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Applying Gadamer:
An Evaluation of Interpretations of the Confucian *Analects* by Different Schools
Under the Light of Gadamerian Hermeneutics

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An Independent Study Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to analyse and evaluate several interpretations of the Confucian *Analects* under the light of Gadamerian hermeneutics. In chapter 1, I explicate Gadamerian hermeneutics and analyse Gadamer's hermeneutical view. In chapter 2, I introduce a challenge to Gadamer's theory regarding the problem of objectivity, give Gadamer a limited defence, and then reconstruct Gadamerian hermeneutics in order to answer the challenge. Chapter 3 deals with some further concerns about the application of Gadamerian hermeneutics in terms of evaluating interpretations. Chapter 4 and 5 are spent on analysing two groups of interpretations of the Confucian *Analects* as well as the interpreters' hermeneutical views. The first group consists of Zhu Xi, a scholar in the Song dynasty. The second group consists of three Qing scholars – Mao Qiling, Gu Yanwu, Liu Baonan – and three English-speaking translators – Roger Ames, Edward Slingerland, and Robert Eno. Conclusive evaluations of the two groups of interpretations are made in chapter 6.

CH1

Gadamer on the nature of understanding

I did not intend to produce an art or technique of understanding, in the manner of the earlier hermeneutics...nor was it my aim to... put my findings in practical ends... my real concerns was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.¹

By this piece of paragraph quoted from the preface of *Truth and Method*, it is fair to say that Hans-Georg Gadamer does not view his hermeneutical theory as a normative procedure for understandings. For Gadamer, though understanding is an activity of seeking what is true (of the interpreted object), the truth is not hidden behind any object (such as a text or an artwork), waiting to be unfolded. Instead, the truth is constantly being forged through a process of understanding which necessarily happens. He also holds that understanding is bound with interpretation because understanding is fundamentally linguistic, meaning that to understand is to articulate the understood meaning into linguistic forms, and such an activity is essentially interpretative. Since every interpretation must be created by an interpreter, the truth of what is being interpreted can only be created by the interpreter with her participation in the process of understanding.²

In terms of textual hermeneutics, such an argument about understanding denies the pre-existing of meaning in the text as absolute. Meaning becomes relational and it even varies along the process of one's understanding. Hence, to account what the nature of understanding is for Gadamer, we are not looking for where the meaning as "the truth" is located nor how we can reach "the truth" through certain paths. What we should look at is the forging of understanding

¹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 1975. 25xxv.

² *Ibid*, (part 3) 383-490.

which Gadamer describes. I will single out, in the following sections, some essential concepts constituting the process of understanding in Gadamerian hermeneutics to help figuring out the large picture.

Prejudgement and perception of completion

In part 2 of his book, Gadamer introduces a Heideggerian conception of the fore-structure of understanding, the historicity, which fundamentally makes it possible for one to understand anything. He asserts that one can only understand the present through the conceptions generated from one's past experience, and the historicity is the finitude of this past experience. According to Gadamer, one's past experience cannot be divided into individual facts but is rather like a stream where one is immersed in. Such a holistic definition of experience indicates that the finitude of a person due to her experience – her historicity – is inescapable for the person and her historicity cannot be bracketed or avoided partly by the person's will. One's historicity functions in one's usage of language in all the interpretations one makes of other objects, as well as in all the objects one creates which are interpretable by others.³ According to Heidegger, every interpretation of something (i.e. to give account for something using what is different from the original) is based upon the interpreter's fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. These three elements make up of the interpreter's fore-structure of understanding, and the activity of understanding (and interpretation) is a process, beginning with this fore-structure, towards a future creation.⁴ The fore-structure provides one with certain prejudgements in understanding something, and every interpretation is based upon those prejudgements. In pre-Gadamerian

³ Palmer, Richard Edward. *Hermeneutics: interpretation theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969. 194-5.

⁴ *Truth and Method*, 269.

hermeneutics, the interpreter's history has been often portrayed under a negative light, since something like an interpreter's pre-understanding has been regarded to cause invalid prejudices which would misdirect the understanding. From Gadamer's view, the fore-structure of an interpreter should be considered to be a positive factor, instead of something to avoid, for the interpreter's creativity and productivity, providing the interpreter a foothold with a special horizon which enables her to potentially grasp everything she is capable of viewing: "What is true of fore-meanings that stem from usage, however, is equally true of the fore-meanings concerning content with which we read texts, and which make up our fore-understanding."⁵⁶

Let us take an example of a hermeneutic situation in textual understanding. Suppose a native English speaker who learns Chinese is reading a text on *li* (礼, usually translated to "ritual") written in classical Chinese. She must come with some prejudgements – judgements prior to judgements about the meaning of the text – to start the process. It could be the knowledge of what this text is likely to talk about or the knowledge of some Chinese terms. Let us suppose our interpreter knows from somewhere that this text is about *li*, then the interpreter would be able to have some expectation of what may be discussed in the text (e.g. he may think of things like dress code or hospitality). As the reading goes, she suddenly encounters a paragraph on the behaviour of *bei bi* (卑鄙). She recalls a memory of her taking mandarin class in the college and finds in it that *bei bi* was in his vocabulary list, matching an English word "despicable". Based on her general understanding of the paragraph, she senses that the behaviour of *bei bi* is depicted in a positive tone. A question is then raised by her: why and in what way can the behaviour of despicableness possibly be depicted in a positive tone? Although feeling very

⁵ Ibid, 270.

⁶ Ibid, 267-72.

sceptical of this paragraph, she chooses to go on reading while holding the question in mind. As she has read more of the paragraph, she starts to notice that, rather than justifying the behaviour of despicableness to be ritually respectful, the paragraph seems to be discussing a behaviour different from one of despicableness: The word *bei bi* in this paragraph actually indicates an attitude of humbleness and politeness as if being a servant who is menial to others. Such a meaning derives from a different aspect of *bei bi*'s constitution, where *bei* (卑, usually means “petty” or “small”) and *bi* (鄙, usually means “low”) indicate a positive sense of self-deprecating.

In this hermeneutic situation, our interpreter's fore-understanding forms several prejudgements of hers, including her expectation of the text on talking about ritual in a sense identical or very similar to her own notion of ritual, which turned out to be coherent with the text. What those prejudgements also include is the judgement of *bei bi* meaning “despicable”, which turned out to be an illegitimate prejudgement which she later found incoherent with the text, and the illegitimacy was eventually realised and corrected by the interpreter herself.

We should notice that our interpreter has experienced a step where he feels sceptical of the paragraph because, holding her prejudgement of *bei bi* meaning “despicable”, she found it challengeable that the paragraph claims *bei bi* to be ritually respectful in a positive tone. Nonetheless, she did not stop to criticise the text to be wrong immediately. Instead, she kept on reading the text and finally discovered the illegitimacy in his prejudgement. This is a rather important movement in the process of understanding that our interpreter assumes a “fore-conception of completeness”⁷. Although our interpreter finds some ideas in the text conflict with her past historicity, she holds an assumption that the text is an adequate, coherent, and truthful

⁷ *Ibid*, 364.

expression of a complete idea. Gadamer calls such an assumption “an axiom of all hermeneutics”⁸, arguing that only through such an initial assumption can one possibly learn from the others. When an interpreter encounters something seeming to cause a challenge to her past historicity or an inconsistency in the text, the fore-conception of completeness makes her attempt to look for another interpretation from the text itself which allows her interpretation of this challenging bit to be coherent with the general interpretation of the whole text. If she does not presuppose this “axiom”, she would not be conscious of the inadequacy in her prejudgement nor start to question those prejudgements, therefore the text would just seem incoherent and unreasonable to her.⁹

If prejudgement provides the foothold which the interpreter can rely on to grasp anything she is capable of viewing from it, the assumption of perception of completion insures the possibility for the interpreter to adjudicate whatever is given by the prejudgement. According to Gadamer, the perception of completion entails a “good will” held by the interpreter to “friendly question” the other (the author of the text, in terms of textual understanding), listen to the other, and learn from the other. The good will is the inherent interest in understanding the text and should be regarded as the virtue of understanding. With such a good will, one has his prejudgements open for critique, willing to accept something which seems to be against him.¹⁰ While prejudgement serves as a necessary condition for switching on an understanding, the perception of completion guarantees the virtue of understanding.

⁸ Ibid, 364

⁹ SCHMIDT, LAWRENCE K. "Intercultural Understanding in Philosophical Hermeneutics." In *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*, edited by XIE MING, 210-32. 215. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt7zwbwr.15>.

¹⁰ Ibid, 215

Fusing of horizons

Since the perception of completion has made the interpreter's fore-structure open to critiques and questions, we can say that the pre-structure is not a close system. What is true for an interpreter's fore-structure – her historicity – is one of the interpreter's experience, which has an openness to new experience. In the introduction of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes: “the way that we experience one another...constitutes a truly hermeneutic universe, in which we are not imprisoned, as if behind insurmountable barriers, but to which we are opened.”¹¹

“Experience” in a Gadamerian sense, as mentioned earlier, should not be considered as a collection of one's preserved informational knowledge that is dividable, but a holistic, “largely nonobjectifiable¹² accumulation of ‘understanding’ (which we may often call wisdom).”¹³

Because of its openness, the experience is able to interact with what is external to it and the interaction can cause the experience to be expanded in some way. Gadamer, inspired by Hegel, asserts the expansion of experience to be fundamentally dialectical: the expansion of experience has a structure of reversal or reconstructing of awareness. The expansion begins with an encounter with what is object to the experience; and as the person matures her view on the object, treating the object as something other than merely what she should directly reject, her experience is itself converted so that it allows her to know the object differently from before. Through encountering a negativity (what is object to the experience) and a self-reconstruction concerning the negativity (whether one should reject the object, or one should view the object in

¹¹ *Truth and Method*, xiv.

¹² The nonobjectifiability of experience implies that experience cannot be put into terms that are absolute and history-free because experience essentially grows in one's history. We should not treat experience as a set of judgment (knowledge) data. One's experience, by Gadamer, should be treated as a nonobjectifiable stream.

¹³ Palmer, 195.

another way so that one need not reject it) is the experience expanded. The expansion is obviously not a process of simply adding new conceptual terms into the experience.¹⁴ The expansion is better regarded as an evolution of the historicity – entailing that the finitude of one’s experience has been evolved to be coherent with what used to be excluded by previous finitude – which enables the person to view what has been first treated as negativity more adequately. It is neither the case where the negativity is essentially not object to the unexpanded experience, nor that the experience is deliberately converted in order to adapt the negativity, but that the negativity is discovered to be coherent with one’s understanding by his evolved historicity.

We have seen that one’s fore-structure of understanding is “expandable”, so it is fair to claim that the horizon forged by the fore-structure should therefore be open and expandable. The task of an interpreter, then, is to expand her own historicity, mingling the horizon from her fore-structure with another horizon from the fore-structure of what is to be interpreted. The fusing of the two horizons, if we see it as a dialectical process from the view of the interpreter’s experience, should be not only diachronic but also synchronic. In such a fusing process, the history and the present, the object and the subject, the self and the other make up a unified whole.¹⁵ The criterion set by Gadamer for a good fusing process is that it “must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought.”¹⁶ In other words, only in the case where the understanding process is not dominated merely by the interpreter’s horizon but directed by both the text and the interpreter can such a fusing process take place. It is also fair to say, on the other hand, the interpreter faces the challenge of discerning the alterity of the interpreted. The interpreter is asked to judge the appropriation of the

¹⁴ Ibid, 195-6

¹⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode*. Translated by Handing Hong. Shanghai: China Times Publishing Company, 1993. 8.

¹⁶ *Truth and Method*, 269.

fore-meanings in her fore-structure and her prejudices. This challenge should never be regarded as being towards an extinction of one's historicity, nor of a deliberate neutrality between the two horizons. We must remark that an interpreter's prejudice, produced by her historicity, does not necessarily play a negative role nor certainly lead to false judgements but instead, provides the interpreter with a primary standpoint for understanding and the interest to continue the understanding. Such a prejudice is in essence judgeable for the interpreter to have either a positive or a negative value in an understanding.

The fusing of horizon requires the adjudication of prejudgements. Based on the pre-structure of understanding and assuming the perception of completion, the interpreter projects a horizon of meaning for the text. This horizon, originated from the general history of the interpreter, exists exclusively for the text and in contradistinction to the original horizon from the interpreter's historicity. Namely, the projected horizon only contains all prejudgements the interpreter would have about the text and those prejudgements are put into question whenever they are regarded in the understanding of the text. The regarded prejudgements are adjudicated to be either applicable or illegal in terms of understanding the text. Recall the example earlier, when our interpreter understands a paragraph of the text to be arguing for proper rituals in family, her prejudgement of the text talking about ritual is regarded and put into question. She finds that she does understand the argument as something related to what she regards as "ritual" according to her experience, so there is nothing opposing her prejudgement. In this case, a prejudgement is adjudicated to be applicable. However, when the interpreter sees *bei bi* and her prejudgement that this term consisting of the two scripts means "despicable" is called into question, she finds her understanding of the paragraph where *bei bi* is depicted positively, which opposes to her experience, namely a despicable behaviour is not often depicted in a positive tone.

In such a case, Gadamer insists that the meaning of this subject matter can be known “only when the counterinstances are dissolved, only when the counterarguments are seen to be incorrect.”¹⁷ Only if the interpreter seeks to learn from the subject matter and tries to find the possibility in which the subject matter is coherent with her general understanding of the text, rather than blindly defends her own position drawn from past historicity, can the true meaning emerge. During this adjudication, “a new prejudgment that was initially not held by either of the conversation partners (in our case, the text author and the interpreter) could come into the discussion”¹⁸. This meaning serves as one aspect of the subject matter, even though it can differ from both the interpreter’s original prejudgement and the text author’s prejudgement about the subject matter. As the emerged meaning of the subject matter has been legitimised (i.e. to be coherent with the interpreter’s general understanding of the text), the adjudication has been completed, and the new prejudgement about the subject matter becomes the judgement of it.¹⁹

Notice that the new prejudgement forged by the evolved historicity of the interpreter is essentially distinct from a grasp of some kind of informational knowledge. We must not regard the evolution of historicity as a process of adding information to a finite domain so that the domain contains more elements. This is a rather important point that understanding from the fusing of horizons rejects the idea of understanding being an epistemological activity to “see more clearly” or “discover” a meaning pre-existed in the text.²⁰ The fusing of horizons itself signifies an evolutionary process of the interpreter’s historicity and all understandings forged during the process are the interpreter’s self-consciousness and self-reconstruction, realised by the interpreter’s capacity and wisdom derived from his expanding experience. Because one’s

¹⁷ *Truth and Method*, 358.

¹⁸ Schmidt, 219.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 220.

²⁰ Dostal, Robert J. *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 36-9.

experience, though being finite due to one's historicity, is not a close domain nor a set of objectifiable elements, the evolution of one's historicity through reconstruction must be considered in the way that one's experience as wisdom is converted as a whole.

Effective history and its implications

To Gadamer, the event that the meaning of a text emerges from an understanding process is in its essence an event of "effective history" (or "a fusion of horizons"²¹). The "effect" here implies the interaction between consciousness and historicity. Understanding happens constantly as the interpreter is conscious of her historicity and realises the evolution of her historicity. We have known that meaning is forged from the fusing of horizon, which belongs to neither the past historicity of the interpreter nor the historicity of the author. Understanding is never an action on an "object" by a subject, but rather a process where the interpreter works on her historicity within the horizon brought by the text, to be conscious of and to judge her own prejudgements. Once the prejudgements are adjudicated and the historicity is evolved, the interpreter and the text come to an agreement. Once they come to an agreement, the interpreter has had in mind the answer to the question she cares about in the text.

Gadamer argues that every understanding is historical. This is to say: every interpretation is a way of existence of what is interpreted. A person exists as a historical being, with her own historical particularity and finitudes. Understanding does not symbolise one's overcoming all her historical finitude but is based upon her consciousness of it and good judgement about it. Every horizon is at first one stage in an endless process of evolution, formed by the past and open to the

²¹ In English translations of Gadamer's works, the understanding process is usually translated as "fusion of horizon." I regard such a translation somehow ambiguous because the word "fusion" is often used to refer to some kind of state rather than a process. Therefore, I use "fusing of horizons" in this thesis to refer to the understanding process, while use "fusion" to refer to a particular understanding state.

future. This nature of horizon applies to not only all horizons belonging to an interpreter but also all horizons fused in an understanding. A meaning, though counted as a product of an understanding, should not be considered as the end of the understanding and it must be open to future understanding. Gadamer spent one third of his book *Truth and Method* discussing the understanding in arts: if a work of art is not understood historically but rather as being absolute, then it can by no possibility be understood by anyone. What is interpreted should always be treated as a historical subject instead of an inert object, and the whole understanding process is an event between two subjects where the interpreter constantly learns from what is interpreted through the fusing of horizon and brings about whatever is meaningful to the interpreter at the moment.

One of the most remarkable features of Gadamerian hermeneutics is its emphasis on the limitation of historicity, which is drawn from Gadamer's anti-methodological approach to answering the question that every hermeneutic theory must face: what is understanding? Gadamer not only rejects the assumption that there must be methodologies leading one to grasp the meaning of a text, but also rejects the assumption that the meaning of a text is absolute and history-free. The meaning of a text is not the end of the understanding process, so it cannot be absolute; the meaning is forged from the fusing of horizons, which is a historical process, so the meaning must be historical. For Gadamer, earlier hermeneutics all have the misassumption that there must be a path connecting an interpreter with the absolute meaning of a text, and a hermeneutic theory should sweep away the dust along the path as well as uncover the law of correct understanding. The absolute meaning treated as inert objects by earlier hermeneutics is

just an illusion formed by the false assumption, and the meaning of a text always has its contemporary meaningfulness to the interpreter instead of something historically eternal.²²

It might be helpful to bring in the concept of “the hermeneutic circle” for better understanding Gadamer’s approach. First raised by a philologist – Friedrich Ast, the principle of the hermeneutic circle is the circulating nature of interpretation: “the whole is, of course, understood in reference to the individual, so too, the individual can only be understood in reference to the whole”²³. I think it is fair to consider Ast’s circle to be a closed circular flow within an experience (presupposing the interpreter’s experience as a “closed whole”), where the interpreter understands both the whole and the individuals completely by his own past experience. Gadamer would certainly disagree with such an idea, therefore he gives a new explication of this circle: the circle should be regarded as equal the horizon of the text, as argued earlier, which must be historically expandable. Every time when the interpreter tries to understand a text, she should have both a feeling of familiarity and a feeling of unfamiliarity. The familiarity derives from her fore-understanding of the text and the cultural-historical continuity between the interpreter’s time and the text creation’s time; while the unfamiliarity derives from the difference between the past experience of the interpreter and the exclusive historical background of the text creation. It is impossible for the interpreter to leave her past experience completely and enter the experience of the text creation, nor is it necessary. The meaning of a text, being interpreted, always goes beyond the experience of its author, as something born from its author’s meaning but carries a meaningfulness to the interpreter’s experience. In one aspect, all understanding starts from what is given by the interpreter’s

²² Ding, Boyi. “From prejudice to effective history (从偏见到效果历史)”. *Journal of Seeking Knowledge Guide*. Doi: 2095-624X (2017) 12-0156-02. April 2017. 156-7.

²³ Mantzavinos, C. "Hermeneutics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. June 22, 2016. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>.

experience and therefore all forged meanings are limited by the possibility of the interpreter's experiential expansion. In the other aspect, the meaning of a text is not limited to the meaningfulness to the time of its creation, but open to the possibility in fusing processes with different interpreters' horizons.

Such a view of understanding is shared by Charles Taylor. In his article "Interpretation and the Science of Man," Taylor categorises textual understanding to the field of "science of interpretation"²⁴ and to understand a text is to make sense of it in a way different from how it is originally expressed. "Even if there is an important sense in which a meaning re-expressed in a new medium cannot be declared identical, this by no means entails that we can give no sense to the project of expressing a meaning in a new way."²⁵ The meaning in understanding, for Taylor, is a sense for a subject, corresponding to the Gadamer's idea that the meaning of a text must be meaningful to a subject (an interpreter) at a time. Understanding, then, is the process of forging the meaningfulness by the interpreter for herself and for others who share the same experience with the interpreter.

Finally, I would like to briefly touch on the notion of "truth" in Gadamerian hermeneutics which could be implied by Gadamer's view of understanding. We have seen that, in some sense, understanding is defined by Gadamer in terms of an interpreter's approaching process to the text, which begins with the interpreter's prejudgements of the text. A text always has content which is indeterminate, and the purpose of interpretation is to make more sense of what has been indeterminate (therefore, less understandable). In other words, an interpretation must aim at expressing what is true of a text's content which has been indeterminate. The truth of understanding according to Gadamerian hermeneutics – the meaning of a text – seems to be

²⁴ Taylor, Charles. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." *Philosophy and Social Science*.15.

²⁵ Ibid, 16.

determined by how an interpreter's understanding process brings meaningfulness (viz. makes sense of the text) to the interpreter. If this is the case, a question may be raised: can one, in any case, claim what is determined by how one interprets a text to be true of the text? In the following two chapters, we will look at several challenges to Gadamerian hermeneutics regarding the problem of objectivity and truth, and we will pick up this question again in the third chapter.

CH2

The problem of objectivity in Gadamerian hermeneutics

Gadamerian hermeneutics, in contrast to earlier hermeneutic traditions, rejects a universal foundation for understanding: Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasises the idea that all understanding must be based on the interpreter's history. This feature might be the most inspiring aspect of Gadamerian hermeneutics, but it might also be the most problematic one, incurring numerous critiques regarding the lack of objectivity. Since everyone is a historical being – everyone is limited by the finitude of one's cultural history – and one's understanding is historically situated, suspicions are raised about how the meaning forged through a historically-based process can be vindicated as truth. It seems to be the case that, on the one hand, Gadamer insists that an understanding is essentially an effective history which expresses an interpreter's consciousness of her general historical experience. Understanding, as a process, must take its first step from the interpreter's prejudices, which reflect the interpreter's historical experience as well as creates questions that the interpreter wants to find an answer for within the text being interpreted. The understanding process always takes the form of a dialogue and there can be no part of the whole process dissociated from the interpreter's history and experience because the interpreter herself participates in the dialogue. Gadamer thus regards it inadequate to look for necessary and sufficient conditions for understanding that do not presuppose the interpreter's situated history. On the other hand, Gadamer holds that a good understanding “must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought.”²⁶ This seems to suggest that there are criteria that can distinguish a good understanding from a bad one, depending on

²⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 1975. 269.

how arbitrary an understanding is (the less arbitrary, the better the understanding). Hence, Gadamer seems to suggest some kind of transcendentalism in his theory which allows the interpreter to transcend her own historical prejudices and make judgements about her prejudices.²⁷ Is it contradictory that Gadamer has in hand both the inevitability of every interpreter's historical finitude and the necessity of some kind of transcendentalism in his hermeneutics? This chapter presents several challenges to Gadamerian hermeneutics regarding the problem of objectivity, which would force anyone who stands with Gadamer to face the tension between the two hands mentioned above. I consider two main questions: does Gadamerian hermeneutics imply subjectivism? Does Gadamer need to justify some kind of transcendentalism in order to free his theory out of subjectivism? In this chapter, we will consider the first one.

Truth without Method

Before we dive into the main concern, it would be good to ground the reason why such a concern is important for the plausibility of Gadamerian hermeneutics. The foremost cause of the concern is that Gadamer's theory can be easily read as being founded on the rejection of transcendental philosophy and further as a subjectivist theory. Emilio Betti's objection to Gadamer illustrates the anti-transcendental aspect in Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Betti, together with E. D. Hirsch, argues for a return to pre-Gadamerian hermeneutic tradition. Betti protests that: first, Gadamer's theory does not do the job that should be central to a hermeneutical theory – offering a methodology for understanding in humane studies; second, Gadamer does not give explicit criteria for legitimating an interpretation. I shall argue that the

²⁷ Thaning, Morten S. *The Problem of Objectivity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics in Light of McDowell's Empiricism*. Vol. 1. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015. 3-14.

first critique in fact helps to further clarify Gadamer's position, and we will pick up the second critique in the next chapter. For Betti, the interpretive object has its objectivity as a certain form of the creator's spirit (i.e. the objectivity of a written text would be the author's spirit, and the text is a linguistic form of the spirit) and this spirit is exactly what every interpreter should strive to uncover. He believes that it is possible for one to accomplish an objectively valid interpretation by reexperiencing the object creator's life experience.²⁸ Betti seeks help from Dilthey in arguing for the possibility that an interpreter can leave her own life experience and enter another person's life experience through an object the other person has created for interpreters to understand.²⁹ If this possibility is vindicated, then an interpretation can be made indisputable in every case in which an interpreter successfully enters the object creator's life experience.

However, this possibility is denied by Gadamer. According to Gadamer, Betti's "valid interpretation" requires the interpreter to be transferred into a foreign subjectivity which divorces the interpreter from her own history and experience – the subjectivity of the creator of the object – and inverts the creating process to seek for the original idea of the creator³⁰. Such a transition requires the interpreter to abandon all of her historical experience, which is impossible for a person, a being who is historical. To make the claim even stronger, Gadamer regards "the purpose to reach the object creator's spirit in understanding" to be not just unachievable but also, more importantly, wrong. Gadamer holds that all understanding must be purposeful, starting from some point in the interpreter's pre-structure of understanding and aiming at the interpreter's particular interest which has inspired her to enter the "dialogue" with the text. This process

²⁸ Palmer, Richard Edward. *Hermeneutics: interpretation theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969. 54-60.

²⁹ Ibid, 100-103.

³⁰ Ibid, 46-65.

inherently precludes what does not belong to the interpreter's hermeneutical purpose, and therefore eliminates the requirement of a reconstruction of the object creator's full intention. All that matters in an understanding should be only what the interpreter cares about. Palmer writes in his commentary on Gadamer: "integration, not restoration, is the true task of hermeneutics... such an approach would see the text [the object] in the light of the present [the interpreter's own world]." ³¹

From what we have seen, Gadamerian hermeneutics should certainly not be regarded as a doctrine of method which can provide a necessary and sufficient condition for "one correct understanding." This fact leads many readers of Gadamer to think that Gadamer stands with subjectivism and against the tradition of transcendental philosophy ³², because he seems to deny the possibility of one same a priori structure which enables us to "understand." However, Gadamer himself has rejected this conclusion. By the anti-method point, what Gadamer refuses is the idea that a hermeneutical theory can be reduced to a scientific theory which bases

psychic transposition as the special 'method' of the human sciences. This would make historical hermeneutics a branch of psychology (which was what Dilthey had in mind). In fact, however, the coordination of all knowing activity with what is known is not based on the fact that they have the same mode of being but draws its significance from the particular nature of the mode of being that is common to them. It consists in the fact that neither the knower nor the known is 'present-at-hand' in an 'ontic' way, but in a historical one. ³³

Although Gadamer denies a common "mode of coordination of all knowing activity with what is known", he insists that some coordination must exist, and must exist only in a way that is historically based. The history of hermeneutics marks Gadamer as a turning point where the

³¹ Palmer, 189.

³² Traditional transcendental philosophy under this context refers to theories which try to uncover the a priori structure of achieving universal truths.

³³ *Truth and Method*, 252

theory of understanding is claimed, by Gadamer in the preface of the second version *Truth and Method*, to have a universal scope that reveals what necessarily happens over and over again to us whenever we are understanding something.³⁴ This is often regarded as a turn into, using Gadamer's own words, philosophical hermeneutics. But if Gadamer claims the universality, he would find his theory in a potential contradiction: he cannot argue for the universal scope of his hermeneutics and meanwhile lack a transcendental dimension in his theory. In other words, since Gadamer emphasises that his hermeneutics is not merely a pragmatic method that one can choose to take up in an understanding but what beyond our preference and always happen to us (i.e. the historically based "coordination" is an inevitable demand on each interpreter), he must acknowledge that his hermeneutics includes a transcendental dimension of understanding. If such a transcendental dimension were denied, then Gadamer's claim of universality would fail, and it would be possible for one to skip the dialogue with a text and instead, interpret the text wholly relying on past experience, and still declare that one has understood the text.³⁵

Clearly, Gadamer would not want to argue for objectivity in the sense of natural science, for otherwise his hermeneutics would run counter to its main position. Now there comes the difficulty, which concerns how Gadamer can be defended against subjectivism as well as distinguished from a universally-shared structure that can be uncovered. By realising the importance of both aspects – namely anti-traditional-transcendentality and required minimal transcendentality – any defender of Gadamerian hermeneutics finds herself treading on thin ice.

³⁴ (Quoted at the beginning of chapter 1) *Truth and Method*, 25xxv. "I did not intend to produce a manual for guiding understanding in the manner of the earlier hermeneutic ...nor was it my aim to... put my findings in practical ends... my real concerns was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing."

³⁵ Thaning, 13-18.

To illustrate the point above, it would be good to introduce an example of an interpretation of Gadamer which radicalises the anti-transcendental aspect. Gianni Vattimo, an Italian philosopher, articulates Gadamerian hermeneutics as having no transcendental implication and is fundamentally against any form of transcendental philosophy. Standing at a Nietzschean historicist position, Vattimo claims that Gadamer's theory itself is a historical truth, instead of just a theory about the historicity of truth:

If hermeneutics, as the philosophical theory of the interpretative character of every experience of truth, is lucid about itself as no more than an interpretation, will it not find itself inevitably caught up in the nihilistic logic of Nietzsche's hermeneutics? This "logic" may be encapsulated in the statement that there can be no recognition of the essentially interpretative character of the experience of the true without the death of God and without the fabling of the world or, which amounts to the same thing, of Being. In short, it seems impossible to prove the truth of hermeneutics other than by presenting it as the response to a history of Being interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism.³⁶

The point Vattimo makes is that a hermeneutical theory must regard itself as a historical truth which is born from the historicity of the hermeneutist, and this point applies to all hermeneutical trends including Gadamer's. Since a hermeneutical theory is merely historical (i.e. it is merely an interpretation by the hermeneutist), there can be nothing non-subjective at all. For Vattimo, Gadamerian hermeneutics has its essential value in rejecting transcendental philosophy and he sees it as being nihilistic.

If one reads Gadamer as Vattimo does, meaning would amount to nothing more than an interpretation of the interpreter's own tradition. Gadamerian hermeneutics would be subject to a position like Nietzschean historicism, which, according to Vattimo, means to establish "a coherent picture [under the name of "truth"] we can share while we wait for others to propose a

³⁶ Vattimo, G. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press. 1997. 8.

more plausible alternative.”³⁷ According to this view, there can be no claim of truth other than the consciousness of one’s historicity. An interpretation is merely a “necessary illusion” provided by the interpreter’s only foundation: her historical prejudices. Hermeneutics, in order to avoid being a metaphysics, “can therefore not offer any conclusive evidence for its world-view, but only ‘present itself as the most persuasive philosophical interpretation of a situation or “epoch” of the course of events of which it feels itself to be the outcome’.”^{38,39} The “Truth of understanding” in Gadamerian hermeneutics, although distinguished from the notion of truth as correspondence in a natural-scientific model under such a reading, loses the value of “being true,” because when all interpretations are merely necessary products of the interpreter’s only foundation, there can be no truth or falsity in the interpretations – the interpretation is trapped in the interpreter’s past experience as a closed domain.⁴⁰ In such a case, not only can there be no criterion to judge the truth and falsity of an interpretation from outside the interpreter’s historical experience, but also no possibility for the interpreter herself to be critical of her own interpretation, entailing that there is no falsity or misunderstanding, but only the “necessary interpretation” that one is able to make given her tradition. The idea of “fusing of horizons” is then denied, because there is only one horizon, and the process of understanding becomes an unfolding of nihilism.

The Habermas-Gadamer debate

There was a famous debate which took place in the 20th century in which Habermas criticised Gadamer for having gone too far in rejecting the natural-scientific methodology. I will

³⁷ Ibid, 11

³⁸ Ibid, 10f

³⁹ Thaning, 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 18-24.

argue in this section that: 1) this debate directly points to the need of some kind of norm which makes it possible for an interpretation to be right and wrong and 2) the debate is reconcilable, while the reconciliation should at least make it possible that the interpreter can take a critical stance towards her own history and past interpretation.

We have found that Gadamerian hermeneutics criticises a natural-scientific model of hermeneutical theories and underlines the ineliminable subject-participation in all understanding. On this level, Habermas stands with Gadamer by arguing against those who advocate an emulation of the natural-scientific model in humanistic areas of study. In his book *On the Logic of Social Sciences*, Habermas accuses several approaches of falling into an idolatry of history-free objectivity which contravenes the nature of social sciences.⁴¹ Like Gadamer, Habermas holds the view that social science cannot claim a purely-objective viewpoint free from any human history, stressing that the observer's history must be taken into account when making claims about problems in humanities.⁴² Nevertheless, Habermas criticises Gadamer's theory for failing to reveal anything potentially problematic about the interpreter's history due to its lack of a normative methodology.

Clearly, Gadamer has in mind to free hermeneutics from "the prejudice against prejudice" held by scientific hermeneutic theorists. Habermas thinks that such an aim has not only made Gadamer criticise the a natural-scientific model for hermeneutics, but also avoid providing methodological prescriptions. According to Habermas, although Gadamer is right to resist a natural-scientific model in interpretation, he has mistakenly and abstractly opposed hermeneutics to all types of methodical knowing. Hermeneutics, Habermas argues, is essentially

⁴¹ Habermas, Jürgen. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark. Books by Jürgen Habermas Included in the Series Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988. 43-74.

⁴² Ibid, 143-170.

a principle of methodology. Despite the fact that a natural-scientific model of methodology is not a suitable model for human science, it is wrong to exclude all methodological elements in hermeneutics. The radical exclusion of methodology implies a lack of normativity, and the lack of normativity eventually eliminates the possibility that one can be critical of one's own tradition (historicity, in Gadamer's word). Recall that Gadamer argues for the universality of his hermeneutic theory and refuses to attribute his theory to a methodology because he thinks that all methodological theories of understanding have a scientific model. In Habermas' view, a methodological theory does not presuppose a scientific model, meanwhile, however, a methodology can offer a normativity which one can refer to so that one can be right or wrong when applying the theory. In terms of history-based understanding, one needs the normativity to judge one's own history (tradition). For this reason, Habermas emphasises a need for a reflective appropriation of tradition that allows one to question one's own tradition, which he thinks Gadamer fails to allow. Without "the power of reflection", what is problematic about one's historical structure of understanding can never be revealed but instead be granted as a given. In Habermas's work *The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality*, he uses an analogy of psychological distortion to illustrate this defect: someone with psychological distortion cannot discover the pathology without an external reference, usually the help of a psychotherapist.⁴³ For Habermas, any interpreter under Gadamer's theory could be one with, at least latent, psychological distortion. Therefore, he calls for "a system of reference that transcends the context of tradition as such. Only then can tradition be criticized as well."⁴⁴ This system of reference demands a normativity in the process of understanding and functions as the standard for reflective

⁴³ Habermas, J. "The hermeneutic claim to universality." *Contemporary hermeneutics: Method, philosophy and critique*. Edited by J. Bleicher. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

⁴⁴ Habermas. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, 170.

appropriations. Namely, the system of reference must be referable at any time when one applies a prejudgement to the understanding. Only with such references is one able to make reflections, which Habermas regards to be necessary in any hermeneutical theory.

Reflection, for Habermas, is the ability to reason. Such an ability makes one's tradition accessible to judgement and critique by oneself. We might recall the adjudication of prejudgement in Gadamer's theory which takes the interpreter to the "fusing of horizons". A good "fusing of horizons" requires the interpreter to be conscious of her own prejudgements while put them into question. Is this what Habermas is seeking with his concern about reflection? Did Habermas simply overlook this aspect of Gadamer's book? According to Mandelson, the debate between these two took place due to their attitude towards the idea of adjudicating one's prejudgement, namely the "system of reference" that Habermas calls for. Gadamer sees the "system of reference" as a turn to rationalism which he has been criticising throughout his book. To Gadamer, the idea of reflection requires one to judge the historical structure of one's understanding from outside one's history, which would violate his argument that one can never bring one's historical structure into transparency. While to Habermas, the call for reflection may not have such a radical implication. As the ability of reasoning, reflection does not have to deny its bond with historicity and it is certainly incapable of bringing the historical structure into pure-transparency. Mandelson suggests that Habermas might clarify his point by distinguishing "those inevitable preunderstandings which derive simply from one's participation in culture, and those false preconceptions which are anchored in systematically distorted forms of communication...its normative ideal is the complete elimination of systematic blockages to communication with oneself or others. But it certainly does not claim to being to consciousness

all of the addressee's preconceptions – an impossible task.”⁴⁵ What Habermas' critical theory stresses is not a rationalist reference external to one's history but an intention to reach a maximum of shared pre-structure of understanding between the interpreter and the interpreted so that “a certain degree of control” can be achieved.⁴⁶ In other words, the system of reference that Habermas calls for is a possibility that the interpreter can verify whether her own tradition as the pre-structure of understanding is adequate or not for interpreting whatever she tries to interpret, which is equally what makes Gadamer's “fusion of horizons” accomplishable.

The task Gadamer faces, originally for the purpose of further justifying his hermeneutics, may be exactly the same task of giving “the reflection” Habermas calls for. The reflection must offer a level of normativity to draw the line between hermeneutics and some kind of relativistic, arbitrary story telling. At the same time, the reflection should not go beyond the boundary of one's historicity so that the primary stance of Gadamer's theory is preserved.

Reconciliation through reconstructing the theory

We may find hope to reconcile the Habermas-Gadamer debate by reconstructing Gadamerian hermeneutics with the help of Sellars' idea of “the space of reasons” (as articulated by John McDowell):

For McDowell, the question is this: is transcendental philosophy necessarily exercised from a standpoint external to the processes whose world-disclosing ability is to be vindicated? ... McDowell claims that transcendental philosophy can also be ‘acceptably executed from within the conceptual order’⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Mendelson, J. “The Habermas-Gadamer debate.” *New German Critique* 18, 1979. 62-3.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 57-64

⁴⁷ Thaning, 35

In *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Sellars states that an intentional state must be placed “in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says”.⁴⁸

McDowell sees it as

means to exclude an externalist view of epistemic satisfactoriness, a view according to which one can be entitled to a belief without being in a position to know what entitles one to it. Knowing things, as Sellars intends his dictum to mean, must draw on capacities that belong to reason, conceived as a faculty whose exercises include vindicating one’s entitlement to say things.⁴⁹

For McDowell, the space of reasons provides a normativity to intentional states, meaning that we are responsible to do certain things whenever we are thinking and believing with responsiveness to certain norms or rules. He further states that the act of judging is the paradigmatic mode of actualising norms (by asserting that something is true or not according to the norms). The space of reasons requires one to judge, and this requirement implies a realm of the freedom of judging. McDowell stresses that this freedom is limited to judgements about intentional states. For example, we can judge the belief that “it is raining outside” by going out and check the weather, based on our concept of “rain”.⁵⁰ However, when it comes to non-intentional forms of intelligibility, such as a causal influence described by natural science, we cannot take such a critical stance – the influence is either exercised or not, and there is no right or wrong.⁵¹

The claim about freedom by McDowell is rather important because it draws the boundary of our freedom of judging, distinguishing human, as historical beings, with both a God-like being and merely physical matters. The norms or rules one refers to when making judgements are not a

⁴⁸ Sellars, W. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1997. 76.

⁴⁹ McDowell, J. “Avoiding the Myth of the Given”. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2009. 256.

⁵⁰ McDowell uses ‘concepts’ to represent the rules or norms that articulate the content of “our commitments in thinking and acting... Our intentional life is intrinsically bound up with responsibility or commitment because it involves a fundamental responsiveness to rules (concepts)” (Thaning, 42).

⁵¹ Thaning, 42-3

priori, but are formed explicitly and implicitly from the cultural history one has been immersed in. Through constant participation in a social-historical community, one's language and experience are shaped to have its cultural features which become the norms. Notice that the norms themselves should not be treated as simply caused but as what has been justified according to earlier norms. In *Mind and World*, McDowell uses a Kantian idea of "spontaneity" in applying concepts to explain how the space of reason really works: "empirical knowledge results from a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity... The power of spontaneity comprises a network of conceptual capacities linked by putatively rational connections, with the connections essentially subject to critical reflection."⁵² This "expansion" of norms seems to parallel Gadamer's argument for the expansion of experience, which reforms the structure of understanding through the fusing of new experience into the pre-structure of understanding. Even more similar with Gadamer, McDowell explains the process of judging in the space of reasons to be realised by linguistic articulation: "In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene."⁵³ Briefly speaking, it is language that realises and governs one's norm, and the possibility of actualising a norm relies upon one's ability to articulate one's language. To Gadamer, as to McDowell, understanding is fundamentally linguistic, namely, to understand is to articulate the understood into linguistic forms.

By arguing for the internality of the norms, McDowell denies one's dependence on any norm or rule external to one's own cultural history, therefore one always acts as a free agent

⁵² McDowell, John. *Mind and World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994. 9; 124-5.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 125.

when judging an intentional state through the space of reasons without being constrained by any external normativity:

It is to refuse to conceive experience's demand on a system of beliefs as imposed from outside the activity of adjusting the system, by something constituted independently of the current state of the evolving system, or a state into which the system might evolve. The required adjustments to the system depend on what we take experience to reveal to us, and we can capture that only in terms of the concepts and conceptions that figure in the evolving system. What we take experience to tell us is already part of the system, not an external constraint on it.⁵⁴

The rejection of normativity external to one's cultural history is also implied by Gadamer's reading of Socratic dialogues. Perhaps many of us read all Socratic dialogues written by Plato to be pointing at the abstract and timeless "truths" in a realm cut off from our historical world, which we even refer to as the "Platonic realm". Such an idea about truth is obviously opposed to Gadamer's theory. However, Gadamer reads the Ancient Greek works from a different angle which builds a coherency between the Greek dialogues and Gadamer's theory, by which he "does not understand Platonic dialectics as a method of exposing super-sensible meaning located in a metaphysical realm, but rather as the practice of dialogue as paradigmatically exercised by Socrates... the aim is not to articulate definitive or ultimate knowledge, but to lead the reader to an insistence on the search for knowledge as such."⁵⁵ In other words, the "Socrates" in those conversations does not argue for absolute truths in a platonic realm, but rather attempts to make the dialogue go on so that the two dialogists can both grow a deeper understanding of the topic through dialectics. Gadamer and McDowell emphasise both the finitude and the freedom in one's understanding, where the finitude implies a cultural historical boundary which prevents us from

⁵⁴ Ibid, 135-6.

⁵⁵ Thaning, 54-5.

being “able to judge the full nature and extent of any norms that govern our knowledge”⁵⁶, while the freedom, being within our cultural history, gives the possibility for one to take a critical stance at which one can judge one’s intentional states (aka. “tradition” by Habermas and “prejudgement” by Gadamer). Wachterhauser puts it this way: “freedom can be illustrated by pointing out a well-known relationship between how we are formed by such traditions and how we contribute to their development. Only if we are deeply formed by a tradition are we capable of modifying those traditions in meaningful ways... one can change such norms [which one refers to in her language and tradition] only by demonstrating a deeper grasp of them.”⁵⁷ In this sense, the more deeply we are conscious of being formed by a tradition, the more freely and appropriately we can actualise norms which derive from it in the space of reasons. Returning to the task set by Habermas, we shall find that Habermas’ call for a system of reference is satisfied because the reflective stance given by freedom within the space of reasons has been vindicated within one’s cultural history, the “system of reference” non-independent from one’s tradition. At the end of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer claims that “what the tool of [natural-scientific] method does not achieve must—and really can—be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth”⁵⁸. We now see that this can be justified.

⁵⁶ Dostal, Robert J. *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (The bit I cite here is a chapter written by Wachterhauser: “Getting it Right: Relativism, Realism, and Truth”, pp52-78). 62. As Wachterhauser points out, this is “a view of our freedom as rational agents that has its roots in the Cartesian and Enlightenment tradition... this dominant view of rational or epistemic autonomy requires that we become “second authors” of these norms... Such “second authorship” would enable us, when challenged to justify our reliance on such norms, to reconstruct the full weight of their authority out of our own insight, without any recourse to our de facto reliance on the tradition as such”. (Dostal, 61-2).

⁵⁷ Ibid, 63-4.

⁵⁸ *Truth and Method*, 484.

CH3

The problem in the application of Gadamerian hermeneutics

The reconstruction of Gadamerian hermeneutics has proved that there is an inherent normativity in Gadamerian hermeneutics, which is the space of reasons. However, although the space of reasons enables one to question and examine one's cultural history based on the expandability of one's experience, the space of reasons itself is formed by one's historical experience. However, in consideration of our purpose in this project – which is to evaluate other people's interpretation of a text – a kind of normativity which allows one to question and examine another person's interpretation seems to be necessary. Now we should be concerned of this question: is there a kind of normativity given by Gadamer that enables one to transcend one's general cultural history?

The answer to the question, I think, cannot be made straightforwardly, and the difficulty originates from Gadamer's rejection of the natural-scientific model of methodology. In the earlier discussion, despite the sound justification of the normativity in Gadamer's theory, the normativity is bound to the interpreter's world-view. Unlike natural sciences which claim an all-embracing view for their laws and theories, Gadamer's theory seems insufficient to account for how one can judge the interpretations made from a world-view other than one's own.

Victory of scepticism?

Here we shall re-address the second critique raised by Betti and Hirsch: Gadamer does not give explicit criteria for legitimating an interpretation. In the book *Validity in*

*interpretation*⁵⁹, Hirsch writes: “Suppose, as it often happens, two readers disagree about the meaning of a text.... What principle would they have for determining who is more nearly right?... tradition cannot really function as a stable, normative concept... Without a genuinely stable norm we cannot even in principle make a valid choice between two differing interpretations...”⁶⁰ While the consequence of this concern about Gadamerian hermeneutics stated by Hirsch – a hermeneutic nihilism – has been denied from the interpreter’s viewpoint, we are left with the problem of lacking a criterion for one to judge another’s interpretation. Since each interpreter is finite due to her historicity, does it mean that each interpreter is blocked off from any truth claims of others’ in other normative traditions? If one argues for a normativity that is outside one’s cultural-historical community to judge an interpretation made from an alien viewpoint, one would fall into the position Gadamer stands against. If not, one can never find a fair stance to make judgement about whether an interpretation made by someone else has achieved the virtue of understanding via the normativity given by the space of reasons. In other words, one cannot discern and differentiate the arbitrary and the adequate in another’s interpretation, given that normative traditions are different.

Wachterhauser, defending Gadamer, rejects this sceptical idea. He understands the objection as assuming “an unbridgeable gulf of radical incommensurability”⁶¹ between different people’s historicities. This assumption must be false because

there is a sense in which all traditions occupy the same normative ground, but they may very well occupy different pieces of it at different points in time. In this sense, the historicity of our traditions places a real limit on the completeness of our knowledge, but it does not preclude knowledge as such. The grip of tradition is not a

⁵⁹ Although Hirsch’s primary argument against Gadamer to defend the author’s intention as the goal of understanding is not discussed in this work, I regard this subpoint Hirsch makes in the book worth paying attention to.

⁶⁰ Hirsch, Eric D., Jr. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967. 249-51.

⁶¹ Dostal, 64.

stranglehold; it places a real limit on the completeness of our knowledge, but it allows for real knowledge of ourselves, of others, and of the world.⁶²

Wachterhauser stresses the possibility of the commensurability between historicities, and he finds his backup from Gadamer's theory about language. He uses Gadamer's claim that one always understands the world in one's own language while this "world" ought to be conceived as "the world" shared by all users of the same language.⁶³ There are two further clarifications for this claim. First, Gadamer denies that all reality are just words. It is better to comprehend the claim as saying that language has made the world more intelligible to one who can use the language. The second clarification concerns the development of a language. Although one's freedom is situated in one's linguistic tradition, one's language, like all languages, is extendable in various ways while not being fixed by a set of rules. With the help of this claim, Wachterhauser tries to point out that one can always extend one's knowledge through learning from other people's use of language.⁶⁴ The normativity required for one's judgement about someone else's interpretation would then become identical to the normativity within one's own language boundary, since one's usage of language has been extended to include the other person's usage. Wachterhauser ends up saying that "this implies a rejection of a priori

⁶² Ibid, 65.

⁶³ Wachterhauser draws this idea from Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics* ("Chapter 4 Man and Language", from p59). Though Gadamer does agree that one "lives in language" and the language has "the significance of an excellent manifestation in which the nature of man and his development in history can be studied" (61), he denies that language is "one of the means by which consciousness is mediated with the world" (62). Therefore, language should not be treated merely as a tool which serves as a third instrument with its individual determinacy. (Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1976.)

⁶⁴ Notice that this idea about the development of one's language can be found in Gadamer's work. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that the process of understanding is also a process of learning from the other where the interpreter's experience is constantly expanded. The thing being interpreted should be treated as a complete expression concealing the truth, and this expression (Gadamer uses "the beauty" of an object to designate the expression, such as the beauty of a poem or the beauty of a work of art) is directly manifested to the interpreter. By referring to the direct expression (which should be assumed to be the truthful expression), the deeper the understanding process goes, the higher degree the fusion of horizon is at. (Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. 435-68.)

incommensurability, but not necessarily a rejection of contingent incommensurabilities⁶⁵, because it is not guaranteed that one's usage of language can be extended to fully include another person's usage of language for an interpretation of something.⁶⁶ If we go back to the problem of transcendentalism, Wachterhauser's argument might have provided the possibility for one to transcend one's past history – by extending one's usage of language to include another's (while “transcend” might not be a good word for such an extension). Nevertheless, such a possibility faces the solipsistic challenge: merely because there is a chance for one's extended usage of language to include another person's usage does not imply that it is judgeable whether or not one's usage of language has been so extended.

Though Wachterhauser does not explicitly spell it out, I read his strategy to be that: a judgement about an interpretation is based on the understanding of the interpretation as a complete whole; therefore, a process of understanding must happen in the evaluation. Hence, on one hand, the evaluator enters an understanding process of the original text (the text being interpreted by the evaluated interpretation) from the fused horizon with the evaluated interpreter. On the other hand, the evaluation is itself made within the fused horizon fusing the evaluator's cultural historical experience and the evaluated interpretation. In short, judging an interpretation is deconstructed by Wachterhauser to be simply an understanding of the original text and another text (the evaluated interpretation) at the same time, and the normativity of evaluation would be the same as the normativity of understanding, which has been vindicated by the reconstruction. However, this does not quite answer the concern because, in his denial of the incommensurability, Wachterhauser presupposes the overlapping between historicities, which is the common language. He has assumed that the interpretation must originate from a cultural-

⁶⁵ Dostal, 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 64-77.

historical community having something in common with evaluators who use the same language. As he has admitted, even though there is no necessary incommensurability, there can be contingent incommensurability. If an evaluator sees part of an interpretation as inadequate, how can he tell if the inadequacy is due to the interpreter's arbitrariness in her understanding or due to the incommensurability between the evaluator's own historicity and the interpreter's? Instead of an assumption of possible partial commensurability, what is really needed here might be a criterion for discerning whether a viewpoint is formed from an alien cultural-historical community. If such a criterion is not given, the veil between the evaluator's and the interpreter's cultural history can never be penetrable: since the evaluator can only make evaluations when he shares the same normativity of understanding with the evaluated interpreter, and the evaluator cannot make any judgment about an interpretation deriving from a cultural history alien to his own (for if so, there is no normativity for the evaluator to refer to), the criterion for discernment must be given so that it would be knowable whether or not certain normativity is applicable in an evaluation.

Perhaps Wachterhauser has found it impossible to offer such a criterion from a Gadamerian stance, and for this reason, he acknowledges that "the sceptic cannot be answered, at least not on her own terms, because the full extent of our reliance on historically mediated normativity and the contingencies of language cannot be surveyed sufficiently to rule out the possibility of error that might result from being the unconscious dupes of our own indebtedness"⁶⁷. However, Wachterhauser still advocates a positive attitude toward the Gadamerian response he gave to the concern. As he states: "the collapse of foundationalism does not imply a victory for scepticism, but a more nuanced commitment to fallibilism"⁶⁸. One of the

⁶⁷ Ibid, 69.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 70.

essential ideas in Gadamerian hermeneutics is to challenge the achievability of “certainty”. From the fact that one cannot give objectively (in the sense of natural science) sufficient evidence for something, it does not follow that one is wrong, especially when it is already justified that one can have some degree of normativity to judge herself.⁶⁹ The inherent limitations of understanding ought not be considered an inherent inaccessibility to truth. On the contrary, what we have within the limitation furnishes us the possibility and condition towards the truth.

Revisit the question about truth

In order to solve the problem of objectivity in Gadamerian hermeneutics, we have looked for elements which are coherent with Gadamer’s theory meanwhile able to free it from subjectivism. From the reconstruction of the theory, a normativity is vindicated so that the interpreter is enabled to take a critical stance towards her own cultural history. However, such a normativity is justified not because it transcends the interpreter’s general cultural history, but that it derives from the openness of the interpreter’s experience. The normativity might be treated as a kind of transcendentalism which enables one to transcend one’s cultural history in the past (as said earlier, “transcend” does not really sound like the right word), but it certainly does not take one out of one’s general cultural history. I suggest that we can comprehend it as the capability of reflection and evolution. Instead of forcibly claiming to have vindicated a transcendentalism in Gadamer’s theory, it might be more proper to claim that the goodness we look for from transcendentalism in order to free Gadamerian hermeneutics from subjectivism can be given by the capability of reflection and evolution without arguing for a transcendental dimension in Gadamerian hermeneutics. Rather than providing objectivity by giving an absolute normativity,

⁶⁹ Ibid, 70-7.

the capability of reflection and evolution provides objectivity by giving the normativity which is relative to one's general cultural history. Although, as argued in the last section, the relative objectivity does not guarantee to bring one all of what can be questionable from one's cultural history, the openness of experience indicates that one's way towards truth is not blocked off by one's cultural history. With that said, it seems that one has been justified to have a stance of being critical of another person's interpretation.

However, what can an evaluator really judge about another's interpretation from such a stance? Assuming the commensurability between cultural histories, the evaluator is able to judge whether an interpreter has interpreted well in a sense the interpreter has participated in the fusing of horizons as if the evaluator is the interpreter himself. But is it all an evaluator is expected to do in an evaluation? Probably not. When we think about an evaluation of an interpretation of a text, the evaluator usually judges the interpretation in regard to whether the interpretation says something true of the text, instead of whether the interpreter has been open-minded/critical enough in the process of understanding. This concern shall lead us back to the notion of "truth" in Gadamerian hermeneutics which has been mentioned in chapter 1, that whether the truth of the content of a text can be determined by how one interprets the text.

In the article "Gadamer's realism," Wachterhauser attempts to draw a necessary relation between how one interprets the text and being true of the text. Wachterhauser asserts Gadamer's epistemological view to be "perspectival realism,"⁷⁰ because, to Gadamer, what is true of a text – the meaning – must be meaningful to a "historically contingent" and "linguistically mediated" perspective. The true meaning of a text always reveals an aspect of the text but can never bring the text into pure transparency.⁷¹ This is also suggested by Gadamer's article "What is Truth"

⁷⁰ Wachterhauser, Brice R. "Gadamer's Realism." 154.

⁷¹ Ibid, 154-5.

where he claims that “there can be no proposition that is purely and simply true.”⁷² Inversely, Gadamer also claims that the-text-itself can never be transparent, independent from any perspective. The truth of a text must be linguistically presented, and linguistic presentation entails perspectives with limitation – the finitude of the language user’s cultural history.⁷³

Wachterhauser insists that such a view (what he calls “perspectival realism”) is a type of direct realism, by which Gadamer argues that a linguistic interpretation of a text is a direct presentation of the text’s content. In this sense, the process one takes to interpret a text can be “self-authenticating” regarding being true of the text, and it offers us “a level of inexhaustible insight that can sustain ‘infinite’ interpretive efforts.”⁷⁴

It might be fair to claim that, according to Gadamer, every interpretation of a text must both conditioned and limited by the interpreter’s cultural history, and every interpretation must in some respects present the truth of the text. In addition, because of the potential commensurability between cultural histories, every interpretation, being itself open to future interpretive efforts, also provides those who do not share the same cultural history with inexhaustive insights towards the truth of the text. Of course, all of what have been argued are based upon the condition that the interpreter has more or less participate into the fusing of horizons. In other words, as long as an interpreter has entered the understanding process, there is always something true of the text we can find in her interpretation. The job of an evaluator, then, is to make assessment of how well the evaluated interpreter executes the process.

⁷² Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “What is Truth.” 41. Gadamer argues that this claim not only apply to propositions in human science but also propositions in natural science as long as it is made by human, because there can always be some presuppositions which one cannot step back from, but a purely true proposition – in a sense it describes the Hegelian “absolute totality” – must be made from a assumption-free stance, which is impossible for a human to take.

⁷³ “Gadamer’s Realism,” 154-6.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 159.

How do we evaluate?

I shall spend this section discussing two guiding points towards the next few chapters in which different interpretations of the *Analects* will be evaluated under the light of Gadamerian hermeneutics: 1) what does it mean to evaluate an interpretation? 2) how can Gadamerian hermeneutics be applied to evaluate an interpretation?

Michael Scriven introduces the transdisciplinary view of evaluation in his paper “The Nature of Evaluation”, and I regard it as helpful to understand what we are going to do with the different interpretations. Scriven defines evaluation to be “a process of determining merit, worth, or significance... and this process may be judgemental or inferential.”⁷⁵ The transdisciplinary view of evaluation categorises evaluation to be a transdiscipline, meaning that evaluation is itself an autonomous discipline while at the same time “its methods and results provide important tools used in a significant number of other disciplines.”⁷⁶ According to this view, evaluation should be regarded as a tool that can be applied in multiple disciplines to make critical judgements. Like Scriven’s definition suggests, evaluation is usually judgemental or inferential, and being judgemental or inferential requires some kind of criteria. Such criteria are given by the discipline of the evaluation itself.⁷⁷

Since an interpretation must be made in a particular language, at a particular time, and by a person who understands and explains in a particular way, we can treat the interpretation as a representation which corresponds a discipline of interpretation. The evaluation of interpretation, in such a case, is the discipline that can be applied to make judgements about all the disciplines of interpretation of their quality. In other words, each interpretation corresponds a theory of

⁷⁵ Scriven, Michael. "The Nature of Evaluation." November 20, 2009, 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 1-3.

understanding (a school of hermeneutics), while the evaluation, being a theory of understanding itself, serves to analyse the evaluated theories of interpretation and make judgments about the interpretations made from those theories. When a theory of understanding is used for evaluation, the methods and normativity offered by that theory for understanding would be the scale for judging the evaluated interpretations.

Before discussing how we can use Gadamerian hermeneutics as the trans-hermeneutics discipline to assess different interpretations, I shall remark on why we should apply Gadamerian hermeneutics rather than any other theory of understanding by reemphasising Gadamer's rejection of a universal foundation for understanding. Nicolas Davey comments on Gadamer's hermeneutics about what the theory appreciates:

understanding in the humanities is not to be articulated as problem-solving which when achieved brings an end to discussion, but as a process whereby we begin to understand the open-ended nature of certain fundamental questions more deeply.⁷⁸

Clearly, hermeneutics, as well as hermeneutical methods, should be regarded as a humanities study, distinct from natural science studies which points to "an end of discussion". Gadamer's rejection of methodology in understanding in his hermeneutics is an emphasis on the distinction between humanities and natural science, in order to stress that a humanities study should not be done in the same way natural science studies are done.

What really is the difference between humanities and natural science? Why does it matter when it comes to our evaluation of interpretations? As we have seen in the previous chapters, although both natural science and humanities studies use language to understand and interpret the world, natural science does all these by objectifying what is to be understood and interpreted – therefore the studier and the studied share an "I and it" relationship, while the studier and the

⁷⁸ Davey, Nicholas. "Truth, Method, and Transcendence." In *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years After Gadamer's Truth and Method*, edited by Malpas Jeff and Zabala Santiago, 27.

studied in humanities share an “I and thou” relationship. In a humanities activity like understanding a text, the interpreter treats the text as a subject, participating into a dialectical activity with the text. What Gadamer rejects, however, is objectifying the text to be an object and anatomising the object according to a divinely-given method. If we want to evaluate an interpretation, we want the evaluation to be done as a humanities study. We do not want, for example, a theory of understanding which claims a “universal formula” for all understandings in all languages to be the scale, although it might be much easier to judge different interpretations of a same text – since such a theory would certainly claim one solely correct interpretation for each text, which would be the outcome of filling the text into its “universal formula” – and all the interpretations different from the solely correct one would simply be bad interpretations. In other words, the transdiscipline that we apply as the scale must itself provide what is suitable for a humanities study, otherwise all the work we are going to do in the following chapters would be based upon a fundamental mistake. Lin An Wu made an argument about the core value of humanities studies in one of his lectures in Taipei which resonates Gadamer’s view on humanities: like natural sciences, humanity studies also include empirical description and theory building, but humanity has its core value in neither of these two. Instead, the core of humanity studies should be the pursuit of ideas. If a humanity study contains only empirical description and theory building, it will very likely become “an accomplice with the most powerful class in the society [because what the study claims to be the truth of human would be claimed as the truth of human with transparency rather than aspectual].”⁷⁹ By the pursuit of ideas, Lin means that we must treat what we study in humanities as subjects who are not quantifiable, and what we pursue

⁷⁹ Lin, An Wu. *Renwen Xue Fangfalun*. Century Literature Press. May, 2016. 18-9. Natural science is also about people.

should therefore be based on each subject itself.⁸⁰ If we use the methods in science, such as statistics, to study a subject matter in humanities, we would be quantifying the subject matter and applying a method which is independent from the subject matter. Likewise, argued by Charles Taylor, that “social reality” between “subjects” is not made up of brute data. All of what is true about a society must not be regarded as some kind of pre-existed reality which is independent of any language which are used to describe it.⁸¹ If the method is independent from the subject matter that we studied, the subject is not treated as a subject but an object in a group which has no difference with other objects in the same group, and the result from such a study would be meaningless. As long as we agree that hermeneutics is a humanities study, Gadamer is right in rejecting universal foundation for understanding. Because there is no universal foundation for understanding, there is no all-powerful key to the understanding of any one text, hence no all-powerful scale for evaluating any one interpretation.

One might question, then, if there can be no universal standard for the evaluation of interpretations, can we still make objective assessments of an interpretation at all? This question exactly connects the problem which the previous chapter endeavours to solve with the rest of the project. We should have found that (the reconstructed) Gadamerian hermeneutics certainly allows us to make objective evaluations without providing an all-powerful key to understanding texts. Recall that, from the reconstruction of the theory, the capability of reflection and evolution are proved to provides objectivity by giving the normativity which is relational to one’s cultural history, and cultural histories (mediated by language) are commensurable. Therefore, the

⁸⁰ In the lecture, Lin argues that humanity study is a study of “quality” rather than “quantity”. What is studied in humanity must be unquantifiable because what humanity deals with is itself a subject’s (person’s) pursuit for truth.

⁸¹ Taylor. “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” 33-8.

relational objectivity given by the capability of reflection and evolution is not only sufficient to free Gadamerian hermeneutics from subjectivism but also applicable as a transdiscipline.

Now we shall look at the final question: how Gadamerian hermeneutics can be applied in our evaluations? In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer replaces method – an all-powerful formula for all correct understandings – with dialogues engaging the interpreter and the text. The dialogues take the form of question and answer, where the interpreter keeps raising questions for the text to answer, and understandings are satisfactory answers the interpreter gets from the text. Hence, the evaluator of an interpretation must first evaluate the question which the evaluated interpreter asks the text (i.e. the motive/interest held by the interpreter). The question an interpreter raises could be good or bad, based on whether the answer to that question can be well given by the text or not. For example, there is a sentence in the *Analects*: “If you study but don’t reflect, you’ll be lost. If you reflect but don’t study, you’ll get into trouble (学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆).”⁸²

An interpreter may raise different questions to this sentence. Some may ask: “what does Confucius mean by ‘reflect’?” Some may ask: “which would be a worse case – being lost or getting into trouble?” The former question could be well answered by the text, and one is very likely to interpret “reflect” as “introspection” or “self-judge”. The latter, however, seems to be a bad question for the text, since the text does not seem to imply a preference between being lost and getting into trouble, but instead asserts both cases to be unwanted. The answerability of the question that the interpreter asks the text is the minimum requirement of a good interpretation, because a good interpretation must first be coherent with the text so that the answer given by the text to that question could possibly carry some meaningfulness to the understanding of the text.

⁸² Confucius. *The Analects*. 2.15.

Cultural difference may play a tricky role when we evaluate an interpretation. Sometimes we simply cannot observe at the first glance how the question raised by the interpreter is connected to the text. It indicates that we should not assess a question to be unanswerable by the text merely based on our first sketch of the interpretation. The evaluator must try to discern whether the incoherence he has observed between the interpretation and the text is due to the interpreter's unsuitable question or the difference between the evaluator's and the interpreter's cultural histories. As suggested earlier, there is no a priori incommensurability between cultural histories, and cultural histories are potentially commensurable through language. The evaluator must assure that he has shared some cultural agreement with the interpreter on the piece of evaluated interpretation, which implies that the evaluator must not only look at the interpretation but also understand the interpreter and the interpreter's relation with the text.⁸³ The interpreters we are going to see in the following chapters –Zhu Xi and post-Ming interpreters – are all those from cultures more or less different from mine in multiple aspects. In order for me to stand at a position of evaluating their interpretations of the *Analects*, I will first do a historical research on their cultural background to assure that I would be able to understand their language using and their interpretations of the *Analects*. Only then will my evaluation be legit, and my critique (if there is any) be adequate, for each of the interpretations.

Once the evaluator manages to put on the evaluated interpreter's lenses, the evaluator is able to make judgements of the interpretation, and the interpretation will be assessed to be good or bad in certain respects by certain standards. According to the reconstructed Gadamerian theory of understanding, there are several points the evaluator could consider. First, an

⁸³ Remark that each interpretation is a historical product, an effective history, rather than an independent existent which can be understood or studied without understanding the historical condition of it. Not doing so would contradict Gadamerian hermeneutics, implying either a mistake of anachronism or falling into a metaphysical view of understanding.

interpretation, according to the opening nature of understanding, an interpretation should be open to other possibilities of understanding. A good interpretation should reveal meaningfulness from the text in some respects, but it should certainly not claim itself to be some kind of authoritarian (or the only correct) interpretation of the text. Second, an interpreter may stand at relatively more inferior positions of understanding a text than other interpreters do – in certain aspects – due to their culture history, including language, the time of their living from the text author’s writing, and the lack of knowledge about the text author’s history, etc. For the *Analects*, English translators may be standing at a relatively inferior position because the forms/styles of classical Chinese in a text sometimes do not make much sense for English speakers and there has been little communication in history between the English language and the language of classical Chinese.⁸⁴ Third, a good interpretation, forged from a fusing of horizons, must reveal something meaningful to times other than when the interpreted text is written, entailing that a good interpretation should speak to the present, providing perspectives and ideas originated from the text that would stimulate people’s thinking about the present world. It is also implied by Gadamerian hermeneutics that an interpretation of something, as a creation, always has certain value which can be appreciated by people besides the value people could appreciate from simply reading the original text.

With those in hand, it should be clear how we will deal with the materials in the following chapters. The purpose for the evaluation of those interpretations is not to grade them, nor to rank them from “the best” to “the worst”, but to investigate how these interpreters treat the work of interpreting one same text differently from a hermeneutically and philosophically interesting perspective. Ideally, this project would help us appreciate each interpretation

⁸⁴ Most translations of classical Chinese works are bridged by modern Chinese: texts are translated into modern Chinese, then the translated modern Chinese are translated into English.

individually through investigating how those interpretations were made, judge the interpretation as well as the hermeneutics underlying the interpreter's understanding critically, and bring some ideas about what we could learn from those interpreters.

CH 4

Zhu Xi and his metaphysical reading of the *Analects*

I shall clarify at the beginning of this evaluation that, since the purpose of this whole project is to examine multiple interpretations of the Confucian *Analects*, it is always more adequate to treat this evaluation as one of interpretation works (picked from many trends) on the *Analects* rather than one of different traditions of thoughts such as Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian theory which we will lightly touch in this chapter. Although it will turn out that Zhu's metaphysics undisputedly plays an important role in his interpretation, what we focus on ought to be "is what Zhu regards as the right way of understanding a good approach" instead of "is Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism a good theory." In the following two chapters, interpretations of pieces from the *Analects* by people from various cultural histories will be introduced and assessed. As said in the earlier chapter, I will first try to understand the interpreter's use of language in a way I am capable of – namely trying my best to commensurate the interpreter's cultural history with mine. Given such conditions, I will look at each interpretation, analyse it, and conclude about how understanding the *Analects* is like for the interpreters – viz. the interpreter's hermeneutical view – so that the interpretations by that interpreter could be appreciated. After these two chapters, comparisons as well as critiques will be made of their hermeneutics. Finally, we shall discuss how these interpretations can bring meaningfulness to the present.

In this chapter, we will look at Zhu Xi's (1130-1200), a literatus in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), interpretation of the Confucian *Analects*. According to the evaluation procedure, I shall first investigate Zhu Xi's cultural history so that we can be relatively informed about the conditions for his interpretation at his time.

Zhu Xi and Confucian classics

The reading of Confucian classics in the Song Dynasty experienced a turning point in both the aspect of which texts are regarded to be the authoritative ones and the aspect of how the texts are interpreted by scholars. The former can be reflected by the comparison of the authoritative texts at the beginning of Song and those at the end of the dynasty: the Five Classics – the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* – was regarded by the Confucian school as the most quintessential texts over all others⁸⁵; while by the end of the Song, the importance of the Five Classics had been displaced by the Four Books – the *Greater Learning*, the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and the *Mean*. The latter, on the other hand, could be observed in the exegeses made by Confucian scholars of the Song Dynasty that plenty of language of metaphysics is employed, which indicates a switch of scholarly attention in the Confucian tradition.⁸⁶

If one is to investigate the interpretations of Confucian texts made in the Song, Zhu Xi is certainly the one who should never be overlooked. Zhu is not only one of the Confucian scholars who employed the most contemporary language of metaphysics in the interpretations of Confucian texts, but also the one who is primarily responsible for the authorisation of the Four Books.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ In the Han dynasty, thirteen works were collected and canonised in the Confucian tradition. Among them, the five books mentioned above were classified as the Five Classics. Emperor Wu (141-87 B.C.) officialised Confucianism and established the institution of *Wujing Boshi* (Erudites of the Five Classics).

Gardner, Daniel K. "From the Five Classics to the Four Books: A Schematic Overview." In *Chu Hsi and the "Ta Hsueh": Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon*, 6.

⁸⁶ According to D. Gardner's research, there was a switch towards philosophic readings of the Confucian classics in the Song, partly because of the influence from Buddhism and the general academic atmosphere among scholars. Started from Cheng Yi and followed by Zhu Xi, the Five Classics had been thought too difficult to begin with for a learner. Therefore, they reorganised the Confucian canons and put forward the Four Books which they believe to be both beginner-friendly and quintessential in the Confucian tradition. In *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects*, Zhu Xi even gives his suggestion for the order of reading the Four books: *Daxue* – the *Analects* – *Mengzi* – *Zhongyong*.

Gardner, Daniel K. *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects*. Columbia University Press; New York, 2003. 5-16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 1-2.

Zhu received early education from a family tutor at his young age, having learned and recited Confucian classics over and over again. “I started reading the Four Books since very young, and it was a tough experience (某自少读四书，甚辛苦),”⁸⁸ said by himself and recorded in “A Collection of Conversations of Master Zhu (*Zhuzi Yulei*)” edited by Li Jingde. After the age of 14, Zhu began to be taught under the school of scholars who were obsessed with *Li Xue*⁸⁹ and Buddhism. Such an experience lays the foundation of Zhu’s scholarship. There was onetime when Zhu decided to abandon Confucianism for Chan Buddhism, but he turned back to become a Confucian again at his 23 and acknowledged Li Tong as his master:

某少时未有知，亦曾学禅且将圣人书来读。读来读去，一日复一日，觉得圣贤言语渐渐有味。却回头看释氏之说，渐渐破绽，罅漏百出⁹⁰

I was ignorant in my youth and devoted to Chan Buddhism ... I took a book of Confucius to read. After reading it again and again from day to day, I started to find Confucius’s words flavourful. Then I return to the Buddha’s words, finding them to be full of flaws.

Among the Confucian texts, Zhu’s earliest and most attention was devoted into the exegesis of the *Analects*. He started writing commentaries on the book when he was still following Li Tong, studying not only the text itself but also the other exegeses made by predecessor interpreters such as He Yan⁹¹ (190-249) from the Wei dynasty and Xing Bing from the North Song. Zhu criticises those exegeses for superficially paying all their attentions to the “instructional words” and seemingly historical objects. On the contrary, Zhu believes that all these former readings of the *Analects* lack what he regards as the quintessence of the text: the

⁸⁸ Zhu, Xi. *Zhuzi Yulei*. Since the version of the book I refer to is the online dictionary “cText,” there is no page number printed. However, it has a searching engine inserted in the system so that one can easily find the paragraph by typing in any word(s) included.

⁸⁹ *Li Xue* refers to a school of metaphysical thoughts brought up by the Cheng brothers (Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao) and Zhu Xi. They claimed the doctrine to be deriving from Confucianism. According to *Li Xue*, there is an ultimate principle called *Li* which governs everything in the world.

⁹⁰ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

⁹¹ He Yan is a famous scholar and philosopher in late East Han and early Wei. He’s work of interpreting the *Analects*, *Lunyu Jijie*, has been an important reference cited by many Confucian scholars in the history.

implicit meaning of Confucius's words.⁹² For Zhu, the recorded sentences by Confucius in the *Analects* are not mere moral instructions as how former interpreters have understood it but contain the truths about the world that Confucius tries to reveal. Perhaps it is exactly such an insight that had pushed Zhu to reorganise the Confucian canons and Zhu ended up putting forward the four books. What's more, Zhu specifies and highlights the order (*xu* 序) of reading the Confucian canons,⁹³ with an implication that only after reading the Four Books is it more possible for one to understand Confucianism. As written in *Zhuzi Yulei*, "the four books are cooked rice, while other Confucian classics are rice grains which requires threshing (语孟中庸大学是熟饭, 看其它经, 是打禾为饭)."⁹⁴ According to Zhu's view, the *Analects*, being a complete work itself and relatively easier to digest, is tightly associated with the other classics, playing a role of a foundation for understanding other classics.⁹⁵

Zhu Xi's hermeneutics

What is worth remarking about Zhu's interpretation is that, although his work can be read as a completed work, Zhu himself acknowledges that there could still be possible errors to be fixed in his work:

Having exerted a lifetime of effort on the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Daxue* (*Greater Learning*), and *Zhongyong* (*Mean*), in a crude fashion, I had completed my explanation. Reading these recently, however, I found that there were still one or two large sections in error and so I have been emending and deleting continuously.

⁹² Tang, Minggui. "A research on the hermeneutics in Zhu Xi's interpretation of the *Analects* (朱熹《论语》诠释研究)." *Hai Dai Xue Kan*. Qilu Shushe Press. 2014. 103-6.

⁹³ In *Zhuzi Yulei*, Zhu specifies that he suggests one read in an order of the *Great Learning*, the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Mean*.

Makeham, John. *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*. Cambridge (Massachusetts); London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003. 180.

⁹⁴ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

⁹⁵ According to Zhu's hermeneutics, Zhu holds that every idea expressed in the *Analects* can explicitly or implicitly corresponds with the ideas implicitly or explicitly expressed in other classics.

Sometimes, no matter where I turn, new problems arise. When seen in this light, my task is not an easy one.⁹⁶

Zhu's acknowledgement may not affect how we assess his work of interpretation, but it surely arouses some concern which we should take into account while we evaluate his hermeneutics – regardless that most of Zhu's Confucian successors as well as governments of East Asian states treat Zhu's interpretation of Confucian classics as an orthodoxy, Zhu himself had been thinking and revising his interpretation until the end of his life. Hence, it seems that Zhu would not be happy to claim his final version of interpretation to be the only correct version. Rather, he might agree with the idea that one could always find problems in the last version of interpretation. Besides, Zhu himself has suggested a hermeneutical theory, though he does not claim it to be “his hermeneutics” but rather advocates it as a way of learning through reading. We shall discuss this way of reading here.

In *Zhuzi Yulei*, there are several chapters (e.g. *Dushufa* and *Lunweixue* are two chapters especially concentrate on reading Confucian classics in general) where Zhu discusses how learning should be done and how to read classics by sages. As introduced earlier, Zhu holds that Confucius, by uttering the sentences which are recorded in the *Analects*, reveals the truths about the world – Zhu uses the word *Li* to refer to those truths, attempting to draw a connection with the principle which can explain the reality of the external world and/or lead one to act morally (viz. we might take *Li* to be both the moral principle and the natural law here but it is controversial what Zhu exactly refers to by *Li*)⁹⁷. The *Analects*, being a collection of Confucius'

⁹⁶ Zhu, Xi. *Hui'an Xiansheng Zhu Wengong Wenji* (translated by Makeham in *Transmitters and Creators*, 179).

⁹⁷ There have been disputes about whether the principle *Li* should be the natural law or the moral law or both. Some scholars have pointed out that Zhu's idea about the external world may undermine his view about morality. They argue that Zhu is committed to intellectualism in the problem of morality, while holding a view that we must empirically investigate the external world in order to have knowledge about it and the investigation should not be interfered by morality. It seems to be the case that Zhu is inconsistent in his metaphysical view about the external

speaking, carries (what Zhu thinks) the purest expressions of the *Li* that Confucius has. Then, in what way can one know the *Li* that are embedded in the *Analects*? For Zhu, everyone is endowed with *Qi* (in this case, *Qi* is usually explained to be some kind of energy inherent in a person),⁹⁸ and the only way to have knowledge about *Li* is to transform one's *Qi* into which has the same quality as a sage's *Qi*, because sages are born with the *Qi* which enables them to have direct contact with the *Li*.⁹⁹ It is suggested in the chapter of *Yu Meng Gangling*: "If one reads through and become familiar with the text, one can be said to have engendered the [sages'] quality of *Qi* (如看得透，存养熟，可谓甚生气质)."¹⁰⁰ To understand the quality of *Qi*, we can refer to what Zhu calls *Qixiang*¹⁰¹ in *Lunyu Jizhu*. Zhu mentions the word in the paragraph 5.25: "whenever we look at the *Analects*, we must not only try to understand the textual content, but also learn to recognise the quality of *Qi* which is exclusive to sages (凡看论语，非但欲理会文字，须要识得圣贤气象)."¹⁰² Having recognised a sage's quality of *Qi*, one must try one's best to transform one's own quality of *Qi* to the same quality as the sage's *Qi*. This should be the final aim of learning and reading the classics, but how is this possible?

world – with which he believes that knowledge of the nature laws can be derived from pure reason, while people must do empirical investigation to be able to reason in the correct way. (Tu, Ching-I. *Classics and Interpretations: The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2000. 247.)

⁹⁸ Makeham explains *Qi* to be "psychophysical energy." (Makeham, 197)

And Gardner explains *Qi* to be "psychophysical stuff." (Gardner, *Zhu's Reading*, 23)

In *Zhuzi Yulei*, Zhu writes that *Qi* is endowed to everything govern by *Li*. He further clarifies: "there is no precedence relationship between *Li* and *Qi*. However, if you really push me to answer which is prior, it is like the case that *Li* is prior to *Qi* [理与气本无先后之可言。但推上去时，却如理在先，气在后相似]." (*Zhuzi Yulei*)

⁹⁹ It is suggested by Zhu's writing, and agreed among scholars who study Zhu Xi, that he does think sages are somehow born with a nature in which they can have unmediated access to the principles.

¹⁰⁰ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

¹⁰¹ This is also suggested by Makeham and he draws reference from A. Graham: "*Qixiang* has been variously translated, although "temperament" and "disposition" seem to come close to the mark. Angus Graham describes *qixiang* as the outward manifestation of a person's qi.71 More particularly, it might be understood as an aura or quality-particularly one exuded by sages and worthies-that can be intuited by others. The term was part of the Cheng brothers' vocabulary, with an almost identical sense." (Makeham, 186)

¹⁰² *Lunyu Jizhu*. 5.25.

When Zhu talks about learning, he speaks in an almost imperative tone. Learning, to Zhu, means to comprehend *Li*, and the comprehension of *Li* is what all people should do in their life no matter if there has been written works existed by those sages who have comprehended *Li*. Reading, argued by Zhu, is a way (and probably the best way) most people could achieve learning, but is not necessary to learning. In *Zhuzi Yulei*, Zhu quotes “Zhaogong”: “learning is essentially not about reading, but if one does not read, it is very likely to be the case that one would not comprehend *Li* (学固不在乎读书，然不读书，则义理无由明).”¹⁰³ The sages, according to Zhu, did not rely on reading to comprehend *Li* and there was no book for them to read; people of less intelligence, on the other hand, can only try to achieve learning by reading what the sages have written. With that claimed, Zhu adds that although the comprehended *Li* is embedded in the text and the aim of reading is clear for the readers – to transform the *Qi*, it is extremely hard for one to succeed in practise.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, Zhu offers advice (primarily to his students) about how to read in order for a larger chance of success in learning.

Through the whole chapter of *Dushufa*, Zhu likes using the analogy of eating to discuss reading. Reading a text, according to Zhu, is like “eating a fruit (吃果子).”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the terms that Zhu uses in his suggested ways of reading are all related to “taste (味).” For example, he uses “flavour (滋味)” for referring to the feeling when one understands a text, and “playing with the savour of the text (玩味)” for referring to the process of ideal reading (understanding). The main idea is to argue for a feeling of intimate familiarity between a text reader and the meaning of the text (implying that, in terms of reading the classics written by the sages, an

¹⁰³ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

¹⁰⁴ Tu, 260-2.

¹⁰⁵ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

intimate familiarity between the text reader and the *Li* expressed): "...after attaining refined intimacy the principles [*Li*] will be seen. It is like eating a piece of fruit: When you first bite it you have not yet experienced the flavour. So you eat it. [And in eating it,] you must chew till it is soft, for only then will the flavour naturally emerge. Only then will you be able to determine whether it is sweet or bitter; only then will you [start to] know the flavour ("...精熟后，理自见得。如吃果子一般，劈头方咬开，未见滋味，便吃了。须是细嚼教烂，则滋味自出，方始识得这个是甜是苦是甘是辛，始为知味)¹⁰⁶。”¹⁰⁷ Reading, then, must be a repeated work which enables the reader to get more and more familiar with the text, in order for building a more direct contact with *Li*. "If you just hold a piece of fruit in your hand, you do not know if its inside is acidic or salty, bitter or harsh (若只是握得一个鹑仑底果子，不知里面是酸，是咸，是苦，是涩)¹⁰⁸。”¹⁰⁹ The text itself, the characters and words and sentences, are like how a piece of fruit looks like visually. It is only after one bites into the fruit and the flavour will be allowed to emerge. On the other hand, it is also the case that how the fruit looks like (those words and sentences) no longer plays an important role after one's repeated chewing but only the flavour that one tastes matters. For the same reason, Zhu stresses three times in a row in *Dushufa* that one must avoid reading too much: "it is wrong to be "greedy" about the amount of reading (读书不可贪多)."¹¹⁰ Only if one chews slowly and thoroughly can one swallow smoothly so that one's body can absorb the nourishment. Only if one reads patiently and repeatedly can one build an intimate relationship with the *Li* expressed by the text. As Zhu argues, overreading could also

¹⁰⁶ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

¹⁰⁷ Tu, 263.

¹⁰⁸ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

¹⁰⁹ Tu, 262.

¹¹⁰ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

cause a higher chance of making mistakes and getting confused by the meanings understood from different texts.

As the reader “chews the fruit,” the reader is transferring the quality of her *Qi* closer to the sage’s (text author’s) quality of *Qi*. At the same time, the reader is able to “play with the savour of the text.” In *Lunyu Jizhu*, Zhu comments under the piece where Confucius answers the question of how one should repay resentment and virtue:

或曰：“以德报怨，何如？”...子曰：“何以报德？...以直报怨，以德报德。”于其所怨者，爱憎取舍，一以至公而无私，所谓直也。于其所德者，则必以德报之，不可忘也。或人之言，可谓厚矣。然以圣人之言观之，则见其出于有意之私，而怨德之报皆不得其平也。必如夫子之言，然后二者之报各得其所。然怨有不讎，而德无不报，则又未尝不厚也。此章之言，明白简约，而其指意曲折反复。如造化之简易易知，而微妙无穷，学者所宜详玩也。¹¹¹

Someone said, “To employ virtue to repay resentment, how would that be?”
The Master said, “What, then, would you employ to repay virtue? Employ straightforwardness to repay resentment; employ virtue to repay virtue.”¹¹² For those who resent you, you should treat them according to how you feel – like or hate, accept or reject – and always be consistent [principled] and unbiased. This is what Confucius means by “straightforwardness.” For those who have done favour to you [who are virtuous], you should always employ virtue to repay them and never forget about what they have done. What the “someone” says could be called honest and sincere. Nevertheless, from a sage’s perspective, it is to realise that the person has done things intentionally so that, if you repay resentment with virtue, whatever you employ to repay the person who has done favour to you – virtue or resentment – will not balance your principle. Therefore, you must do according to what Confucius says, and your principle will be balanced. In such a case, there is no revenge for resentment, neither an absence of virtuous payback to virtue, and this case can still be called honest and sincere. The wording of this piece is simple, but the designated intention [meaning] is complex and zigzagging. The principle behind the meaning can be known with the same kind of easiness that characterises natural reproduction [viz. it could be known effortlessly], but [, although the knowing comes easily,] it is subtle and inexhaustible, and this is exactly why the learner [reader] should meticulously play with it.¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Lunyu Jizhu*. 14.36. The normal text is Zhu’s comments while the bold text is the original text in the *Analects*.

¹¹² Here I use the translation by Eno’s *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, 14.34 (14.36 in original text written in Classical Chinese). Eno, Robert. *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*. V 2.21. 2015. 14.34.

¹¹³ The comment is translated by me.

What is central to the idea of “play” is that the reader should participate in the meaning of the text and think. The more thoroughly one digests the classics, the more similarity between one’s thinking and a sage’s thinking because one’s *Qi*, as the energy for one’s thinking, is gradually transferring to sharing the quality with a sage’s *Qi*. It follows that the better one “plays with” the text, the more likely for one to comprehend *Li* – and thereby, become a sage. However, just like Confucius says, “Yóu¹¹⁴, there are few who recognize virtue¹¹⁵ (由！知德者鲜矣),^{116,117} Zhu believes that it is nearly impossible for one to become a sage like Confucius by learning (we may also deduce that from his assuming that all sages are born with the special *Qi*). In order to make one “plays with” the text better, Zhu argues for the attitude of “*xuxin* (虚心)” during one’s reading.

In *Dushufa*, Zhu uses the word “*xuxin*” for 22 times. For instance, “reading must be based on *xuxin* and self-experience (读书须是虚心切己);”¹¹⁸ “*xuxin* and then the way and *Li* will be clear (虚心则见道理明);”¹¹⁹ “the words of the sages must be read with *xuxin*. If you read it with preconception, then your understanding will be distorted (圣贤言语，当虚心看，不可先自立说去撑拄，便啗斜了).”¹²⁰ By “*xuxin*,” Zhu means the attitude one holds while reading with which one “read with an empty mind,”¹²¹ or with preconceived ideas removed¹²². The necessity of *xuxin* derive from Zhu’s assumption that the reader’s thinking before understanding the

¹¹⁴ Yóu is the name of Zilu’s, one of Confucius’ disciples.

¹¹⁵ Recognising virtue, according to Zhu’s interpretation, implies becoming a sage.

¹¹⁶ *Lunyu Jijie*, 15.4.

¹¹⁷ Eno, 15.4.

¹¹⁸ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Makeham, 203.

¹²² Tu, 264.

classics will not lead the reader to *Li* unless the reader is born a sage. Hence, the reader's prejudice and preconceptions will be an obstacle to understanding the meaning as well as the *Li* in a text. There might be two ways of interpreting Zhu's argument for *xuxin* here: the first one suggests *xuxin* be taken as open-mindedness; and the second one suggests a radical elimination of preconceptions (which is suggested by the literal meaning of *xuxin*: empty mind). Both Makeham and Tu tend to interpret *xuxin* in the first way. Makeham writes: "emptying one's mind is not simply a rejection of former interpretations so that one might passively reproduce some past meaning. Rather, it is an interim expedient by which one makes a conscious effort to divest oneself of received interpretations and ill-formulated subjective explanations."¹²³ Makeham's explanation of *xuxin* seems to equate the idea with Gadamer's "perception of completion." According to Gadamer, one must assume the text to be an adequate, coherent, and truthful expression of a complete idea in order to understand the text. In this sense, Zhu would certainly agree with Gadamer since the classics, written by sages, must be such a completion. However, it might be reasonable to interpret Zhu's idea about *xuxin* in a more radical way: *xuxin* implies a radical elimination of all preconceptions. This interpretation of *xuxin* could be drawn from Zhu's idea of *Qi* transfer. According to Zhu's idea, in order to comprehend *Li*, one's *Qi* must share the same quality with a sage's *Qi*. In the case of reading a classic, one must transfer one's *Qi* totally to the *Qi* of the same quality as the author's, which entails that one must abandon all of what would not be conceived by the author's *Qi* but are conceived by one's *Qi* before understanding the classic. This is suggested by another piece of Zhu's *Dushufa*:

本心陷溺之久，义理浸灌未透，且宜读书穷理。常不间断，则物欲之心自不能胜，而本心之义理自安且固矣。¹²⁴

¹²³ Makeham, 205.

¹²⁴ *Zhuzi Yulei*.

If the original mind [of the reader without a complete *Qi* transfer] is submerged [by prejudices and false preconceptions] for long, and the meaning cannot be fully penetrated, it is suitable for the reader to read more books again and again and investigate *Li*. As the reader keeps doing that, the mind of desire will naturally be beaten, and the meaning will be secured and steady [then revealed] to the mind.

The process of *Qi* transfer, then, is a process of wiping away all preconceptions that would not be held by a sage, namely those that stop one from comprehending *Li*. In other words, the comprehension of *Li* requires one to be a same person as a sage. Gadamer would probably assert Zhu's idea of *xuxin* to be false if the idea is interpreted in the radical way, because, by arguing that, Zhu must also agree that one is able to transcend one's pre-conceptions. As we have discussed, Gadamer regards himself to be standing against transcendental hermeneutic theory and he emphasises that some pre-conceptions are not escapable (which entails the finitude of historicity). Besides, Gadamer might also disagree with *Qi* transfer as the aim of understanding. This point shall be picked up later.

Does Zhu Xi apply his own hermeneutics well?

Regardless which way we take to interpret Zhu Xi's idea of *xuxin*, it is arguably suggested by Zhu's hermeneutics that one must be open-minded to the text in order to possibly understand the text. With that claimed, Zhu thinks that understanding the classics even to only some extent is still a difficult job. In *Dushufa*, Zhu writes: "usually, if one does not understand after reading a text for ten times, then one reads it for twenty times; if twenty times still does not help, thirty to fifty times would allow the one to at least grow some insights. If one understands nothing after fifty times of reading, it must have to do with the problems in the quality of one's *Qi* (凡人若读十遍不会，则读二十遍；又不会，则读三十遍至五十遍，必有见到处。五十

遍瞑然不晓，便是气质不好)”¹²⁵ As time goes on, it would be more and more difficult for the people of future generations to transfer their *Qi* when reading the classics, and Zhu takes it as his duty to reorganise as well as provide annotations for the classics so that it would be less difficult for people to understand those texts.

As discussed earlier, Zhu Xi, together with other Confucian scholars who advocates *Li Xue*, holds that the Confucian classics are receptacles of “the truth” (*Li*), and only when they are properly interpreted could *Li* be discovered. It became a mission for those scholars that they should create an order by which *Li* could be more easily revealed to the people who read the classics. A tendency towards creating an intellectual orthodoxy for Confucianism was formed at the time. According to Gardner, “in the Song period a movement to consolidate values, to return to a more narrowly and sharply articulated ‘orthodoxy,’ prevailed.”¹²⁶ Although Zhu Xi might not treat his own interpretation as the only correct one, it might be doubtful whether Zhu would think that there could be other interpretations which do not follow his way.

The hallmark of Zhu Xi’s interpretation, as already suggested, focuses on how the sentences said by Confucius can reveal *Li* about the world. Even though the term *Li* itself has never appear in the *Analects*, there are 164 *Li* and 28 *Tian Li* (*Li* of the world) found in Zhu’s interpretation.¹²⁷ Besides, it has been noticed by scholars in the Qing dynasty as well as recent scholars studying Zhu’s work that, even though Zhu cites many predecessor scholars’ interpretations of the *Analects*, he seems to have intentionally ignored many commonly accepted interpretations while preferring only those of *Li Xue* scholars.¹²⁸ As already said, the idea of *Li*

¹²⁵ Zhuzi Yulei.

¹²⁶ Gardner, *Zhu Xi’s Reading*, 18.

¹²⁷ Lunyu Jizhu

¹²⁸ Zhou, Yuanxia. “The Style and Significance of ‘Collective Commentaries’ of the Collective Commentaries on the *Analects*.” *Zhongguo Zhaxue Shi*. Beijing, 2013.

does not appear in the original text, which has in some sense created a gap between Zhu's interpretation of the *Analects* and the *Analects* itself. We may look at some examples.

In the *Analects* 6.28, Confucius says:

夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人...以己及人，仁者之心也。于此观之，可以见天理之周流而无闲矣。¹²⁹

Those with *Ren* [usually translated as “benevolence”] establish others when they want to establish themselves, and they help others to achieve aims when they want to achieve their own aims... it is the heart/spirit of a *Ren* [benevolent] person to naturally put himself in the stance of others. It can be observed from this fact that the *Li* of the world flows around without obstruction.

We can see that, in the original text, there is nothing like the principle or law of nature mentioned by Confucius but only *Ren*. While in Zhu's interpretation, the idea of *Li* is brought up and said to be related to *Ren*. Such phenomenon can be found in many other pieces of interpretation by Zhu such as:

子使漆雕开仕。对曰：“吾斯之未能信”...斯，指此理而言...程子曰：“漆雕开已见大意，故夫子说之。”¹³⁰

Confucius let Qi Diaokai [one of Confucius' disciples] be the officer. Qi said: “I may not be trustworthy to be this” ... This, here refers to this *Li* [of being an officer] ... Cheng Zi [referring to Cheng Yi] said: “Qi Diaokai has already realised what Confucius mean [that Qi should be aware that his ability is inadequate for undertaking the duty], therefore Confucius is pleased.”

It might be hard to relate the “this” under such a context to the *Li* of something, and most interpretations just grant the “this” to refer to “being an officer.”¹³¹ However, Zhu Xi adds a quotation from Cheng Yi to back up his understanding. Gardner argues that Zhu imposes the idea of *Li* into the interpretation of Confucian classics because Zhu is attempting to give Confucian teachings an ontological foundation. Gardner compares the interpretation of the *Analects* by Zhu

¹²⁹ *Lunyu Jizhu*, 6.28.

¹³⁰ *Lunyu Jizhu*, 5.5.

¹³¹ Tang, 118.

Xi with the interpretation by He Yan, concluding that He Yan, as a representative of pre-Zhu interpreters of the *Analects*, interprets the *Analects* as a guide for moral cultivations; while Zhu Xi builds up a metaphysical system for all those moral claims: “man could become perfectly moral because the nature with which he was born was itself always moral. But his natural endowment of psychophysical stuff (*qi*) could, if it were turbid, dense, or impure enough, obscure his moral nature, and thus it had to be refined if the moral nature was to become manifest.”¹³² Through arguing for a principle of all things, *Li*, Zhu Xi gives a foundation of all Confucian teachings, including those related moral cultivation in the *Analects*. Such a metaphysical claim, if accepted, also strings all the Confucian classics more tightly into one system. Zhu’s school of Confucianism, promulgated in the Song, later became the dominant discourse as well as the state orthodoxy of post-Song China and some other East Asian states.¹³³

If we recall Zhu’s hermeneutical view of understanding the classics, Zhu emphasises the ideas of tasting and of *xuxin*. Those two ideas in some sense mirrors Gadamer’s idea of participation with the text (or “fusing of horizons”) and of the perception of completion. From such a perspective, Zhu’s hermeneutics shares much similarity with Gadamerian hermeneutics, while due to the ambiguity of *xuxin*, it is difficult to judge whether Zhu agrees with Gadamer on how we should treat preconceptions in understanding. We will pick up this discussion in the final chapter. However, I shall argue here that Zhu Xi, in his interpretation of the *Analects*, contradicts his own hermeneutical view because his imposition of *Li* into the interpretation of the *Analects* violates both ideas of tasting and *xuxin*.

Based on the effort Zhu Xi spent on reading the *Analects* and researching about former interpretations, it might be fair to claim that Zhu had purposefully avoided citing some

¹³² Gardner, *Zhu Xi’s Reading*, 23.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 23.

previously prevalent interpretations and annotations which are inconsistent with his own understanding and even avoided discussing them in his work *Lunyu Jizhu*. Instead, Zhu has cited a large number of *Li Xue* scholars' interpretations in order to serve as warrants for his metaphysical claims about the text's content. As discussed, the idea of *Li* never appeared in the original text and many pieces of Zhu's interpretation which focus on how *Li* can be revealed from Confucius' words are, in some sense, forced. From what we have learned about the history of Confucianism in the Song, it may be suggested that Zhu Xi has injected his metaphysics into the interpretation primarily for the sake of constructing a systematic Confucian doctrine for his successor to follow, but such a decision could be criticised by Zhu's own hermeneutics.

First, if one reads the *Analects* with Zhu Xi's annotations, one can be easily affected by Zhu's metaphysics which can be found throughout the text, and one is no longer "chewing" what the sage (Confucius) says but rather what Zhu Xi says. More ironically, unlike pre-Zhu interpretations which focus on "the superficial textual meaning" (criticised by Zhu Xi), the essence of Zhu's annotations includes what cannot be found in the original text – *Li*. It looks more likely to be the case that Zhu no longer treats himself as a reader when writing his interpretation but as a sage recognised by his hermeneutical view – one who is born with the *Qi* to understand the *Li* embodied in the *Analects*.¹³⁴ Hence, it might be fair to argue that Zhu's *Lunyu Jizhu* actually blocks the readers from tasting the *Analects*. Second, not only has Zhu never really argued for his metaphysical claims about Confucius' words, he intentionally ignored how former interpretations explain those words which had been commonly accepted and, to some extent, more straightforward in relation to the original text. It would be reasonable to criticise Zhu Xi of not being *xuxin* because he has been holding his metaphysics as the

¹³⁴ Some scholars argue that Zhu Xi's metaphysics emerged from his reading of the classics instead of being presupposed before his reading. However, even in such a case, Zhu can be criticised in the same way.

assumption in interpreting the *Analects* uncritically. In this sense, Zhu Xi seems to be rejecting the transformation of his own *Qi* when reading a sage's words.

CH 5

Post-Ming interpretations and the spirit of *Kao Zheng*

In this chapter, we will look at a few interpretations of the *Analects* by scholars in the modern era. By modern era, I refer to the time period from 17th century until today, and we will look at interpretations both by the *Kao Zheng* scholars¹³⁵ in Qing dynasty (1636-1912) and western scholars who have translated the *Analects*. It must be clarified that even within these interpretations, there are huge diversities. I group these interpretations in one same chapter only in order to argue for a significant difference between Zhu Xi's interpretation and those modern interpretations as a group, and I will argue that the modern interpretations all seem to share one common hermeneutical ground. Unlike Zhu who implicitly argues for his metaphysical theory through interpreting Confucius' words, while presupposing his theory to be inherent in the *Analects*, the scholars we will be looking at in the following paragraphs take an "empirical" stance. By "empirical," I mean a stance which stresses the importance of external evidence. Benjamin Elman articulates such a stance as "an epistemological position that stresses that valid knowledge must be corroborated by external (textual or otherwise) facts and impartial observation... [Scholars holding this position] searched for an external source for the legitimation of their knowledge."¹³⁶

¹³⁵ The *Kao Zheng* scholars are also known as the evidence scholars, which refer to the group of scholars in the Qing who devoted themselves to the empirical research of ancient texts and relics.

¹³⁶ Elman, Benjamin A. *From Philosophy to Philology*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London. 1984. xxiv.

The Kao Zheng trend in Qing dynasty

It is worth remarking that Zhu Xi's theory was treated as the orthodox version of Confucianism, and the Confucian classics with Zhu's interpretation were used in the civil service exam¹³⁷ for governmental recruitment. Part of the reason for the Qing government's adopting Zhu's school of Confucianism, as argued by historians and scholars,¹³⁸ is that: on the one hand, some Confucian ideas are beneficial to the government's ruling of the state;¹³⁹ on the other hand, Zhu's Confucianism, being a school which advocates the idea of *Li* and differs from the Confucianism prevalent in the Ming¹⁴⁰ (the dynasty taken over by the Qing) which advocates mind-heart introspection, is a more effective tool for constraining people's thought and study by the government. If this is the case, it was only one tool used by the Qing dynasty to constrain thought. Another, more direct method, was literary inquisition and censorship, an approach which culminated in the eighteenth century Four Treasuries project.¹⁴¹

Some scholars, being constrained by the literary inquisition in their own writings,¹⁴² tried to avoid persecution by studying texts written by the ancients. According to Meng Sen:

¹³⁷ The civil service exam is the exam designed for governmental recruitment, established in Sui/Tang dynasty and kept until the late Qing.

¹³⁸ There seems to be an agreement on the question of why Zhu Xi's Confucianism is treated as orthodoxy and why evidential research, or *Kao Zheng*, started to thrive since the years of Qianlong and Jiaqing. Those scholars include but not limited to Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan, Lu Xun, Guo Moruo.

¹³⁹ For example, there is an idea stressed by Confucius which is called "mandate of heaven," which claims that the rule of the ruler is justified by heaven (*Tian*). If a government is overthrown, it would be the case that the government has already lost the mandate of heaven. The Qing rulers, being Manchus, took benefit from such an idea by arguing that the Ming government (consisting of Han officials) had lost the mandate of heaven and the Qing rulers are those who obtained it so that the ruling of the state by Manchus were justified.

¹⁴⁰ There was a trend of Confucianism raised mainly by Wang Yangming and Lu Jiuyuan which advocated that principles of the world (*Li*) are acquired through mind-heart (*Xin*) introspection, contrasting Zhu Xi's idea that *Li* must be acquired through investigations of things.

¹⁴¹ Also known as the *Si Ku Quan Shu* project, which was an edition project of a literary encyclopaedia.

¹⁴² The Qing government had a very strict literary censorship in academics. The censorship, known as "Literary Inquisition (*Wen Zi Yu*)," was described by *Hanyu Dacidian* as "the ruler deliberately extracts words or phrases from intellectual's writings and arbitrarily accuse him in order to persecute him (旧时谓统治者迫害知识分子, 故意从其著作中摘取字句, 罗织成罪)."

Luo, Zhufeng. *Han yu da ci dian bian ji wei yuan hui.*, Han yu da ci dian bian zuan chu. 2nd. Shanghai: Han yu da ci dian chu ban she. 2003.

“evidential study had been thriving since the year of Qianlong. Those writings concerning the contemporary society by scholars are easy to be accused as anti-governmental. A lot of scholars then did not dare to write about the society and switched their research area to the study of classics and relics. Their achievements [in general] also surpassed their predecessors in former dynasties (乾隆以来多朴学，知人论世之文，易触时忌，一概不敢从事，移其心力，毕注於经学，毕注於名物训诂之考订，所成就亦超出前儒之上).”¹⁴³ Xiao Yishan also argues:

“Those scholars who had thoughts about their nation [the Han], under the force by an alien government [the Qing government by Manchu], were unwilling to be yes-men of the government but also too cowardly to launch radical revolutions. They wanted to study freely but were afraid of the persecution. What can they do? All they could choose was ‘keeping their nose clean’ and ‘making friends with the ancients’, which was to study the ancient texts (有民族思想的学者，在异族的钐制政策下，不甘心作无耻的应声虫，又不敢作激烈的革命党，自由研究学问，也怕横撻文网，那还有甚么办法？只好‘明哲保身’，‘尚友古人’，向故纸堆里去钻了).”¹⁴⁴

Western scholars who study the Qing history such as Benjamin Elman and John Henderson share the same opinion on the cause of the rise of evidential research, while Henderson points out that the *Kao Zheng* scholars also had concerns for practical problems in science within their textual interests.¹⁴⁵ To the government and the Emperor (such as Qianlong), evidential research into the most important writings of the Chinese tradition did no harm to their ruling of the state and certainly was beneficial for literary as well as scientific studies in general. As long as there were

¹⁴³ Meng, Sen. *MingQingshi Jiangyi*. The Commercial Press. 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Xiao, Yishan. *Qingdai Tongshi*. The Commercial Press (Taiwan). 1963.

¹⁴⁵ Elman, 14. It is argued that practical contents in Confucian texts about astronomy and mathematics were highly valued by the Qing scholars so that Confucian tradition and technical studies were reunited.

no words written by a scholar that described the Manchu court or Mongols disrespectfully, the scholar could study as well as write about any aspect of the classics that he found interesting.¹⁴⁶

Although the thriving of *Kao Zheng* might suggest that those scholars chose to do empirical studies mainly because they were, to some extent, forced to, they ended up producing scrupulous works of exegeses and interpretations of the classics based on empirical research. Unlike Zhu Xi, who injected his own ideas into the interpretation of the Confucian classics, the purpose of interpreting the classics for the *Kao Zheng* scholars was relatively simple: to retrieve the original meaning of the classics through searching for evidence. Elman treats the *Kao Zheng* scholars as philologists who “favoured linguistic clarity, simplicity, and purity... hoped to eliminate linguistic confusion and thereby locate a bedrock of timeless order... from ancient artefacts and historical documents and text... personal achievement of sagehood, by now an unrealistic aim for serious Confucians, was no longer their goal.”¹⁴⁷ Such a historical condition might make us think, in our analysis of the interpretations by those Qing scholars, about how the interpreter views Zhu Xi’s hermeneutics as well as make comparison between the interpreter’s hermeneutics with Zhu’s.

Among the large number of Qing scholars who devoted their academic life in evidential research, I focus on three scholars who, according to my view, were responsible for the most typical interpretations of the *Kao Zheng* tradition: Mao Qiling, Gu Yanwu, and Liu Baonan. Although there are significant diversities among these *Kao Zheng* scholars, all of the *Kao Zheng* scholars base their interpretations on meticulous empirical research, as described by Liang Qichao in *Qingdai Xueshu Gailun*: “the evidential research is based on the principle of ‘seeking

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 15-6.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 3-6.

truth from facts’ and ‘believing nothing without evidence’ (其治学之根本方法，在‘实事求是’，‘无证不信’).”¹⁴⁸ We shall will look at the three scholars one by one.

The first *Kao Zheng* scholar we will look at is Mao Qiling (1623-1716). Mao did not begin the work of interpreting the *Analects* until his later life after he retired from his work in the government, and his main contribution to *Analects* interpretation, *Lunyu Jiqiu Pian*, was inspired by his disagreement with Zhu Xi’s interpretation. In the preface of the book, Mao writes: “When I read the *Analects* at early age, I was excited and inspired. However, when I read it the second time, I started to be sceptical about it... after I read it repeatedly, more and more suspicion emerged. It seems to be the case that what Confucius meant by his words was not as how the seventy students of Confucius’ interpreted them. The meaning explicated by the interpretation was imposed by the interpreters... those interpretations are books by the Confucian scholars in the Song but not books by Confucius (少读论语，激欢然，至再读而反疑之...再三读而犹豫烦生，似宣尼所吕与七十子之所编记其思旨本不如是而斛者以己意强行之... 此宋儒之书非夫子之书也).”¹⁴⁹ He further criticises Zhu Xi’s interpretation by claiming that Zhu only refers to some of He Yan’s¹⁵⁰ interpretation of the *Analects* while those parts of He Yan’s interpretation are basically Daoist readings. Thereby, Mao states that his aim in editing his interpretation is to reveal what Confucius really meant by his words recorded in the *Analects* based on evidential research and to point out Zhu’s mistakes: “Zhu’s *Jizhu*, as an interpretation of the textual meaning, only focuses on how the text can reflect *Li*. Such an interpretation is not based on

¹⁴⁸ Liang, Qichao. *Qingdai Xueshu Gailun*. Zhonghua Book Company. 1920.

There is also an English translation for the book: Liang, Qichao, tr. Immanuel C.Y. Hsu. *Intellectual trends in the Ching period* (Ching-tai hsüeh-shu kai-lun). Harvard University Press, 1959.

¹⁴⁹ Mao, Qiling. *Lunyu Jiqiu Pian*. The text on ctext is not punctuated, but I added punctuations on my own to help read the text more easily. Again, there is no page number on the website.

¹⁵⁰ Recall that Gardner has compared Zhu’s interpretation with He’s to emphasise the metaphysical feature of Zhu’s interpretation.

evidential research. I have studied much and I like arguing, therefore I would like to draw references from the ancient texts and challenge Zhu(朱子集注研究文义期于惟理, 而此原不以考注为长. 奇龄学博而好辨, 遂旁采古义以相诘难).”¹⁵¹

In *Lunyu Jiqiu Pian*, Mao selects 91 pieces from the *Analects* that he argues had been misinterpreted by Zhu. For each of them, Mao refers to multiple sources in ancient times (especially from the pre-Qin period), including the other pieces in the same text, former scholars’ interpretations, and ancient didactics, in order to find the “most possible meaning” of the text.¹⁵² Besides, Mao also cares much about the accuracy of historical facts that are mentioned in the text. For example, in his interpretation of the chapter about “Duke Huan kills Jiu(桓公杀公子纠),” Mao tries to figure out who is the older brother between Jiu and Bai.¹⁵³ For this purpose, he refers to classics such as *Gongyang* and *Lianggu* and historical records such as *Shiji*. Holding references from multiple reliable sources, Mao makes criticism of Zhu Xi’s interpretation in terms of sentence meaning, character identification, and appellations.¹⁵⁴

After most of his interpretations of a piece, Mao writes a concluding paragraph in which he expresses his own opinion on how a reader should approach the discussed piece and why some former interpretations of the same piece are mistaken. Every claim he makes about how one should interpret the *Analects* is backed up by multiple sources – often being drawn from reliable historical records and classics.¹⁵⁵ There are two points I would like to raise about Mao’s

¹⁵¹ Mao.

¹⁵² Liu, 49.

¹⁵³ The reason why Mao wants to figure out the answer to this question is that many ancient texts suggest that Jiu is older than Bai, but Zhu Xi, in his annotation, writes “Bai is older than Jiu.” Mao further points out that Zhu made the mistake because he only referred to the text in *Hanshu*, but *Hanshu* has flipped the seniority between Jiu and Bai purposefully and the reason is given in the footnote of *Hanshu*. Zhu simply drew reference from the content of *Hanshu* while ignored the footnote.

¹⁵⁴ Liu, 49-51.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 51-3.

hermeneutics: first, Mao deserves the name of “a pioneer” who challenges the orthodoxy (Zhu’s Confucianism) at his time in a way that was accepted by his society and highly appreciated by other scholars – through looking for evidence from the ancient time for the text; second, it is fair to claim that, according to Mao’s hermeneutical view, figuring out what the sentences in a text correspond to at the time when those sentence were written, even if it is not necessarily the only aim, should be the foremost aim of the interpretation. I shall argue that the second view is shared by all the interpreters discussed in this chapter, and we will further examine this view later.

The second interpreter, Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), was born in the last few years of the Ming dynasty and grew up in a state governed by the Qing government. In his early life, Gu joined anti-Qing movements, all of which failed to overthrow the new government. After that, he travelled around without yielding to the Qing government and became a geographer and philologist. Although Gu does not have a specific work on the *Analects* like Mao Qiling’s *Lunyu Jiqiu Pian*, the *Analects* often appears in his main works. For example, one of the most well-known of Gu’s works, *Ri Zhi Lu*, took its name from the *Analects*: “knowing what one has yet to understand everyday, and, month by month, not forgetting what one has learned can be called one who loves learning (日知其所亡，月无忘其所能，可谓好学也已矣).”¹⁵⁶ In terms of learning, Gu argues against the over-emphasis on what is non-practical such as *Li*, but advocates self-cultivation through learning from classic texts and external things. According to his view, the reason why Ming was overthrown was the corruption of (Confucian) scholars, and the reason for the corruption was that Ming scholars all ignored the importance of applying what they learned from the classics to real life and they lived dissolutely. In order to correct and remould the academic atmosphere, Gu made a claim which later became well-known: “one should

¹⁵⁶ *Lunyu Jizhu*, 19.5.

broadly learn from *Wen*¹⁵⁷ and conduct oneself with a sense of shame (博学于文，行己有耻).”¹⁵⁸ In fact, the whole sentence in this claim is made up of quotes from the *Analects*.¹⁵⁹

If we take *Ri Zhi Lu* as an example, there is no comprehensive interpretation of any large piece from the *Analects*. Instead, we can find scattered interpretations as well as analyses of short pieces from the *Analects* all over the whole work. As introduced, Gu holds that the Ming perished because the scholars and officers in the Ming all advocated that which was non-practical and believed that they were pursuing what was beyond moral codes in real life. Gu argues that the ideas advocated by scholars in the Song and the Ming all separated what people ought to do in daily life from what they believed as the ultimate principle (e.g. *Li* for Zhu Xi). In book seven of *Ri Zhi Lu*, Gu writes: “[in the *Analects*] Sima Niu asks Confucius about *Ren*. Confucius says that one who has *Ren* must be one who is cautious about the words one speaks...people today do not attain the level of Sima Niu, but they are so arrogant that they try to make claims which are even beyond what is said by Confucius’ two favourite disciples. Eventually, those people talk about *Xing* and *Tiandao* [viz. those ultimate principles] without realising that they have fallen into something like Chan Buddhism (司马牛问仁子曰：仁者，其言也訥...今之君子学未及乎司马牛，而欲其说之高于颜曾二子，是以终日言性与天道而不自知其墮于禅学也).”¹⁶⁰ According to Gu, even if there is some kind of ultimate principles, those principles must be internal to good characters and right actions in daily life. If one claims the principle to be something that is beyond the daily moral code and separated from people’s life,

¹⁵⁷ There have been disputes about how this *Wen* should be interpreted among scholars. Usually, *Wen* is tied to literary knowledge, but the *Wen* in this sentence seems to refer to a large range of things.

¹⁵⁸ Gu, Yanwu. “Yu Youren Lun Xueshu.”

¹⁵⁹ The first half of the sentence is quoted from 12.15; the second half is quoted from 13.20.

¹⁶⁰ Gu, Yanwu. *Ri Zhi Lu*. 1639. 7.20.

one is likely to fall into Chan Buddhism (which is negatively viewed by Confucians). Thus, the assumption that Confucius' words must carry some kind of ultimate principles beyond daily moral codes is unjustified and pointless. Gu then argues that, in order to understand what the text really means, one ought to look for references drawn from works which share close relationships with Confucius himself.

In Gu's own interpretation of the *Analects*, he usually draws evidence from the other Confucian classics. Sometimes the evidence for the same piece is inconsistent. In such cases, Gu does not forcibly make conclusions about what the piece means, but rather present all the reasonable evidences. In book seven where he tries to interpret “*Wen* (文)” in the sentence “one should eruditely learn from *Wen* (博学于文),” he presents how the term is explained in *Li Ji*, *Zhou Yi*, *Yi Zhou Shu*, and elsewhere in the *Analects*, without concluding about how the term should be understood in the sentence.¹⁶¹ However, such presentation is not a simple list of sentences which seem related to the term. Gu presents them for two purposes: first, to challenge the commonly accepted interpretation by earlier scholars; second, to provide as many reasonable approaches as possible to understanding the term. Because of such a hermeneutical stance, Gu is often viewed by today's scholars as the pioneer of evidential research trends in the Qing dynasty.¹⁶²

The third interpreter we will look at from the group of Qing *Kao Zheng* scholars is Liu Baonan. Liu has left a work even larger in content than Zhu Xi's *Lunyu Jizhu*, in which Liu integrates all the former interpretations of and companions to the *Analects* that he regards as reliable. Liu titles his work *Lunyu Zhengyi*.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 7.25.

¹⁶² Liu, 67-74.

Liu Baonan was a person who loved travel and making friends with other scholars. It is thought to be the case by many scholars who study his work that Liu wrote *Lunyu Zhengyi* primarily for the purpose of arguing with his friends on the interpretation of the *Analects*. While it is also suggested by scholars that the last seven chapters were in fact not written by Liu Baonan but by his second son Liu Gongmian.¹⁶³ Different from the other two interpretations we just discussed, which criticise the orthodoxy by Zhu Xi, *Lunyu Zhengyi* holds a neutral attitude towards Zhu's interpretation. For Liu Baonan (and Liu Gongmian), every former interpretation or annotation has parts which are worth regarding and parts which should be rejected. For each piece from the *Analects*, Liu puts all the interpretations made by former interpreters he regards as reasonable from his research with a beginning of "A says" and "B says" etc. After these interpretations, Liu writes his own idea about how to interpret the piece with a beginning of "Zhengyi says."¹⁶⁴ Through the whole work, Liu cites more than 150 works including former interpretations, classics, historical records, and works about characters. Zhu Xi's interpretation is also part of which Liu puts in his work, but Liu, like other Qing scholars, tends to reject Zhu's idea of *Li* and only retain those pieces about textual explanation. However, Liu does not reject all claims about what Confucius tries to express besides the superficial textual meaning. What Liu, as well as other *Kao Zheng* scholars, rejects is claims made without a solid basis of good evidences. For example, claims made by *Kao Zheng* scholars Dai Zhen and Jiao Xun are of extended explications beyond the superficial textual meaning, but those claims are backed up by empirical research about the text. Therefore, those claims are treated as worth considering by Liu.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Ibid, 135-9.

¹⁶⁴ Liu, Baonan. *Lunyu Zhengyi*.

¹⁶⁵ Liu, Hong. 142-4.

Liu Baonan shares a similar hermeneutical view with Mao Qiling and Gu Yanwu that the interpretation of the *Analects* should rely not on introspection but on evidence related to the text. Their shared view indicates that Qing scholars were suspicious about Zhu Xi's interpretation of the *Analects*. Liu, however, does not intentionally criticise Zhu Xi's interpretation simply because of Zhu's over-simplistic evidence for making conclusive claims in the interpretation. Rather, Liu inspects Zhu's interpretation with empirical research and then judges whether the interpretation is reasonable or not based on evidence from the research.¹⁶⁶ After all, arguing for one or some interpretations over others is not the primary aim held by the *Kao Zheng* scholars. When they are gathering more evidence in their empirical research, as they believe from their hermeneutical stance, they are making more impartial observations as well as stepping closer to the original meaning of the text. When they write down their interpretations of the *Analects*, instead of arguing for the adequacy of their explanation, what they care most about is that they present the meaning (in some sense as or close to a retrieval of Confucius' intention) of the *Analects* as accurate and straightforward as possible to the readers.

Translations as interpretations based on empirical research

The hermeneutical view held by Qing scholars can often be found in the English translations of the *Analects* by Western scholars. Generally speaking, the study of Chinese culture and language by non-Chinese scholars must require empirical research and communication. This holds true for both early Western missionaries who arrived in China and more recent scholars who study Chinese texts in academic institutions. One of the many English versions of the *Analects* is translated by Roger Ames, and Ames discusses his work as a

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 144-5.

translator in his book *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. Ames writes that the difference between two languages marks the difference between two groups of discourses “about the world, about beliefs, and about attitudes.”¹⁶⁷ According to Ames, one must be aware that, although making “cultural generalisations” can be problematic, it is more dangerous if we do not do so and fall into a position¹⁶⁸ in which we do not identify or elaborate the presuppositions underlying all discourse sedimented into a language. A translator of the *Analects*, then, must first attempt to identify and elaborate so as to “describe the world as experienced by the ancient Chinese who walk through its [the book’s] pages.”¹⁶⁹ From such a claim about translation and translator, it is suggested that, since the translator must identify and elaborate the presupposition held by the text author in the author’s use of language, the translator must first have knowledge about the language used for the text before diving into the interpretation of the text itself. In the rest of the chapter, I will bring popular English translations of the *Analects* for analysis, which provide not only the translated text from the original book, but also a large number of annotations included by the translator that come from their own empirical research. The translations of the *Analects*, primarily as a type of interpretation, are also typical examples sharing the similar hermeneutical view we aim to evaluate in this chapter.

We shall first look at Ames’ translation. Ames is concerned with the relation between metaphysics and language when he talks about translation. As mentioned earlier, he regards it to be helpful that a translator makes some generalisations about a culture/language so that the translator may do better in presenting the text in a sense closer to that in the original language. Therefore, before the translation, Ames does careful research in classical Chinese and points out

¹⁶⁷ Ames, Roger T. and Rosemont, Henry Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. The Ballantine Publishing Group, New York and Toronto. 1998. 20

¹⁶⁸ Ames calls this position a type of “reductionism.” Ibid, 20.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 20

what a translator should be aware of when translating a text from classical Chinese into English. For example, he makes the point that classical Chinese is more “an eventful language”¹⁷⁰ than English and other Indo-European language which are more “substantive.”¹⁷¹ Ames uses the example of a tree to demonstrate the difference: a tree in English is described as a substance which is real and exists by its own; in classical Chinese, a tree is described relationally and eventfully – e.g. a tree is described with some kind of relation to seasons, to natural phenomena, or to the one who sees it is seen at some time.¹⁷² There are also no clear distinctions between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. He further explains that, when we talk about the relations between two things (in English, it would be two substances described by nouns), the relatedness can be described “extrinsically.”¹⁷³ It may remind us of the “extensionality” we talk about in philosophy of mind and language, by which we say that a relation can be described in the form of “ aRb ,” where the relatedness R holds regardless of how we describe a and b . In classical Chinese, however, “correlation” might be a more felicitous term. Nothing from a sentence can be individually defined, and Ames suggest that the reason for it has to do with the metaphysics in ancient China. In the metaphysics underlying classical Chinese, the totality of all things (万物) is inhered by both change (变) and persistence (通).¹⁷⁴ While many Western thinkers often tie “what is real” to “what does not change,” the ancient Chinese thinkers do not think in this way. Such a difference between the two target languages certainly brings much challenge to the translator, even assuming that the translator himself “lives a life” in each of the two languages.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 20-2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 26.

It is easily observable in Ames' translation that he tries very hard to convert the language in the classical Chinese text into a way which might be understandable in English while retaining, as much as he can, the original style/form of the text. Take the passage 12.11 in his translation as example, in which four phrases are mentioned: “君君， 臣臣， 父父， 子子.”¹⁷⁵ Each of these four phrases consists of two same characters. Grammatically, the former character serves as the subject noun and the latter one as the verb. How the verb should be interpreted is related to the subject noun. Ames suggests in his analysis of the four phrases that an English speaker may read the first two phrases as “the ruler should rule, minister should minister,” but the third phrase might be read as “father should sire” because “father” is not strictly used as a verb meaning “to act as a father” in English. However, in the actual translation of this piece, Ames keeps the form of the original text and writes the third phrase as “father should father.”¹⁷⁶ To some extent, it might still be understandable directly by an English speaker although the phrase/sentence would be grammatically mistaken. What is important here is that Ames intentionally retains the form of the original text while giving clarification elsewhere, such as footnotes and appendixes, ensuring that the readers do not simply read his analyses but also a text as close as possible to the original text. In fact, Ames even keeps the actual text in classical Chinese in his book.

I suggest that Ames' hermeneutical view of translation is not only shared by typical *Kao Zheng* scholars, but also by many popular versions of the *Analects* in English such as Edward Slingerland's and the online translation by Robert Eno. Slingerland and Eno, unlike Ames, have not included the Chinese sentences in their works. However, they apply the approach used by the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 156.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 28; 156.

Chinese scholars we have discussed – Zhu Xi and *Kao Zheng* scholars – which is to put annotations and analyses below or on the side of the actual text. If we look at the same piece discussed in Ames’ translation, it is observed that both Slingerland’s and Eno’s work include their empirical research about when and where this sentence was uttered by Confucius – Confucius said it in 516 B.C. in Qi to Duke Jing, and both works indicate that the paragraph 12.11 is suggested by many former scholars to be concerned with what Confucius talks about in 13.3.¹⁷⁷ Being richer in content than Eno’s online publication, Slingerland also includes historical information about how people usually treat words like ruler/lord (君), minister (臣), father (父), and son (子), as well as citing Zhu Xi’s comments.¹⁷⁸ However, in the actual translation of the text, Slingerland and Eno seem to be less concerned about the form/style than Ames. The four phrases in Slingerland’s translation are written as “the lord be a true lord, the ministers true ministers, the fathers true fathers, and the sons true sons.”¹⁷⁹ Eno translates: “the ruler be ruler, ministers ministers, fathers fathers, sons sons.”¹⁸⁰ We might treat such translations as more English-speaker-friendly translations because they are phrased in more common ways than how Ames writes. However, such translations may keep the readers who only speak English but not Chinese more distant from the actual *Analects*.

At first glance, the aim of interpretation claimed by the post-Ming interpretations – an intention to retrieve the author’s intention – sounds like what would be criticised by Gadamerian hermeneutics which stresses again and again the necessity of cultural historical prejudgements in

¹⁷⁷ Slingerland, Edward. *Confucius Analects*. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc (Indianapolis/Cambridge). 2003. 130-1;

Eno, 62.

¹⁷⁸ Slingerland, 131. Slingerland’s work strictly follows the form Zhu Xi and *Kao Zheng* scholars write their interpretations: giving research results right below the actual text with some words added by himself.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 130.

¹⁸⁰ Eno, 62.

the understanding process. Nevertheless, the methodology of empirical research that those interpreters apply shall distinguish their hermeneutical view with which Hirsch might hold. The reason why post-Ming interpreters choose to do empirical research is that they have realised the difference between Confucius' cultural history and their own ones, meanwhile the methodology of comparing multiple former interpretations shall imply that their understanding process is fundamentally dialectical. In other words, the spirit of *Kao Zheng* in understanding – “seeking truth from facts (实事求是)” and “believing nothing without evidence (无证不信)” – is the spirit of being critical of one's own cultural history. Hence, I shall argue that the post-Ming interpreters are by no means committed to any hermeneutical view which presupposes the pre-existence of the meaning of the text, and their caution during the interpreting process implies their will to participate in the dialectical fusing with the text as well as their will to think about their own prejudgements more critically.

CH 6

Conclusions

We have discussed that an evaluation under the light of Gadamerian hermeneutics emphasises that an interpretation should be treated as a creation, presenting the meaning of a text forged from a dialectical fusing between the interpreter and the text. The meaning should make sense of the text for, make the text coherent with, and bring meaningfulness to the interpreter and those who share their cultural history with the interpreter.¹⁸¹ Because the meaning of a text does not exist independently of any cultural history, the evaluation of any interpretation must also be made from a stance which more or less share its cultural history with the interpreter's in order to make the evaluation legit to certain extent. Therefore, for the investigation of both groups of interpretations of the *Analects*, we first looked at the historical condition behind those interpreters' understanding so as to commensurate their cultural histories as much as we could with ours, and to be familiar with their use of languages as well as their forms/styles of interpretation. Only on such a basis could we make legit evaluations of their interpretations and their hermeneutical views.

In the beginning paragraph of chapter 5, I mentioned briefly why I distinguish the interpretations into two groups, which has to do with two different hermeneutical approaches – Zhu Xi's interpretation aims at the implicit advocacy of his metaphysics through interpreting a Confucian classic, meanwhile the post-Ming interpretations aim at retrieving the original intention of Confucius as accurately as they can. With that claimed, I do not intend to argue for a clear distinction between the two trends, but for a difference of emphasis. It can be observed that Zhu Xi has done a decent amount of empirical research on former interpreters' interpretations of

¹⁸¹ Taylor. "Interpretation and the Science of Man," 24.

the *Analects* from the large number of quotations he made in *Lunyu Jizhu*. It can also be observed that the post-Ming interpreters made conclusive claims of the text's content (in the case of translations, every translated sentence should be regarded as a conclusive claim of the text's content, a re-expression of what the translator believes to be Confucius' intention). However, as suggested in chapter 4, Zhu Xi seems to have purposefully filtrated his researching results in order to fully support his metaphysical claims. On the contrary, post-Ming interpreters tend not to forcibly make conclusive claims which are not well warranted by what they have researched. In this chapter, we shall discuss how these two trends of interpretations of the *Analects* can be assessed by Gadamerian hermeneutics, and we will focus on three questions as standards: 1) does the interpretation leave it open for future interpretations following the same fusing of horizons (viz. is there space for someone who shares the same cultural history with the interpreter to continue the interpreting process)? 2) What prejudgements does the interpreter hold to approach the meaning of the *Analects*? 3) What can one learn from the interpretation which cannot be acquired from simply reading the *Analects* itself?

From Zhu Xi's hermeneutical view that we discussed in chapter 4, it is arguable that Zhu's anti-completion view of interpretation¹⁸² leaves the understanding process open-ended since "no matter where I turn, new problems arise."¹⁸³ Zhu has always regarded his interpretative work as a companion for future learners to approach the classics written by the ancient sage. Having provided both a work of interpretation (*Lunyu Jizhu*) and a work which teaches people how to interpret (*Zhuzi Yulei*), Zhu is much concerned with how successfully his followers manage to continue his understanding process. However, it is suggested by Zhu's idea of *xuxin*

¹⁸² (Introduced in chapter 4) Zhu states in *Huian Xiansheng Zhu Wengong Wenji* that he always finds error in the latest version of interpretation every time he reviews his work.

¹⁸³ Makeham, 179.

and his belief that only sages are born with the quality of acquiring *Li* that, although understanding as a process is endless for Zhu, the process is not historically based. This has to do with Zhu's emphasis on metaphysics and his prejudgement that all classics written by the sages are embodiments of *Li*. *Li* – as the ultimate principle – must be history-free, and one must empty one's prejudgements which are based on their cultural history (transform one's quality of *Qi* into which is suitable for reading the classics) in order to enter the understanding process. Zhu not only advocates such a reading of the classics in his hermeneutical theory but even rejects other ways of reading the classics, suggested by his interpretation of the *Analects*. Having been caged by his metaphysical presupposition, Zhu grants those former interpretations of the *Analects* which are incompatible with his metaphysics to be wrong and therefore only cites sources which are compatible. It has been argued that Zhu's metaphysics, together with ideas like *Li*, does not straightforwardly come from the original work of Confucius. Perhaps just as how Mao Qiling argues, Zhu's interpretation would take readers even more distant from the original classics. In this case, Zhu's prejudgement, which has provided a foothold for him to interpret the *Analects*, might have also been a hinderance to the fusing of horizons, because Zhu has been caged by his metaphysics and he (maybe purposefully) refuses to be critical of it.

But precisely because Zhu presupposes his metaphysics throughout the understanding process, his interpretation has played such an important role in the history of Confucianism. Zhu's doctrine was officialised to be the Confucian orthodoxy by many post-Song states because the Confucian classics under his interpretation had been much more systematically organised. With Zhu's annotations, readers are more likely to approach the obscure sentences in the original work. Besides, just because Zhu himself does not take a critical stance towards his metaphysical prejudgements, it does not follow that somebody who begins her understanding process with

Zhu's metaphysics cannot be critical of those prejudgements. As suggested by Gadamerian hermeneutics, one can only be critical of one's tradition by a deeper understanding of it. There have been Confucian scholars who read the *Analects* with Zhu's commentaries, and many of them (e.g. Qing scholars such as Mao Qiling and Liu Baonan) were eventually able to be critical of the metaphysical presuppositions and chose to criticise the adequacy of those presuppositions.

As for the post-Ming interpreters that we have discussed, although they seem to claim that what they try to do in the interpretations is to retrieve Confucius' original intention, it might be unfair to accuse them of asserting the author's intention to be the end of interpretation.¹⁸⁴ It has been argued that the spirit of *Kao Zheng* (or empirical research) is the spirit of being critical of one's own cultural history: because one's cultural history might mislead one from understanding the text well, one ought to look for external evidence in order to verify or falsify one's prejudgement about the text. Due to the historical and cultural gap between the *Analects* and themselves, these post-Ming interpreters tend to feel suspicious about their own prejudgements of the original text. Therefore, they turned to the searching for evidence. It is also inadequate to accuse them of not understanding the text, or of merely gathering information. Instead of having no prejudgement, it is more proper to describe them as being cautious of holding any prejudgement of the text. Those prejudgements include not only which held by themselves, but also which held by other interpreters. We have seen that Qing scholars are concerned about historical facts and translators tend to make some kind of "cultural generalisation" about a language, both of which demonstrate their caution about making unwarranted/baseless prejudgements about the text. "Seeking truth from facts (实事求是)" and

¹⁸⁴ Even if this is the case, they would be likely to claim that any linguistic re-expression of the author's intention cannot be essentially identical to the author's intention. Hence, such an end can never be achieved.

“believing nothing without evidence (无证不信)”¹⁸⁵ do not imply that these interpreters rarely have their own interpretations. On the contrary, these interpreters try to provide people with the most warranted interpretation, warranted not (only) by introspection from one particular cultural history but by evidence from empirical research and reasonable inferences.

According to Gadamerian hermeneutics, understanding is only possible if it is a process beginning with some kind of pre-conception given by a cultural history, and a good understanding process must be dialectical, meaning that the interpreter should constantly be conscious of her prejudgements and be critical of them. Both trends of interpretations of the *Analects* we have discussed in this thesis have demonstrated what Gadamerian hermeneutics claims to necessarily happen in any understanding process. Meanwhile, by criticising Zhu Xi’s understanding process of being caged by certain prejudgements, it is reemphasised that a good understanding should be a dialectical process. Otherwise, the foothold of understanding may become a hinderance to understanding.

¹⁸⁵ Cited from Liang Qichao: *Qingdai Xueshu Gailun*. (see chapter 5)

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