (*qi* 氣), and heart-mind (*xin* 心) that became the shared and

37. Tian, "The Twilight of the Masters."

38. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 9–10.

disputed battleground of Warring States texts.³⁹ Although the present study intends to circumvent as much as possible the overdetermination that the axial age hypothesis imposes on the Masters Texts, it benefits from the particular emphasis Schwartz places on how key terms were reshaped and manipulated in the dialogue between contending Masters Texts.

A. C. Graham's masterful study *Disputers of the Tao* (1989) arranges the succession of various philosophical schools—an expanded version of Sima Tan's "Six Schools"—along a narrative of primal human disappointment. According to Graham, the axial age and rise of consciousness in China is not merely a gratuitous emanation of human rational spirit, but is the necessary outcome of the breakdown of the pre-Confucian world order decreed by Heaven. This metaphysical crisis spins itself into a complicated love story between "Heaven" and "Man." After repeated break-ups in *Mencius*, *Mozi*, and *Zhuangzi* and even declarations of disinterest in *Laozi* and in Legalist texts, the end of the crisis in this relationship comes with political reunification, which in intellectual terms corresponds to cosmological correlative theory and an accommodative syncretism under Confucian colors. The reader is relieved that Heaven and Man are brought together in a new synthesis and is inspired to reflect on whether the promiscuity inherent in cosmological syncretism constitutes a solution of the metaphysical marriage crisis or a mere postponement of the conflict, looking towards a new alliance that had to wait for the era of Song Neo-Confucianism.

Among the studies of the pre-Qin Masters and "Chinese philosophy" that have recently been published in Western languages, Mark Lewis proceeds from a truly innovative framework.⁴⁰ In *Writing and Authority in*

39. "There is in fact a whole vocabulary of terms which comes to be shared by a wide diversity of modes of thought. The terms themselves are such that while they may contain a certain common range of meaning, they nevertheless lend themselves to extraordinarily differing interpretation and emphasis." See Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 174.

40. To name just a few: Bauer, *Geschichte der chinesischen Philosophie*; Gan Shaoping, *Die chinesische Philosophie*; Geldsetzer and Handing, *Grundlagen der chinesischen Philosophie*; Anne Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise*. Also, the long overdue edition of Albert Schweitzer's manuscripts on Chinese thought should not go unmentioned as works of considerable historical interest and as illustrating an unusual perspective on

Early China, Lewis surveys the intertwinement between forms of writing and types of authority in Early China. In his chapter "Writing the Masters,"⁴¹ he discusses what he calls "enunciatory strategies" of the texts and the development from the representation of a teaching scene, as we see it in the *Analects*, to the appearance of essay formats with *Xunzi*. For Lewis the beginning of Masters Literature is marked by the separation of authority from authorship, where authorship is a sign of subordination rather than authorial control.

The present study is yet another examination of the Masters Texts. But my aim is different from survey histories of early Chinese philosophy. There is no desire for integral treatment of the development of early Chinese thought. I engage a central, core body of Masters Texts. Recently, archeology has enhanced our understanding of early Chinese thought, thanks to the excavation of ancient versions of texts and the discovery of completely unknown ancient texts that had apparently fallen out of favor and were lost to the historical record. As the study of these materials rapidly progresses, it crucially enriches and revises our understanding of Early China. Yet I have decided not to make these materials a central piece of my book and only mention them to illustrate particular points. The reason is simple: This book proposes a new disciplinary "translation" for the texts that have come to be called "Early Chinese Philosophy." It coins the term "Masters Literature" for this corpus, uncovers the distinctive features of this genre, and traces how arguments are shaped by narrative formats and rhetorical strategies developed in the early stages of its unfolding, from Confucius to Han Feizi. While excavated texts like the Guodian materials add new insights into intellectual positions that had disappeared and uncover lineages of influence in the interpretation of Confucius's legacy, their existence and content does not alter my argument. They, too, are part of the discursive space of Masters Literature and add historical and intellectual nuance to its development, as I showcase by example in Chapter 6. Yet, all the fundamental shifts in narrative formats and rhetorical strategies that are relevant to my argument about the na-

China by a German theologian, philosopher, musician, and physician who is most remembered for founding a hospital in Lambaréné, West Central Africa. See Schweitzer, *Geschichte des chinesischen Denkens*.

41. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 53–97.

ture and development of Masters Literature are evident in received texts. This is why I focus on received texts in this book.

Beyond the coining of "Masters Literature" and the exploration of its nature and unfolding I attempt to undertake the following, more far-ranging thought experiment: What happens if we scrape away as much as possible of the disciplinary and conceptual baggage that has accrued on the surface of the Masters Texts, the interpretive barnacles in particular of the last half millennium since the Jesuit mission? Which neglected parts, problems, particular moves, concepts, and strategies of the Masters Texts come to light in this scraping process? And can those parts, problems, moves, concepts, and strategies help us see the history of Greek philosophy and its progeny in a different light, or move us into a new cosmopolitan future for philosophy and intellectual inquiry?

We will return to these questions in the epilogue, after reading our way through Masters Literature from the *Analects* to *Han Feizi* and pondering the unfolding of this textual genre. The first chapter is a study of how to use earlier anachronism against later anachronisms. It captures the earliest, anachronistic constructions of "Masters Literature" that took place in the Han dynasty. After exploring the image of Masters in the texts themselves, the chapter analyzes Han dynasty taxonomies of Masters texts and schools, contrasting this vision with the perspective conveyed in the biographies of various pre-Qin masters in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. Moving into the Eastern Han, the chapter closes with a discussion of Wang Chong's 王充 (27–ca. 100) argument for literary creation and his provocative claim that in some ways the Masters corpus is superior to the Classics. Living in a world where sagely creativity had become problematic and was overshadowed by a thriving culture of Classics scholarship, Wang Chong nostalgically identified with the creative enterprise of pre-Qin Masters Literature. As such he constitutes a convenient endpoint for the early reception history of Masters Literature; his arguments mark the point when the canon of Masters Literature became increasingly closed, and he strove to fashion himself as a late-born "master" rather than one of the contemporary writers and scholars.

After setting the stage with an exploration of early notions of Masters Literature, I venture, chapter by chapter, into close readings of seven of the most influential texts attributed to pre-Qin Masters. For each text, I discuss its place within the development of Masters Literature and ex-

plore how certain intellectual claims emerge with certain narrative forms and rhetorical tropes in the text.

The second chapter on the *Analects* attempts to think through the logic of the seminal initial scene of Masters Literature, the “scene of instruction” between a master and his disciples. Here I discuss forms of social relations and community depicted in the *Analects*, focusing in particular on the role of the master’s charismatic body at the heart of that community. Chapter 3 on *Mozi* analyzes styles of expository argument that *Mozi* develops against Confucius and his followers as well as against the Confucian “scene of instruction” itself. The fourth chapter on *Mencius* argues that its discovery of interiority—as is evident for example in Mencius’s discussion of human nature—reflects a pervasive interest in depth: the temporal depth of master-disciple lineages, the depth of the human body and psychology, and even the depth of text, where deeper meaning should have precedent over literal meaning. Chapter 5, on *Xunzi*, shows that *Xunzi* constitutes a major inflection point in the development of Masters Literature, with its introduction of a host of new enunciatory strategies into the genre: *Xunzi* creates the master as an author who persuades his audience in first-person treatises, it employs poetry for persuasive purposes, and it adds sophisticated twists to older narrative formats of Masters Literature such as the “scene of persuasion.”

Deliberately placing *Laozi* after the line-up of Confucian masters, Chapter 6 argues that *Laozi* is a consciously crafted attempt to imagine a Masters Literature outside of established rhetorical formats of scenes of instruction or persuasion. Although possibly owing to its older origin, it is highly aware of Confucian, Mohist, and other Warring States traditions and bans any historical specificity, negates grammatical affirmation, and erases people and charismatic bodies from the scene of the text in order to claim historical precedence over the Confucian tradition. Chapter 7 shows how *Zhuangzi* puts narrative flesh back onto the stripped skeleton of *Laozi*’s experiment with negation and elimination of specificity: it resolves *Laozi*’s paradoxes by leaping into tropes of travel through boundless space, and it populates its mock scenes of instruction and persuasion with new protagonists ranging from the imagined figures of *Laozi* and Confucius to craftsmen, criminals, and monsters. In the last chapter, we get to one of the most complex and most neglected texts of pre-Qin Masters Literature, *Han Feizi*. The chapter shows how, beyond the seemingly

simplistic notion of a draconic state machine that manipulates human behavior through rewards and punishments, there lie vertiginous appropriations of *Laozi*’s concept of “non-action,” bold reimaginings of social roles, and a sophisticated vision about the art and practice of persuasion.

In the epilogue I apply the insights gained from individual Masters Texts to identify key characteristics of the genre of Masters Literature. This allows us to imagine a viable future for Early Chinese Masters Texts: as a catalyst for engaging comparative approaches in literature, philosophy, and intellectual history; as a means to shake up preconceptions about the origins of philosophy in the West and to extend the repertoire of approaches to Greek philosophy; and as a treasure trove of new concepts and distinctive “styles of reasoning” that could become virulent and productive in the cosmopolitan future of philosophy.