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An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy

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the *xiaoren*, in my view, may not gibe with Confucius' division of humans according to their innate sense of moral obligations,⁴ or his assertion that "[t]here are only the wise of the highest class, and the stupid of the lowest class, who cannot be changed."⁵

As a nonphilosopher who regularly teaches the *Analects* in surveys of Asian Literature course, I am always looking for annotated translations that render Chinese classics accessible and appealing to students. I hope more Confucian scholars would periodically take time off from writing for other scholars in order to write for students and the larger public. They may find it no less challenging, as evidenced by Berthrong's generally commendable work.

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ENDNOTES

1. Quotes of Confucius' statements in this review are from James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (Safety Harbor: Simon Publication, 2001), 1.1.
2. *Ibid.*, 15.
3. Chung-ying Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 280.
4. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 20.9.
5. *Ibid.*, 17.3.

An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism. By JeeLoo Liu. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 434 Pp. + xvii. Paperback, ISBN 9781405129503.)

In the past two decades in North America, there has arisen a trend of analytic-comparative study of Chinese philosophy. More and more philosophers have become interested in Chinese philosophy in terms of an analytic orientation with Western philosophical background. As such, their study of Chinese philosophy is at once analytic and comparative in character. This analytic-comparative approach to Chinese philosophy has been much evidenced by research papers presented at professional conferences and published in academic journals and books. However, few textbooks in Chinese philosophy have been written in an analytic-comparative way. That is, until now.

JeeLoo Liu's book breathes fresh air into the field. In this remarkable book, the author presents an introduction to Chinese philosophy with an analytic as well as comparative approach. The analytic approach alone should distinguish this textbook from virtually all other existing textbooks in Chinese philosophy. It breaks new ground

in the teaching of Chinese philosophy and fills a big gap in the field of Chinese philosophy. Given that a large number of philosophy instructors in the English-speaking world are more or less analytic philosophers, this textbook should appeal to instructors in courses like “Chinese Philosophy,” “Asian Philosophy,” and even “Comparative Philosophy.” One complaint of many instructors about textbooks on Chinese philosophy is that they are not engaged in philosophical argument and analysis, which are difficult to articulate and present to students with clarity. Liu’s book remedies this defect.

The author’s organization of the chapters is partly chronological and partly thematic. It takes into consideration historical sequence as well as philosophical contents. The book has two parts. Part 1 is ancient Chinese philosophy and part 2 is Chinese Buddhism, with an introduction to each part. The first part contains seven chapters: “The *Yijing*: The Cosmological Foundation of Chinese Philosophy”; “Confucius in the *Analects*”; “Mencius”; “Xunzi”; “Mozi”; “Laozi”; “Zhuangzi”; and “Hanfeizi.” The second part contains four schools of Chinese Buddhism: “The Consciousness-Only School”; “The Hua-yan School”; “The Tian-tai School”; and “The Chan School.” In each chapter, the author identifies major philosophical arguments and analyzes them step-by-step, presenting a clear picture of Chinese philosophy in action.

There are a number of things that I particularly like in this book. First, the author incorporates insights from numerous scholars in her presentation of the material. For example, in the chapter on Confucius, she cites David Nivison, Chad Hansen, Philip Ivanhoe, and Benjamin Schwartz. By references to these reputable authors, Liu makes her presentation more reliable. Second, after citing original passages from ancient thinkers, Liu presents well-formulated arguments in standard forms. While some of these formulations may be subject to dispute and disagreement, I find them very useful for classroom teaching. Third, when a common interpretation is questionable, Liu offers alternative interpretations for readers to consider and sometimes adds her own insights. For instance, on Confucius’s notion of “*zhong*” (loyalty), she presents a popular reading by such authors as David Nivison and A. C. Graham, which interprets the notion as solely an “upward” relationship toward superiors. Citing evidence from the *Analects*, Liu gives a persuasive argument that “*zhong*” is a broader notion than interpreted by Nivison and Graham. Liu’s reading is quite appropriate as classical commentators have read Confucius’s notion of “*zhong*” as having “an unbiased heart,” as the Chinese character itself indicates. Fourth, based on comparison with alternative theories, the author sometimes states her own position without imposing a view on readers. For example, when comparing

the Confucian notion of *shu*, the negative Golden Rule, with the positive Golden Rule, Liu makes the point that because “there seems to be more common ground in what people do not desire than in what they do desire,” the negative Golden Rule seems more appropriate (p. 55). Finally, at the end of each chapter, there is a section of “Further discussion questions” for students to consider. These questions not only provide some focal points for class discussion but also serve as reading guidelines for students. In addition, each chapter provides a list of “further readings,” which is extremely helpful to students doing research on subjects covered in the chapter. At the end of the book there is a comprehensive list of references, which is also very useful to students as well as instructors.

Of all the chapters, I particularly like the chapter on Xunzi. The strength of the analytic approach is clearly evidenced in the author’s presentation and analysis of Xunzi’s philosophy. The author’s articulation of Xunzi’s various arguments should make it easy for students to grasp the material. I also find her solution to Xunzi’s alleged “dilemma of the early sages” plausible. Here, readers will find a good example of how Chinese philosophy can be done analytically.

Using the analytic approach to study Buddhism, particularly Chan Buddhism, has been a big challenge to analytic philosophers. It is paradoxical to analyze Chan Buddhist philosophy as its central claim is that discursive language, which the analytic method exemplifies, does not reveal truth. In fact, it would say such language and method only distort truth. Thus, the analytic approach as it pertains to Chan tends to make its doctrines less plausible. To my relief, however, Liu is clearly aware of this difficulty. Her treatment of the subject is as good it can get as far as engaging analytic philosophy is concerned. The section of “Chan’s Pedagogy” should be immensely helpful to students studying Chan Buddhism.

Nonetheless, some of the author’s interpretations are subject to dispute, as can be expected in a book of such a broad scope. For example, following her discussion of the “Dao” as the governing force, “the cosmic order” and the moral path, the author writes, “Finally, *dao* as ‘to speak’ reveals the assumption that our language depicts the reality as it is, and to speak the truth means to depict the Way (6).” This interpretation of “Dao” as “to speak” presents too much a representational understanding of “Dao,” which fails to reveal the meaning of participation in the ongoing discourse of transmitting the Dao. For instance, in the *Analects*, 2.3, Confucius says “*dao zhi yi de*,” namely, talking to people about virtue or persuading people toward virtue. It means to use language to guide people. Here “to speak” of the Dao is not to depict, but to spread it. Furthermore, the author does not incorporate into the book the recently discovered Guodian *Laozi*,

which was written earlier than the commonly used version of the *Daodejing* and is not anti-Confucian as Daoism has traditionally been portrayed (see p. 148). A note to alert readers in this regard would have been beneficial. Finally, this book does not include Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, although readers will likely react to this fact in different ways. While some may find the book lacking because of the omission, others may think that as a result of the exclusion, the book is more focused. I belong to the latter group.

Over all, JeeLoo Liu is to be congratulated on her impressive accomplishment in producing this book. This is without doubt the best textbook on Chinese philosophy for analytic-comparative philosophers, who should celebrate its appearance. I, for one, endorse it with excitement.

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