

## EPILOGUE: CHINESE HERMENEUTICS AS POLITICS, APOLOGETICS, PILGRIMAGE

### I. Canonical Unity in Hermeneutical Diversity

In the foregoing pages, we have explored the unity of thought in the *Mencius* (Part I) and its diverse interpretations (Part II). Before explaining a tripartite typology of Chinese hermeneutics exhibited in such an interpretive history, we should first appreciate the beautiful unity of Mencius' system of thought.

Part I insisted that Mencius' most salient feature of thinking lies in insisting that there exists an organic unity among human individuals, sociopolitics and the cosmos, a series of developmental stages. A tearing away or a lack of any one stage seriously cripples the vitality of life. Conversely, fulfillment of any stage enriches others; consummating human individuality solidifies sociopolitics, and upgrading individual and social happiness originates in their cosmological roots. Furthermore, the Mandate of Heaven (*t'ien ming*, 天命) penetrates downward to become human nature, and popular revolt in sociopolitics bespeaks a turning of this heavenly mandate.

This organic continuity among human individuals, socio-politics and the cosmos was expressed as the "Unity of Heaven-Humankind" (*t'ien jen ho yi*, 天人合一) in ancient times, and as "immanent transcendence" today. Their continuity connotes for Mencius their mutual penetration and influence. In other words, the individual is not an isolated entity cut off from the social, as Kao Tzu would have it, but moves and acts along with the social, co-thriving, co-resonating with all other individuals in society, without being reduced to a mere humanoid cog in a social machine.

This interdependent continuity is attended with tension, however. Fortunately, the tension can be dissolved within the mind-heart's deep universality so necessary in value-subjectivity. Hence, the importance of Mencius' theory of human mind-heart. Furthermore, this mind-heart morally resonates through society and the cosmos. Mencius quoted approvingly from the *Book of Documents*, saying that an intimate continuity exists between "the people hear," "the people see," on the one hand, and "Heaven hears,"

“Heaven sees,” on the other. One who cuts off this continuity is not a ruler but a mere vulgar “fellow”.

Finally, a resonative continuity also exists between the individual and the cosmos. Mencius perceptively pointed to our heartfelt reaction, a jolted alarm, on witnessing a baby about to crawl into a well (2A6), and our not being able to bear seeing the jitters of an ox being led to sacrificial slaughter (1A7). Mencius deduced analogically that we are equipped with the “mind-heart of four buddings” that express our conscience, originating in some trans-cendent sources. Inner sageliness and outer kingliness form an interpenetrative unity.

In Part II, we examined the long tradition of Confucian exegesis of the unity of Mencius’ philosophy. This exegetical tradition has origins similar to Western hermeneutics. Both arose out of the gap between the interpretive subject and the raw classical texts he confronted. Interpretation of past writings is a process of decoding, linguistic in character. The incommunicable differences between the linguistic environment, in a wide sense, of the reader and that of the text, due to their mutual alienation in time and locality, set a wall between “our” understanding and the ancient text. This exegetical impasse has provoked the project of hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> Now, given this commonality of generations of hermeneutics in China as well as in the West, the task of this book is thus to explore features of Chinese hermeneutics as distinct from the West.

The long history of Chinese hermeneutics has three traditions: Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist. The Confucian tradition is noted for its pragmatic tendency to manage the world, and has three features: personal, political and apologetic:

- (1). Hermeneutics for *personal* cultivation of life in

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (tr. and ed. by David F. Linge), pp. 3-17. Ch’en Li (陳澧, 1810-1882) was a Confucianist of the Ch’ing Dynasty who said, “*Ku* 詁 (to interpret) means *ku* 古 (ancient), that is, to cut through our differences with the ancient, which is thus made understandable to us. Time has ancient and present; land has four directions. Once mutually separated far and wide, languages would not communicate. Distance in land requires translation; distance in time requires interpretation. Translation transforms other states into our neighbor villages; interpretation renders ancient and today into morning and evening.” (*Tung Shu Tu Shu Chi* [Notes gathered at eastern study], Taipei: Taiwan Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1967), p.183. Both Gadamer and Ch’en point to the same origin of hermeneutics in the breakdown of communication between the ancients and ourselves today.

admiration and emulation of ancient sages: its prominent example is Chu Hsi who in *Ssu shu chi chu* (Collected commentaries on the *Four Books*) hammered out his own philosophy and interpreted Mencius. In doing so, especially in his interpretation of Mencius' "chih yen yang ch'i" (knowing words, cultivating ch'i), as he hammered out his own philosophy, Chu Hsi struggled to understand Mencius, and in doing so cultivated his own deeply felt view of life.

(2). Hermeneutics for *political* operations and maneuvers: Chinese politics was monarchical, centered on the ruler, while the political ideal of Confucianism was centered on the people.<sup>2</sup> In desperation, many Confucian scholars devoted themselves to ostensibly pure scholarship. They buried themselves in writing commentaries on the Classics, a seemingly harmless engagement, yet they entrusted their passionate dreams of "ching shih chi min, 經世濟民" (managing the world for popular welfare) to this commentary-writing. K'ang Yu-wei did so in writing *Meng Tzu Wei* (孟子微, Mencius in depth) at the critical juncture of the early twentieth century when the Western powers came in serietim to "eat up" China, piecemeal or in one gulp. Those scholars plunged into the classics and dug out new exegetical implications as "weapons" against foreign invasions. They did so to draw inspiration on how to advise the ruler to reform his governance, and to repel the enemies.

(3). Another use of exegetical commentary on the classics is apologetics; hermeneutics as apologia, *apologetics*, for a specific school of thinking: Many Confucians used their commentaries on the classics as weapons to defend "orthodox" Confucianism against Buddhism and Taoism. For instance, Han Yü (韓愈, 768-824) wrote "Yüan Tao 原道" (Inquiry into *Tao*) and "Yü Meng Shang-shu hsü 與孟尚書序" (letter to Meng Shang-shu), to claim that the *Tao* of Confucius was handed down through Mencius. Han Yü "refined," redefined, the Confucian *tao*, to expel Buddhism and Taoism. And, Tai Chen was an eighteenth-century Confucian scholar who wrote *Meng Tzu Tzu Yi Shu Cheng* to reject the thoughts of Sung Neo-Confucianism, Yang Tzu, Mo Tzu, the Buddha and Lao Tzu.

Of the above three features of Chinese hermeneutics, the first

---

<sup>2</sup> See Chun-chieh Huang, "Some Observations and Reflections," in Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang eds., *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 281-189.

is most important. Reading the classics is for the sake of the reader's self-cultivation in longing admiration of the ancient sages. Textual hermeneutics is a means to express "learning for oneself" (爲己之學 *wei chi chih hsüeh*), weaving textual studies into one's personal existence, and one's life with the text's into a lived unity. The second hermeneutical feature is related to this-worldly socio-politics. Confucian scholars dug into the ancient texts for new interpretations, in order to find new solutions to their current political issues. The third feature of Chinese hermeneutics is apologetics. Living in the maelstrom of many competing ideas and schools, exegetes of classical texts tried to demonstrate the orthodoxy of their views and treat opponents' views as unorthodox. With Mencian scholarship as our focus, we shall explicate the above three features of Chinese hermeneutics.

## II. Chinese Hermeneutics as Personal Pilgrimages

The first characteristic of Chinese hermeneutics is that the commentator entrusts his personal self-cultivation to the ancient Classics: (a) Commentators read the classical texts in light of their personal experience, making the texts into *their* record of their "pilgrims' progress". Hermeneutics in China is *experiential*. (b) Hermeneutical exercises involve the entire exegete's life, in line with the *existential* character of the Chinese classics. We cite generations of various commentaries on Mencius' "*chih yen, yang ch'i*" (knowing words, cultivating *ch'i*) in *Mencius* 2A2 in order to demonstrate this distinctive feature of Chinese hermeneutics.

(a). The experiential character of Chinese hermeneutics is most manifest in commentaries on the *locus classicus* of the *Mencius*, "*chih yen, yang ch'i*." Chu Hsi devoted much discussion to this passage in volume 52 of *Chu Tzu Yü Lei* (朱子語類, Classified Conversations of Master Chu). During the prolonged dialogues back and forth among Chu Hsi and his disciples we never find them regarding the *Mencius* as an objective text unrelated to their personal lives. They all blended their life experiences into their various readings of the *Mencius*. After these hermeneutical struggles of subject-object intervolvement, Chu Hsi finally sighed, "If any word I said is not in line with Mencius, may Heaven detest me, may Heaven detest me!"<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Li Ching-te, ed., *Chu Tzu Yü lei* (Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chü, 1986), Chüan

Chu Hsi devoted his entire life to achieving a thorough understanding of the *Four Books*, integrating his lived understanding in one insight of his own, “*li yi fen shu*” (理一分殊, the principle is one while its manifestations are many).<sup>4</sup> Conversely, he used this principle to interpret Mencius’ Chapter (2A:2) on “*chih yen, yang ch’i*,” saying,<sup>5</sup> “I humbly claim that studies of Mencius begin with pursuing *li* (principle) to the limit and gathering *yi* (rightness), made effective by *pu tung hsin* (不動心, inner imperturbability). For only in the utmost pursuit of *li* can we “know words”, and only in gathering *yi* can we cultivate “*hao jan chih ch’i* 浩然之氣” (vast flood-like *ch’i*). Clarifying *li*, nothing is dubitable; filled with *ch’i*, fear is nowhere. Thus people can let go of themselves and not be perturbed inside. Considering this chapter enables us to see all this.

In his *Meng Tzu Chi Chu* (孟子集註, Collected commentaries on the *Mencius*), *Meng Tzu Huo Wen* (孟子或問, Queries into the *Mencius*), and volume 52 of *Chu Tzu Yü Lei* (Classified Conversation of Master Chu), Chu Hsi consistently interpreted Mencius’ “*chih yen* 知言” (knowing words) and “*yang ch’i* 養氣” (cultivating *ch’i*) in terms of “*ch’iung li* 窮理” (utmost pursuit of *li*). This line of approach generated a new set of questions, such as, “Why and how can our mind-heart know the *li* of things and events?” “Which comes first, ‘knowing words’ or ‘cultivating *ch’i*’?”<sup>6</sup> These questions are only latent, if they arise at all in the *Mencius* itself, yet they turned out to be major problems in Chu Hsi’s Mencian hermeneutics. This was due to the fact that Chu Hsi interpreted Mencius through his life-experiences. He lived in no ivory-tower. His was an experiential approach.

(b). This *experiential* approach in exegesis endows the classics with profound *existential* significance. The classics are never mummies in a museum, never objects of “*k’ou erh chih hsüeh*” (口耳之學, mouth-and-ears studies). The classics vitally become the commentator’s personal record of progress of life. A case in point can be seen in generations of commentators’ views on “*chi yi*”

---

52, pp. 1250-1251.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 136: 3243.

<sup>5</sup> Chu Hsi, “Ta Kuo Ch’ung-hui,” in *Chu Wen Kung Chi* (Collected works of Chu Hsi) (Ssu-pu Ts’ung-k’an Ch’u-p’ien Suo-pen edition), 37: 601a-602b.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Meng Hsüeh Ssu-hsiang Shih Lun*, Vol. 2, Chap. 5.

(gathering rightness) in Mencius' Chapter on "*chih yen yang ch'i*" (knowing words, cultivating *ch'i*). Wang Yang-ming parted with Chu Hsi's studies after years of close involvement with them.<sup>7</sup> Wang had Mencius' "*chi yi*" (gathering rightness) corroborate his hard-won notion of "*chih liang chih*" (attaining innate knowledge), saying, "'Gathering rightness' is purely 'attaining innate knowledge'. To say 'gathering rightness' may not appear intelligible at first; to mention 'attaining innate knowledge' at once gives us its practical utility."<sup>8</sup> Again, "innate knowledge is the inner core of the mind-heart."<sup>9</sup> To "attain innate knowledge" is "purely to attain the innate knowledge of my mind-heart."<sup>10</sup> In Wang's mind, the mind-heart and the principle (*li*) are of the same essence, in tandem, in unity. Inevitably, Wang interpreted Mencius' "gathering rightness" as "attaining innate knowledge,"<sup>11</sup> stating that "'gathering rightness' is to restore the original essence of the mind-heart."

Clearly, Wang interpreted Mencius' "gathering rightness" in terms of Wang's own experiential "attainment of innate knowledge." In a similar experiential vein, Chu Hsi also interpreted Mencius in terms of his own "*ko wu ch'iung li* 格物窮理" (investigating things, thoroughly pursuing principle), saying, "'Gathering rightness' is gathering goodness, that is, having all events conform to rightness."<sup>12</sup> Many places in volume 52 of *Chu Tzu Yü Lei* develop this thesis. With his personal experience as the basis, Chu Hsi took Mencius' *chi* (collecting) as *chü* (gathering), *yi* (rightness) as the *li* (principle) variously residing in things.<sup>13</sup> These scholars turned the classics into records of, if not commentaries on, their personal experience, existentializing the classics, as it were. All this demonstrates the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Wing-tsit Chan, "Ts'ung Chu Tzu wan-nien ting lun k'an Yang-ming chih yü Chu Tzu," in *Chu Hsüeh Lun Chi* (Taipei: Taiwan Hsüeh-sheng Shu-chü 1982), pp. 353-383.

<sup>8</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *Wang Yang-ming Ch'uan-hsi Lu Hsiang Chu Chi P'ing*, Volume II, "*Ta Nieh Wen-wei*, II," Item 187, p. 268.

<sup>9</sup> Chu Hsi, *Ssu Shu Chang-chü Chi Chu* (Peking: Chung Hua Shu-chü, 1982), Volume II, "*Ta Lu Yüan-ching Shu*," Item 152, p. 214.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Yang-ming, *Wang Wen-ch'eng Kung Ch'üan Shu* (Ssu Pu Ts'ung-k'an Ts'u-pien Shuo Pen), Chüan 26, "*Ta Hsüeh Wen*," pp. 736-740.

<sup>11</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, Item 81, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> *Meng Tzu Chi Chu*, 3:232.

<sup>13</sup> *Chu Tzu Yü Lei*, Chüan 52, p. 1259.

experiential-existential character of Chinese hermeneutics.

**III. Chinese Hermeneutics as Political Pragmatics** The second feature of Chinese hermeneutics is hermeneutics as politics. This feature has two characteristics: (3.1) Hermeneutics with political implications is a sort of ethics. Commentators were offering a political agenda of what *ought* to be done via probing into *what* the Classical text is saying. (3.2.) This sort of politics is a pragmatics, more concerned with arrangements of sociopolitical order (the *chih tao* 治道, way of ruling) than with political principles (the *cheng tao* 政道, way of governing). We shall elucidate this point with Sung Confucian scholars' interpretations of Mencius' political ideals and K'ang Yu-wei's *Meng Tzu Wei* in the late nineteenth century.

**3.1** We may best explain the Chinese hermeneutics as moral politics by citing the debates among Sung Confucian scholars on the *Mencius*. Chapter 7 reveals that the explosive cinder that touched off their debates lay in the thesis, "Mencius did not honor the Chou kings." Here at issue were three points: (a) the king-hegemon distinction, (b) the ruler-subject relation, and (c) whether or not to honor Confucius. The debates were conducted between two groups of scholars -- those who honored Mencius and those who did not -- and they conducted their hermeneutical debates in a moral context. Wang An-shih was a moral idealist, who defended Mencius' "pro-king, anti-hegemon" stand, took the Three Dynasties as his model, and insisted on patterning the current political institution after the legendary kings, Yao and Shun. Ssu-ma Kuang, who opposed Mencius, also adopted the position of government by morality. On the ruler-subject relation, however, Ssu-ma Kuang criticized Mencius for not honoring the Chou kings.

Conspicuously, debaters on both sides took Confucius as the supreme authority and quoted Confucius to bolster their respective positions.<sup>14</sup> We can safely say that those Sung scholars' ostensibly political debates were really about moral problems, such as whether the rulers ought to model themselves on Yao and Shun, whether Mencius' refusal to honor Chou rulers went against the ruler-subject morality, and whether Mencius went against his revered teacher, Confucius.

---

<sup>14</sup> My *Meng Hsüeh Ssu-hsiang Shih Lun*, vol. 2, Chap. 5.

The moral character of Chinese hermeneutics came from the predominantly moral tendency of the Chinese intellectual tradition, and specifically from Mencius' political ideals as fundamentally moral. We are used to the Western idea of political realism, politics as negotiation and compromise among conflicting interests of various groups. In contrast, Mencius regarded the political realm as a moral community guaranteed by the universal necessity of value-awareness deep within the mind-heart. Thus, Mencius said (4A3), "It was with humaneness that the classic Three Dynasties won the world, and with inhumanity that they lost it."<sup>15</sup> Mencius' moral orientation in political thinking greatly influenced later generations of exegetes, who naturally infused moral implications into Mencian hermeneutics.

**3.2** Strangely, however, this moral orientation of Chinese political hermeneutics is coupled predominantly with the way of managerial ruling (*chih tao*) more than with the way of analysis of principles of politics (*cheng tao*). K'ang Yu-wei's interpretation of Mencius can be cited to illustrate this point. K'ang wrote his *Meng Tzu Wei* in 1901, at the critical time when many Western powers were invading China. K'ang intended to write on Mencius in order to propose a solution for China in coping with this crisis through a creative amalgamation of the age-old Mencian tradition with Western democracy, liberty, equality, social Darwinism, etc.<sup>16</sup>

We find, upon close reading, that K'ang was primarily interested in institutional arrangements, such as setting up a legislative assembly, promoting trade and commerce, seeking a balance of power, etc., instead of paying attention to the principles of democracy. This may have been due to the national situation, which prompted the intelligentsia at that time to seek some quick way out.

#### IV. Chinese Hermeneutics as Apologetics

The third feature of Chinese hermeneutics is apologetics. There are two types: (4.1) Internally, textual hermeneutics of the Classics was often a means to refute opponents' "unorthodox" views and interpretations, (4.2) Externally, such a hermeneutics was often a

---

<sup>15</sup> My *Meng Hsüeh Ssu-hsiang Shih Lun*, Vol. 1, Chap. 6.

<sup>16</sup> See my *Meng Hsüeh Ssu-hsiang Shih Lun*, vol. 2, Chap. 9, pp. 373-420.

weapon to reject other schools of thought as “heretical.”

**4.1** In the long tradition of Chinese hermeneutics, the same passage often gave rise to several mutually inconsistent views and interpretations. As a result, scholars would attempt a renewed exegesis of the passage in question to establish their “orthodox” views to reject others. Huang Tsung-hsi, for instance, renewed his Mencian hermeneutics to criticize Chu Hsi. Huang’s *Meng Tzu Shih Shuo* was a representative case of new scholarship in the *Four Books* in the late Ming period.

Chu Hsi’s *Ssu Shu Chi Chu* (Collected commentaries on the *Four Books*) came to be the standard text for the civil-service examinations after 1313. With this event, the Chu Hsi-scholarship came to be established as an orthodox tradition in state officialdom. Interpretations of the *Four Books* up to the middle of Ming dynasty (1368-1662) were very much within the orbit of Chu’s *Chi Chu*. As Sano Koji (佐野公治, 1936-) pointed out, studies of the classics from the Sung to Ming dynasties centered on Chu’s studies of the *Four Books* (and *Five Classics*)--inheriting them, developing them, then discarding them. Wang Yang-ming was the watershed in this process. In the late Ming period, the *Great Learning* was liberally interpreted, and Buddhist ideas were also added in great amounts.<sup>17</sup>

During the late Ming period, there arose a “new scholarship on the *Four Books*,” whose fashion it was to criticize and reject Chu’s interpretations. Huang Tsung-hsi’s *Meng Tzu Shih Shuo* was but one instance. He criticized Chu Hsi on two theses: (a) *Hsin* (mind-heart) and *li* (principle) are two, not one, (b) *Chih yen* (knowing words) is prior to *yang ch’i* (cultivating *ch’i*). This critique originated in Huang’s internal monism, which diverged from Chu’s *li-ch’i* dualism.<sup>18</sup> This was a clash of two schools via divergent Mencius hermeneutics, an instance of hermeneutics as apologetics.

**4.2** The second feature of Chinese hermeneutics as apologetics is that it was used as weapon against other traditions of thought. We know that historically China has had three traditions, each attacking the other with its own renewed exegeses of the classics to show how wrong the other schools were. As Hsiao

---

<sup>17</sup> Sano Koji, *Shi-sho Gaku Shi no Kenkyu* (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1988), Introduction, Section 1.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter eight of the book.

Kung-ch'üan 蕭公權 (1897-1981) once said, "pre-Ch'in thought amounted to forging the novel out of the old, so as to establish norms and set up models for later thinking."<sup>19</sup>

Tai Chen was a Ch'ing dynasty Confucian scholar who wrote *Meng Tzu Tzu Yi Shu Cheng*, probing into the "true" original meanings of Mencius' words and phrases in order to criticize Sung Confucians and reject Buddhists and Taoists. He said,<sup>20</sup> "Mencius argued with Yang Tzu and Mo Tzu. Later people often hear about words of Yang Tzu, Mo Tzu, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and Buddha, taking them to confound Mencius' words; thus people of later times should not be silent on this point. If I were to be incapable of knowing this, I would be silent. If I were to know it and not speak out, I would be disloyal, betraying my studies in relation to the ancient sages, and betraying my humanity in relation to all people who come after me. Thus with trepidation I had to write these three volumes of *Meng Tzu Tzu Yi Shu Cheng*. Han Yü once said, 'Following schools of Yang Tzu, Mo Tzu, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and Buddhism to desire the Way of the sages is to cut off the harbor and water to desire going to the sea. To seek the Way of the sages, we must begin with Mencius.' These words, indeed, cannot be changed."

Tai re-worked the original meanings of Mencius' important concepts such as *li* 理 (principle), *t'ien tao* 天道 (heavenly Tao), *hsing* 性 (nature), *ts'ai* 才 (ability), *jen yi* 仁義 (humaneness, rightness), *ch'eng* 誠 (sincerity), *ch'üan* 權 (expediency), etc., to point out how Sung hermeneutics was inadvertently mixed with elements of Buddhism and Taoism. He thereby criticized the dualism of *li* (principle) and *yü* 慾 (desire) as a view polluted with Buddhism and Taoism. Tai continued, saying,<sup>21</sup>

Their harm greatly exceeds that of the Legalists! Have the Six Classics and books by Confucius and Mencius ever regarded *li* as a

---

<sup>19</sup> Hsiao Kung-chüan, *Chung-kuo Cheng-chih Ssu-hsiang Shih* (Taipei: Lien-ching Ch'u-pan Shih-yeh Kung-ssu, 1980), 1:4.

<sup>20</sup> See *Tai Chen Ch'üan Chi* (Peking: Ch'ing Hua Ta-hsüeh Ch'u-pan She, 1991), p. 150. Cf. Ann-ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman, *Tai Chen on Mencius: Explorations in Words and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

thing external to humans, who express feelings and desires, and exert pressures on them?

Tai interpreted Mencius' *li* saying, "It is what is in conformity with our mind-heart (*hsin*) that is called *li* (principle), *yi* (rightness); what is not, but only exists in human opinions, is not yet *li*, *yi*."<sup>22</sup> Tai thus concretely refuted the Sung Confucians' view that *li* originated in *t'ien* (heaven).

## V. Conclusion

We have explained three types of Chinese hermeneutics: hermeneutics as personal pilgrimatics, as political pragmatics, and as apologetics. Since hermeneutics originated in the breakdown of communication between the contemporary reading subject and ancient texts, the first type of hermeneutics as personal cultivation is primary in origin and importance. Hermeneutics bridges our gap—linguistic, contextual—with the ancient sages, so we may befriend them and be in dialogue with them, in order to cultivate and fulfill *ourselves*.

We can see that, in this respect, hermeneutics as political pragmatics and as apologetics are two directions in which the exegete stretches his subjectivity to express himself. Faced with risky and complex political situations, the exegete has no option but to propose his views through ostensibly objective textual research, his reinterpretations of the classics. Faced with the bewildering plethora of competing schools and views, one has to return to, to dig into, the original classics to bring out, to demonstrate, "truths" to which one is committed, thereby to refute discerned "heresies".

The above three types share written commentaries on the classics to poetically *evoke* (*hsing* 興) the reader to metaphorically (*pi* 比) grasp what the truth there has been from time immemorial. Both the commentator and the reader thereby longingly aspire towards the sages and their views expressed in the classics, and advise the power that be with the immutable political views of the ancients, redressing mistaken views in various divergent schools.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. my "Chung-kuo ku-tai Ju-chia li-shih ssu-wei ti fang-fa chi ch'i yun-yung," in *Chung-kuo Wen-che Yen-chiu Chi-k'an*, No.3, March, 1993, pp. 361-390; my "Historical Thinking in Classical Confucianism: Historical

Finally, we must ask whether Chinese hermeneutics is an intellectual activity or a practical one, that is, whether it is an intellectual exploration of the unknown ancient world in cognitive curiosity, or using such explorations as a means to sociopolitical action. We must answer that Chinese hermeneutics belongs to the latter class, it tends to be an intellectual *praxis*. This *praxis* is twofold, inner and outer. Deep down, hermeneutical *praxis* crucially assists our existential cultivation, sublimating our life to the level of ancient sages. Chinese hermeneutics is “learning for one’s self” (*wei chi chih hsüeh*).<sup>24</sup> Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming, for instance, both forged Mencian interpretations in terms of their own significant life-experiences, thereby taking novel directions and creating distinctive schools. Externally, Chinese hermeneutics is pragmatic, actively engaged in the struggles with cultural and political worlds and applying the fruits of personal cultivation therein. The intelligentsia during the Northern and Southern Sung periods were engaged in debates over Mencius’ political ideas, and K’ang Yu-wei of the late Ch’ing period drew democratic ideas from/into studies of Mencius. All exhibited external pragmatic hermeneutics at work. Furthermore, in all these cases pragmatic exigencies often provoked hermeneutical endeavors on the classics.

In this way, ostensibly intellectual activities of Chinese hermeneutics are really all of a piece with the exegetes’ life-situations. In this regard, Chinese hermeneutics may truly be called a “learning of life”.

One last point must be raised before ending this volume. Some might note that the entire corpus of *Mencius* exegesis seems incoherent when compared to this Epilogue. This exegesis began with explicating *what the Mencius* was all about, in terms of which I critiqued Mencius interpreters in Chinese history. In contrast, the Epilogue noted that Chinese hermeneutics is a tradition of *praxis-reflections*, where the *Mencius* guides and nourishes self-cultivation (pilgrimages) to defend one’s view of Mencius against others (apologetics) and to justify one’s sociopolitical policies (politics). In all this, there is an objective “what” of

---

Argumentation from the Three Dynasties,” in Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher, eds., *Time and Space in Chinese Culture* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 72-88.

<sup>24</sup> This notion of “*wei chi chih hsüeh*” is currently in vogue among sinologists. See, e.g., Wm Theodore de Bary, *Learning for One’s Self* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

Mencius' view.

In response, I offer four points to consider. To begin with, it is a historical fact that all the historical interpreters advanced their views by accusing others, whether contemporary or historical, of "misunderstanding Mencius." Secondly, how did they judge others? By the impacts Mencius made on their contemporary lives. How did they receive Mencius' impact? By marshaling the best literary-critical apparatus of *their* days. Thirdly, this volume similarly marshaled the best critical apparatus of my days to receive Mencius' impact on me in my daily life, thereby critically appraising these historical interpreters. Fourth, those past interpreters did not have what I have today, to be sure, and so I feel obliged to critically appraise their readings of Mencius. Now, some may accuse me of historical hubris here. But, they also then think they are "beyond" their predecessors, even their opponents. I differ from them in knowing all this historicity and transcendence *in history*. I am prepared to accept, indeed, plead for, critiques of many others, both contemporary and subsequent. In other words, my historically "objective" critiques *are themselves* historical "praxis". I call all this "praxis-reflection", a subtle existential unity of subjectivity and objectivity *within history*. The title of this volume reflects this important point.

In short, I should make two points. First, all interpreters of Mencius promoted "what Mencius said" as a preliminary part of their praxis-reflections. The what of Mencius is part and parcel of the how of Mencius praxis reflection, a preliminary part to "apologetics." Second, the Mencian exegesis in this volume fulfills this first part, Mencian "apologetics". As for the other two parts of praxis-reflections, I shall defer to my other reflections, such as my essays on Confucianism today and Confucianism as a guide to the future of Taiwan, China and indeed, the twenty-first century world ("politics"), and my reflections on the history of "Taiwanese consciousness" ("pilgrimages"). To go into both these tasks requires at least another volume, if not more. This volume is a part of the threefold task to be completed by future volumes. *My* "Mencian praxis-reflection" has just begun.