

CONFUCIUS

ANALECTS

WITH SELECTIONS FROM TRADITIONAL COMMENTARIES

TRANSLATED BY
EDWARD SLINGERLAND

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Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Indianapolis/Cambridge

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Printed in the United States of America

08 07 06 05 04 03 02 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

For further information, please address:

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

P.O. Box 44937

Indianapolis, IN 46244-0937

www.hackettpublishing.com

Cover design by Abigail Coyle

Text design by Jennifer Plumley

Composition by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong

Printed at Sheridan Books, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Confucius.

[Lun yu. English]

Confucius analects / translated by Edward
Slingerland.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-87220-636-X—ISBN 0-87220-635-1

(paper)

I. Slingerland, Edward G. (Edward Gilman) II. Title.

PL2478.L8 2003

181'.112—dc21 2003047772

ISBN-13: 978-0-87220-636-6 (cloth)

ISBN-13: 978-087220-635-9 (pbk.)

PRC ISBN: 978-1-60384-095-8

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PREFACE

The *Analects* is not a “book” in the sense that most modern Westerners usually understand a book—that is, a coherent argument or story presented by a single author, to be digested alone in the quiet of one’s study. It is instead a record—somewhat haphazardly collected and edited together at an unknown point in history—of a dynamic process of teaching, and most likely was only committed to writing many years after the primary touchstone of the process, the Master Confucius, had passed away. It probably represents an attempt by later students and followers to keep alive the memory of his teaching, which had been conveyed both verbally and by personal example. Many, if not most, of the passages are quite cryptic, and this may be at least partially intentional. In 7.16, the Master is reported as saying, “I will not open the door for a mind that is not already striving to understand, nor will I provide words to a tongue that is not already struggling to speak. If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again.” As we see throughout the text, Confucius’ comments are often intended to elicit responses from his disciples, which are then corrected or commented upon by the Master. Therefore, these “ordered sayings” of Confucius were originally embedded in a conversational context within which their meaning could be gradually extracted.

By the late fourth century B.C.E., with the Master gone, direct conversation was no longer possible, but this merely forced the dialogue to take a different form. It is at this

point that we get the beginning of what came to be an over two thousand year old tradition of commentary on the words of Confucius. The tradition begins with such Warring States texts as the *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, and the *Record of Ritual*, and continues up to the present-day—carried on for most of this time in classical Chinese, branching out into the various vernaculars of East Asian nations in the Chinese cultural sphere, and finally expanding in the 18th century into a wide variety of Indo-European languages. For the most part, this commentarial tradition represents an attempt by later followers or admirers of the Master to find “the other three corners,” no longer in dialogue with the Master himself, but rather by embracing extant clues about the Master’s possible intention, the views of previous students of the text, and the opinions of contemporaries. For later students of the *Analects*, this written commentarial tradition serves as a proxy for the original conversational environment, providing context, making connections, and teasing out implications.

Since at least the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), no Chinese student of the text has attempted to approach the *Analects* outside of the context of this written commentarial tradition. Most modern Chinese people, of course, read the text—originally written in classical Chinese, a purely literary language—with a translation into modern Chinese as well as extensive commentaries, but even traditionally educated Chinese conversant with the classical language find it necessary to base their understanding of the text upon the foundation of earlier commentaries. Indeed, the text of the *Analects* itself is arguably so concise as to be incomprehensible without some sort of interpretative

apparatus imposed upon it. As John Makeham has noted, “Unless a reader is provided with a commentarial ‘context’ in which flesh is added to the very spare bones of the text, [the *Analects*] frequently reads as a cryptic mixture of parochial injunctions and snatches of dry conversation. It is the commentaries which bring the text to life and lend it definition” (1997: 261). I have therefore always found it astounding that Western readers of the *Analects* have, for the most part, been left to their own devices in understanding this exceedingly difficult text, being presented with simply the bare, original passages with usually no more than a translator’s introduction and occasional textual notes to rely on. Small wonder that so many have come away from the *Analects* with their impression of cryptic, mysterious Eastern “fortune cookie” wisdom reinforced. This, however, is not how the text is read in China, and is not at all how the text itself was originally meant. The passages that make up our received *Analects* were probably originally intended to be recited aloud, with teachers and students together discussing their meaning and subtleties. The commentarial tradition that has accreted around the text merely represents a written substitute for this original verbal interaction.

What this edition attempts to do is give the English-language reader a hint of the richness of this context, a glimpse of the living text in its natural habitat, by presenting it with extensive running commentary. Perhaps the best way to characterize the experience I am trying to create is to imagine reading the *Analects* with a friend by your side who knows classical Chinese, and already has some definite opinions about how to read the text, who then

proceeds to skim through vast quantities of commentaries, sub-commentaries, textual notes, and other arcana surrounding the text and occasionally shout out things he or she thinks are helpful or illuminating, as well as providing recommendations for further exploration in the English-language scholarship. Not ideal, of course, but still a far sight better than being set adrift with only a translator's introduction and the text itself, in all its cryptic glory. Of course, that actual situation is usually worse than that, for much of the cryptic quality of the original is already hidden in the translation by virtue of the choices the translator has to make in rendering the passages into intelligible English. As Alice Cheang has noted,

The first thing to disappear in a translation of the *Analects*—its most distinctive formal characteristic—is the opacity of the text. Much that in the original is dense and abstruse becomes clear, comprehensible, and pellucidly simple. The translator, constrained by the limits of the grammatically feasible, usually has to choose among several interpretations ... so that most of the latent ambiguity in the original is suppressed in the converted text ... What has been added is necessary in order to render the words of Confucius intelligible in another language, but the result is a text in which the balance of power is shifted towards the author (in this case the translator) and away from the reader. (Cheang 2000: 568–569).

Another way to describe what I am trying to do, then, is that by providing alternative interpretations of individual passages and identifying where various understandings are coming from, as well as by pointing the reader in the direction of works that contain more detailed discussions of the issues at hand, I am trying to give back at least a measure of this power to the English-language reader. Not *too* much, of course, because a certain measure of control has to be exerted to avoid producing utter nonsense, but something approaching the maximum amount of power

someone cut off from the text in its original language can reasonably hope. I myself have ceded a great deal of power to the editor of the four-volume critical edition of the *Analects* which this translation is based, Cheng Shude 程樹德, one of the most important of 20th-century Chinese students of the text. The reader may be reassured to know that, at the very least, the hands holding the hands into which you have put yourself are trustworthy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The task of translating the primary text of the *Analects* was eased considerably by the labor of previous translators, whose work I have built on, and whose well-turned phrases I have, in many cases, been entirely helpless to improve on. Uffe Bergeton and Ho Su-mei provided invaluable assistance in my translation of traditional commentaries by checking my work, catching many errors and infelicitous translations, and Uffe did much of the initial biographical research for [Appendix 4](#).

Ivan Perkins was a great help in preparing the appendices, and an anonymous reader solicited by Hackett Publishing provided very helpful comments on the Introduction. Daniel Gardner, whom I initially contacted for assistance in solving a Song question of identity, very graciously agreed to read the entire manuscript, and provided extremely useful feedback that has made this a much more readable book. Jennifer Plumley and her production team at Hackett Publishing did a wonderful job of copyediting, helped me to clean up my sometimes turgid prose, and have generally made the publication process smooth and painless, which is by no means the norm in academic publishing. The completion of this work was facilitated by a USC Individual Zumberge Research Grant for the summer of 2002.

My biggest debts, however, are owed to Deborah Wilkes and Joel Sahleen. Deborah, my editor at Hackett Publishing, has been a source of constant encouragement and lucid advice, and has managed to skillfully balance our desire for academic integrity with the demands of common

sense. Sensitive to the sometimes rather finicky needs of the author and yet thoroughly professional and efficient, Deborah has been a sheer pleasure to work with, and one could not hope for a better editor. Joel Sahleen, my longtime friend and colleague, generously agreed—despite the demands of new fatherhood and dissertation-writing—to watch my sinological back, commenting extensively on the first draft of this translation and saving me from innumerable embarrassing gaffs and stylistic crimes. I have only explicitly noted Joel’s contributions where lack of attribution would constitute egregious intellectual theft, but as a result of his consistent firm guidance—urging me toward clarity of expression, grammatical responsibility, and historical accuracy—his voice in fact permeates this entire translation. In keeping with Confucius’ dictum on friendship, Joel would remonstrate with me gently, desisting when I was too stubborn to listen (12.23), and was unable to save me from all of the sinological and stylistic errors no doubt still to be found in this translation. For these, of course, I take full responsibility.

CONVENTIONS

The *pinyin* system of romanization is used throughout. In order to avoid confusion, Chinese words appearing in quotations from Western scholars have also been converted into *pinyin*, with the exception of titles of articles or books.

References to *Analects* passages will be in the form x.x, where the first number refers to the “book” and the second to the passage number within the book.

Due to the fact that this classroom edition is oriented primarily toward readers with little or no knowledge of Chinese, references for traditional Chinese texts cited by Cheng Shude or other commentators are only provided in cases where a complete English translation is easily available. All translations from Chinese are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Traditional Chinese commentators often make direct or oblique references to classical texts, and these I will note with brackets.

To avoid cluttering the text and commentary with Chinese characters, the characters for proper names will be omitted unless immediately relevant, but will be included in the entries in [Appendix 3](#) (“Historical Personages”).

The disciples of Confucius are often referred to by a variety of names. Their more formal style-name (*zi* 字) is usually used in third-person narrative, whereas in first person speech or when they are usually addressed by Confucius their personal name (*ming* 名) is generally used. The benefits of reflecting these differences in level of formality in the translation seem to be outweighed by the confusion they will create for the English reader, so

throughout the translation I have kept to one form of reference—usually the style-name, but sometimes the full name when the style-name is not used or is only rarely used in the text. I have followed the same practice with other potentially confusing proper names, such as the Shang Dynasty, which is also referred to as the Yin.

In order to avoid confusion, I have adopted nonstandard romanizations of certain proper names:

Zhou 紂, for the evil last king of Shang, to distinguish him from the Zhou 周 Dynasty;

Qii 杞, for a minor state mentioned in the text, to distinguish it from the much more prominent state of Qi 齊;

Jii 姬, for the Zhou clan name, to distinguish it from the Ji 季 of the Ji Family that ruled the state of Lu in Confucius' time.

I have exclusively used the male third-person pronoun when referring to the Confucian practitioner because, as far as we can tell, the *Analects* was composed by and for men, and the idea that women might have any place in the Confucian worldview—other than as temptations to immorality, or (from the Han Dynasty on) subsidiary helpmates toward morality—has no place in an account of traditional Confucianism (refer to the commentary to 17.25). I am not at all unsympathetic toward certain modern Western attempts to make Confucianism more gender-neutral, but feel it is a scholarly disservice to obscure the gender attitudes of traditional Confucians.

INTRODUCTION

The *Analects*, or *Lunyu* 論語 (lit. “ordered sayings”), purports to be a record of the teachings of Kongzi 孔子 and his disciples. Kongzi is more commonly known in the West by the latinization “Confucius,” bestowed upon him by Jesuit missionaries in the 18th century; his traditional dates are 551–479 B.C.E. The *Analects* has been traditionally viewed as a coherent and accurate record of the teachings of the Master, recorded during his lifetime or perhaps shortly after his death, but this view of the text began to be called into question by the philologists of the Qing Dynasty, and modern textual critics have argued convincingly that the text actually consists of different chronological strata, assembled by an editor or series of editors, probably considerably after the death of Confucius.

The earliest explicit quotation from the *Analects* in another early text is found in the *Record of Ritual*,¹ which most scholars agree is of pre-Han Dynasty provenance. Unattributed quotations of the *Analects* found in other pre-Han texts suggest that something like our received version was circulating during the Warring States period. According to the first discussion of the *Analects* as a text, that of Pan Gu (32–92) in the *History of the Han*, there were three different versions circulating in his day: the Lu 魯 version (of twenty books), the Qi 齊 version (of twenty-two books), and the “Ancient text” (*gu* 古) version (of twenty-one books), the last of which was supposedly found in the walls of Confucius’ house, hidden there and therefore saved from the infamous burning of the books carried out by the first emperor of Qin in 213 B.C.E. From the comments of early

textual critics we know that these versions—none of which have survived in their entirety—apparently varied not only in number of books, but also in the content of the individual books. In the early Han Dynasty, scholars specialized in mastering any one of the three versions, and the imperial academy instituted by Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 B.C.E.) trained and tested students on all three. This situation began to change during the reign of Chu Yuan (48–44 B.C.E.), who appointed a scholar by the name of Zhang Yu (d. 5 B.C.E.) as tutor to the crown prince. Zhang Yu was trained in both the Lu and Qi *Analects*, and edited them together to create his own eclectic version, since referred to as the Marquis Zhang version. Zhang Yu’s student became Emperor Cheng in 32 B.C.E., and Zhang himself was appointed Prime Minister in 25 B.C.E., at which point his eclectic version of the *Analects* began to eclipse the other “original” versions. Another prominent eclectic edition of the text circulating at the time was that of Zheng Xuan (127–200), which consisted of the Lu version amended with textual variants from the Qi and Ancient versions, with Zheng Xuan’s commentary appended. Neither the Marquis Zhang nor the Zheng Xuan version survived intact, and what we will be referring to as the “received” version is a doubly eclectic version assembled by He Yan (190–249), which drew on the Marquis Zhang and Zheng Xuan versions.

It is that received version on which this translation is based, although occasional reference will be made to textual variants—points where the Lu, Qi, or Ancient versions differed from the received version—that were recorded by early textual critics and that managed to survive the demise of these original versions. Reference

will also be made to textual variations found in various “extant” versions of the text—copies of the text that have survived in stone carvings or handwritten manuscripts, usually in very fragmentary form. Until recently, the earliest of these extant versions was the Xiping stone text, which dates to approximately 178 C.E., but an additional twist was added to *Analects* textual scholarship by the discovery in 1973 of the so-called Dingzhou 定州 version, written on bamboo strips and found in a Han Dynasty tomb that was sealed in 55 B.C.E. The Dingzhou *Analects* appears to be a variant of the Lu version and reflects slightly less than half of the received text. Due to difficulties involved in reconstructing the order of the bamboo strips, which were originally strung together by cords that have long since rotten away, the Dingzhou text was not published until 1997. Although it contains many textual variations from the received text, most of them are not conceptually significant; the few that are will be noted in the translation.

As for the received version of the text, there is no doubt among contemporary scholars that it is a somewhat heterogeneous collection of material from different time periods, although scholars differ in their identification of the different strata, as well as in the significance they attribute to these differences. At one end of the spectrum of opinion are scholars such as D.C. Lau 1979, who—drawing upon the work of the Qing scholar Cui Shu (1740–1816)—separates the book into two strata (the first 15 books and the last 5) of different ages, but treats the work as more or less thematically homogenous. Steven Van Zoeren 1991 represents what was until recently the other end of the spectrum. He uses a form-critical approach to divide the

work into four strata—from earliest to latest, the “core books” 3–7, books 1–2 and 8–9, books 10–15, and books 16–20—which he sees as representing not only different time periods, but also substantially different viewpoints. This end of the spectrum has recently been pushed to a new extreme by Brooks and Brooks 1998, who see each individual book as representing a discrete stratum, identify vast numbers of “later interpolations” within each stratum, and claim that the work was composed over a much longer period of time than has been generally accepted—the later strata being put together as late as the third century B.C.E. Brooks and Brooks radically reorganize the structure of the *Analects* and regard it as an extremely heterogeneous collection of different (and in many cases competing) viewpoints. Their view is quite speculative, however, and it is the D.C. Lau-Cui Shu’s approach that seems most plausible. Though no doubt representing different time periods and somewhat different concerns, the various strata of the *Analects* display enough consistency in terminological use, conceptual repertoire, and general religious viewpoint to allow us to treat the text as a whole. The probable late date of the last books in the *Analects* (especially books 15–20) should always be kept in mind. Nonetheless, the fact remains that nowhere in the *Analects* do we find even a hint of the sophisticated new conception of the heart-mind (*xin* 心)² debates about human nature and inter-school rivalries that so permeate Warring States texts such as the *Mencius*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Xunzi*. It is highly unlikely that any stratum of the *Analects* was composed after the early fourth century B.C.E., which means that we can safely view the text as a genuine representation of the