Studying Confucian Thought from the Inside Out[1]

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Abstract

The philosophical study of Confucian thought seeks to *both* understand the nature of Confucian thought in its historical and cultural context *and* relate it in an intellectually fruitful manner to contemporary philosophical discourse. Someone engaged in such a study will be *pulled inward* toward approximating the perspectives of the Confucian thinkers set in the context of their concerns and activities, and *pulled outward* away from the Confucians' world of ideas to relate them to our present concerns and interests, specifically those that characterize contemporary philosophical discourse. These two psychological forces, the inward pull and outward pull, can be combined in different ways in the psychological orientation that underlies such a study. The paper presents and discusses the merits of an approach that it describes as "studying Confucian thought from the inside out". On this approach, the inward pull is maximally dominant, and even as the outward pull leads us to move beyond the Confucians' own perspectives to relate their ideas to our present concerns and interests, we at the same time seek to do so in a way that is maximally continuous with their perspectives. Such an approach helps draw out the distinctive characteristics and insights of Confucian thought, and also furthers a direction of inquiry that the Confucian thinkers themselves advocate.

[1] I am grateful to Huang Yong, Jiang Xinyan, Doil Kim, Winnie Sung, Zheng Zemian, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

1. The Psychology of Methodology

The need for a methodological discussion in relation to a scholarly project depends partly on the nature of the project and partly on the way the investigator views the project. If she is working with an agenda and an approach that is well established within the community whose members she regards as her audience, and if she views herself as doing so, there will be little need for an elaborate methodological discussion as she would regard what she does as fairly straightforward and as something whose nature her audience can easily grasp. But if the project goes beyond established agendas or adopts an approach different from the norm, or both, she might feel compelled to explain, in a more elaborate fashion, the goals and methods guiding her study. She might still regard the methodological approach as fairly straightforward, but sees a need to explain it to an audience for whom it might be new.

There can also be instances in which the investigator views her project as not at all straightforward. Both its goals and methods have evolved over time on the basis of continual reflections, and behind such reflections are constant struggles to find ways of resolving forces that pull her in apparently competing directions. These competing forces move her to constantly revise and clarify her goals, and the attempt to reconcile them leads her to constantly refine her methods. After the project and the methodological reflections have stabilized, she can present, in a more removed and systematic fashion, the goals and methods of the relatively stable product. But behind this exposition, there is also a narrative that can be told about the different psychological forces at work, and the psychological orientation she adopts in the attempt to resolve these competing forces.

This paper is an attempt at such a narrative in relation to the *philosophical study of Confucian thought*, by which I refer to a study that aims at *both* understanding the nature of Confucian thought in its historical and cultural context *and* relating it in an intellectually fruitful manner to contemporary philosophical discourse, primarily in the Anglo-American tradition.[2] In previous publications, I have presented in a more removed and systematic fashion a three-staged approach to such study, how it resolves certain potential tensions between different goals, and how these potential tensions and the approach that resolves them relate to methodological discussions among twentieth century Chinese intellectuals.[3] In this paper, I will focus on the nature of the apparently competing psychological forces at work and the psychological orientation that I adopt to resolve the potential tension between them, a psychological orientation

[2] In the rest of the paper, whenever I mention contemporary philosophical discourse, I will be referring specifically to the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. The term "philosophical study" can sometimes be used to refer simply to a study that focuses on ideas of a historical thinker or movement of thought without relating such ideas to contemporary concerns. My use of the expression excludes this kind of study, as my focus is on the linkage between Confucian thought and contemporary philosophical discourse. I am indebted to Jiang Xinyan for alerting me to the need to make explicit this point.

[3] On these three points, see, respectively, Shun (2009), Shun (2012), and Shun (forthcoming b). I also explored related methodological issues in Shun (2013), Shun (2015a), Shun (2015b).

that led to the methodology presented in previous publications. These forces come from two broad directions.

First, when engaged in a study of Confucian thought, we seek to approximate the perspectives of the Confucian thinkers set in the context of the concerns they have and activities they engage in. These concerns and activities are varied, and our study needs to take them into account since their ideas have evolved against the background of their life experiences set in such a context. In being drawn to get close to their perspectives by situating them in such a context, we are, so to speak, *pulled inward* toward their world of ideas, trying to understand these ideas from within their own perspectives.

Second, unless we treat these ideas as mere objects of historical interest, we also want to probe their relevance to us in the present. This involves probing their relevance across time, and for many, also across cultures. We are, so to speak, *pulled outward* away from their world of ideas, viewing these ideas from our perspectives and seeking a relevance to them that transcends the local and the historical. This outward pull can point in different directions. For example, many Chinese intellectuals have pondered upon the relevance of Confucian ideas for contemporary Chinese society, while East Asian intellectuals have deliberated on the implications of such ideas for contemporary socio-political issues in East Asia.[4] And for the past few decades, the bearing of Confucian ideas on the issues of rights and democracy has been widely discussed in both Asian and western countries. In relation to the focus of this paper, it takes the form of an attempt to probe the relevance of Confucian thought to contemporary philosophical discourse.

I have labeled these two broad directions in which we may be drawn "inward" and "outward" pulls. They capture the idea of our being drawn to go 'inside' the Confucian tradition to understand how things look from the perspectives of the Confucian thinkers themselves, and to go 'outside' the tradition by linking it up with present day concerns that we have *independently* of thinking about Confucian thought. These two directions need not always be combined in a single project, but they will if we undertake a project with both sets of goals. Someone engaged in the philosophical study of Confucian thought, understood in the sense described earlier, is drawn to *both* get close to the perspectives of the Confucian thinkers, *and* relate their ideas to the kinds of concerns that characterize contemporary philosophical discourse. My interest is in the dynamics of these two kinds of psychological forces when they are so combined.

There can, but need not be, a potential tension between these two kinds of forces. After all, if the Confucians had themselves shared the same kind of concerns that characterize contemporary philosophical discourse, the attempt to approximate their perspectives and the attempt to engage with contemporary philosophical discourse would end up leading us in exactly the same direction. But, as a matter of historical fact, the concerns that characterize Confucian thought and those that characterize contemporary philosophical discourse are quite different, though they might overlap. Someone engaged in the philosophical study of Confucian thought

[4] I am indebted to Doil Kim for highlighting the latter point.

will therefore be drawn in directions that often diverge or even compete. The purpose of this paper is to present a certain psychological orientation that provides a way of resolving the potentially competing forces. The orientation is one that I describe as approaching Confucian thought 'from the inside out', and one akin to the method that many Confucian thinkers themselves advocate in the study of Confucian classics.

In section 2, I will elaborate further on these two sets of psychological forces. In section 3, I will describe the approach I advocate and the kind of psychological orientation it involves. In section 4, I will discuss the significance of this approach.

2. Inward Pull and Outward Pull

The teachings of the Confucians evolved against the background of their life experiences, which are situated in the context of the kinds of concerns they have and activities they engage in. There are at least six related kinds of concerns and activities that are relevant.

First, they view themselves as engaged in the task of *transmission*. Confucius sought to restore and transmit early Zhou culture, and Mencius and Xunzi viewed themselves as continuing this task while at the same time transmitting the teachings of Confucius. By the Song-Ming period, Confucians regarded themselves as transmitters of the Way (*dao* 道), which encompasses the fundamental values that underlie the social and normative practices that past Confucians sought to promote as well as the rationale behind such values. The Way is constant even though its actualization might evolve with changing circumstances. For example, Xunzi noted how there is one underlying pattern (*li* 理) running through the Way, by grasping which we can respond to changing circumstances. (*Xunzi*: 11.13b-14a) And Zhu Xi noted how, given the changed circumstances of life, the ancient rites (*li* 禮) with all their elaborate details no longer applied to his times; instead, what was needed is some simpler and more practicable form of rites that preserves their spirit (*da yi* 大意 or *yi* 意義). (*Zhuzi Yulei*: 2178, 2185, 2285) Contemporary Confucians such as those associated with the New Asia tradition continue to see something of lasting value in the Confucian teachings that they seek to preserve and transmit to future generations.

What the Confucians seek to transmit are not just certain ideas understood in a pure intellectual sense, but values that they are committed to actively promoting both in themselves and in the public realm – it is a commitment to both embody the Way in oneself and to make it prevail in the public order. The more personal dimension can be put in terms of the idea of *jing de* 敬德, a serious dedication to one's own moral cultivation, and the more public dimension in terms of the idea of *you huan yi shi* 憂患意識, a sense of mission that involves a dedicated concern to work toward the public good, a moral transformation of the social and political order, and the transmission of what is of value in one's cultural heritage to future generations.[5] This

[5] See Mou (1978), 10-15. Xu Fuguan expounds on the idea of *you huan yi shi* 憂患意識 in Xu (1975a), 20-24.

sense of mission is manifested both in the administrative, social and political involvement of the Confucians and in their educational endeavors. The personal and public dimensions are not unrelated, since part of one's moral cultivation is the development of the appropriate public concern, and since it is often in the context of public engagement that one confronts the kind of moral trials and tribulations learning how to cope with which is part of one's own moral cultivation. Thus, the Confucians' concern with transmission also relates to three other kinds of activities – their efforts at their own moral cultivation, their administrative, social and political involvement, and their educational endeavors.

Second, in relation to *moral cultivation*, the Confucians are committed to cultivating in themselves not just certain desirable qualities such as compassionate concern, but also postures in life such as ways of coping with adversities.[6] This involves a process of constant self-reflection and self-transformation, undertaken in the midst of all kinds of moral challenges, such as seeking ways to resist the temptations of life or to cope with loss, or trying to maintain integrity and equanimity in face of persistent personal injuries.[7] The process involves delicate management of the mind's activities, an area of increasing attention as Confucian thought evolved up to the Song-Ming period.

Third, in relation to their *administrative, social and political involvement*, the commitment to make a difference in the public realm can be witnessed in almost all of the major Confucians. Confucius and Mencius traveled among the states in pursuit of social and political reform, Zhu Xi sought political change through his memorandums to the emperor and protests against corruption, while Wang Yangming held active posts in government and went through various political ups and downs. In modern times, New Asia Confucians such as Qian Mu and Tang Junyi were driven by the vision of preserving Chinese culture in the midst of the political turmoil subsequent to the communist takeover of the mainland. Behind such public involvement is a deep sense of mission, a passionate dedication to working toward something much larger than oneself that transcends one's own personal interests. Whether it is social and political reform or preservation of one's cultural heritage, they view it as a call from beyond to which they respond, something to which they would devote years of their life, or even give up years of their life, to further. They might – as Qian Mu and Tang Junyi did – know in advance that what they work toward is something whose realization they would not witness in their own life times. Still, through nurturing the next generation, not just intellectually but also morally and inspirationally, they would plant the seeds for future generations to continue the task.

In the midst of these endeavors, the Confucians would often experience a sense of loneliness, as what they work toward is something that not many would understand, and as the full impact of the heavy burden they carry is something that few, aside from those who share the burden, would appreciate. This is why the life of the Confucians is often described, or even self-

[6] I explored the nature of this posture in Shun (forthcoming a).

[7] I explored the ways in which the Confucians seek to maintain integrity and equanimity in face of personal injuries in Shun (2010).

described, as pervaded by a sense of loneliness.[8] At the same time, they would seek the company of those who share their aspirations, and the satisfaction of nurturing and inspiring a younger generation comes not just from the anticipation that their life-long efforts will continue into the future, but also from this sense of sharing. The sentiments just described – the aspiration to work toward something much larger than oneself and transcending one's personal interests, the sense of the heavy burden and unending task that one has undertaken, the hardships confronted and the perseverance required, and the joy of sharing with others of like mind in these endeavors – are well depicted in the College Anthem of New Asia College, the lyrics for which were written by Qian Mu, drawing on ideas from the Four Books.[9]

Fourth, in relation to their *educational endeavors*, it follows from the preceding discussion that the Confucians' goals for their students encompass different dimensions. These include not just intellectual understanding of the values and the cultural heritage to be transmitted, but also the commitment to embody these values in themselves, the personal resonance with their own cultural heritage, and more importantly, the aspiration to continue to transmit this cultural heritage as well as a passionate sense of mission to work toward something much larger than themselves in the public realm. The sense of satisfaction in successfully so inspiring a student runs deep, as one then sees hope of continuation of an unending task beyond one's life time and can, in one's own life time, feel a sense of fellowship in these endeavors.

These educational goals are difficult to accomplish in a modern university as they do not fit well into the classroom setting. They fitted well into the Song-Ming academies, which were closely knitted communities of Confucian scholars and students, these scholars being not just intellectual, but also moral and inspirational teachers. And it was in the tradition of these academies that New Asia College was founded in 1949. When thinking of the educational activities of the Confucians, it is important to keep in mind that they are not like teachers in the contemporary academic context. In the area of ethics, for example, they are not primarily teachers of ethics in the academic sense, but moral and inspirational teachers whose focus is on the nurturing of the individual student.

The fifth kind of activities that the Confucians engage in builds on these other activities. As deeply reflective individuals, they would, in the context of these other activities, reflect on their own experiences and those of others they interact with, and engage in oral and/or written discourses on the outcomes of these reflections. That is, they also engage in what we might describe as *intellectual discourse* in the sense of reflecting on their experiences in the context of their other concerns and activities and, to varying degrees depending on individual circumstances and temperament, engaging in more systematic discourses on the ideas that result from such reflections. There are obvious differences between the records of dialogues involving Confucius, Mencius, or Wang Yangming, the elaborate commentaries and other written works of Zhu Xi, and the treatise-like writings of Xunzi and Dai Zhen. But behind these variations in styles of

[8] See, for example, the anthology on *The Lonely New Confucians*. Tang Junyi describes himself as a lonely philosopher in his fourth letter to his wife-to-be Xie Ting-guang collected in Tang (1990), 65.

[9] For a discussion of the College Anthem, see the summary of my presentation on the New Asia Spirit in *New Asia Life Monthly* 41:4 (December 2013), 22-25.

presentation of their ideas is a reflectivity that gives us reason to expect some substantive degree of cohesiveness in their ideas, and such reflectivity and reasonable expectation for cohesiveness provide a basis for linkage to contemporary philosophical discourse, at least in areas pertaining to fundamental human concerns and experiences that are likely to be shared across time and cultures.

But there is still an important difference from western philosophical discourse. Even when reflecting on these fundamental human concerns and experiences, the Confucians are rarely interested in understanding the nature of such concerns and experiences in a more abstracted fashion. Instead, their reflective inquiry and discourses are portrayals of and firmly rooted in their own life experiences, and their interest is primarily in the practical differences their reflective inquiry and discourses make to actual human lives, including their own and others'. Thus, their more reflective intellectual activities are both rooted in their life experiences and instrumental to their practical concerns, and their discourses are not pure intellectual discourses of the kind that we often find in contemporary academic writings.[10]

The sixth kind of activities, *learning*, derives from the intellectual discourses of the Confucians. Given the written records of the ideas of past Confucians, whether their own written discourses or their oral discourses recorded in writing by others, the Confucians would study and seek to learn from such records, especially those that have been elevated to canonical status. Those who emphasize this process, such as Zhu Xi, would come up with elaborate accounts of the method of studying the Confucian classics. Since the intellectual discourses of the past Confucians were rooted in their life experiences, the learning process also involves one's relating the ideas in the classics to one's own life experiences that are akin to theirs – it is through one's personal resonance with such ideas that one comes to recognize their validity. Thus, the understanding sought in the learning process is described by the Confucians in terms of personally experiencing (*ti yan* 體驗) the relevant ideas and personally recognizing their validity (*ti ren* 體認). (See Tang Junyi (1936): 54-55) The experiential basis of the Confucians' intellectual discourses, and the experiential dimension of the understanding they seek in learning, link these two activities to the other four kinds of activities in that it is their life experiences in the contexts of the other four kinds of activities that provide the basis for their intellectual reflections, and it is by practicing what they have learnt in the context of the other four kinds of activities that they come to personally resonate with it and recognize its validity.[11] And within the biography of the individual, the learning process provides the foundation for the other five kinds of activities in that what one has learnt provides the basis for what one seeks to transmit through personal embodiment and public practice, as well as for one's own intellectual reflections and discourses.[12]

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[10] See Tang (1936), 52-53; Mou (1978), 5-6; Mou (1980), 18, 21; Mou (1983), 15, 45-49. Also see Shun (forthcoming b).

[11] I am indebted to Winnie Sung for alerting me to this point and to the need for highlighting learning as a separate activity.

[12] See Shun (forthcoming c) for a discussion of the Confucian view of learning.

These six kinds of concerns and activities have been presented in general terms, and are intended to be relatively uncontroversial observations about the Confucians based on what we know about their biographies and the historical circumstances in which they live, as well as their own presentations of their aspirations in life. For example, we have historical evidence of the political endeavors of Confucius and Mencius as they travel among the states, and of Zhu Xi's and Wang Yangming's political endeavors and challenges, such as Zhu's repeated memorandums to the emperor and Wang's banishment. In their own discourses, we also have relatively uncontroversial evidence, evidence that does not depend on detailed textual analysis, of their concern with transmission or with guiding their students in the process of moral transformation. Admittedly, these concerns are present in different degrees in different Confucians due to individual circumstances and temperament, such as being less conspicuous in Dai Zhen with his more scholarly bent. Still, the historical and relatively uncontroversial textual evidence does support this general characterization of their concerns and activities, which provides the background against which we can conduct more detailed textual analysis to probe the specific ideas of specific Confucians thinkers.[13]

In speaking of the *inward pull* in our study of Confucian thought, I refer to our concern or passion to do justice to the ideas of the Confucians by viewing them in the context of the Confucians' life experiences set against such a background. The disjunction "concern or passion" is intended to reflect the fact that we might be so moved in two different fashions. We might view this attempt to do justice to the experiential basis of their ideas in a more removed fashion, as instrumental to our arriving at an intellectually sound account of their ideas. Or we might view it not just as part of an intellectual activity; instead, we ourselves identify with the tradition to which these thinkers belong, personally resonate with their ideas, and seek to continue the tradition ourselves. The more intellectual and the more personal ways in which we feel this inward pull, the former a matter of intellectual seriousness and the latter a matter of the heart, lie at two ends of a spectrum, and there can be different degrees to which we may be drawn by each. That one might feel the inward pull out of intellectual seriousness means that one does not have to identify with the Confucian tradition to start with in feeling such pull. On the other hand, someone who is initially drawn out of intellectual seriousness might, over time and after prolonged and sustained study of Confucian ideas, increasingly come to personally resonate with such ideas and passionately engage with them.[14] In whichever way one might engage with the inward pull, this pull toward doing justice to the Confucians' own perspectives on their ideas keeps things in check when we, at the same time, seek to relate our study to concerns that we have *independently* of our interest in the Confucian tradition.

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[13] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for highlighting the need to explain the basis for this characterization of the Confucians. That this characterization is based on historical and relatively uncontroversial textual evidence explains why there is no circularity in viewing it as the background against which we conduct the more detailed textual analysis.

[14] I am indebted to Winnie Sung for helping me think through this point. I would regard David S. Nivison's prolonged and sustained study of Confucian thought as exhibiting this kind of transition from intellectual seriousness to personal resonance; see Shun (2015b).

This other aspect of our study is what I have referred to as *outward pull*. In characterizing the outward pull in terms of an interest in relating our study to concerns that we have *independently* of our interest in the Confucian tradition, I am speaking not in temporal terms – the point is not that our having such concerns temporally precedes our study of Confucian thought or precedes our interest in such study. Instead, the point is a conceptual one – these are present day concerns that could have engaged our attention even if we had not engaged in such study, even if our attention might only come to focus on such concerns in the course of the study. And while these concerns are independent of such study in this conceptual sense, this does not preclude the possibility that, in the course of our study, we discover that these are also concerns that engage the Confucian thinkers.[15]

Even when viewing things from within the Confucian tradition itself, there is a presumption that its ideas do have this broader relevance to our own present day concerns. The activity of transmission already assumes that what is being transmitted has a relevance that transcends the historical past and local culture. The interest in bringing Confucian thought to bear on our own present day concerns can take different forms. Some may, for example, be interested in the implications of Confucian thought for contemporary socio-political issues or for contemporary business practices. Our focus, the linkage of Confucian thought to contemporary philosophical discourse, is just one among many different forms that this outward pull can take. And even an interest in such linkage can itself take different directions. Our interest may be more intellectual, focusing on how Confucian ideas can enrich our reflections on contemporary philosophical issues. Or our interest may be more pragmatic, focusing on how to make Confucian thought intelligible and accessible to a contemporary philosophical audience, or on finding a place for Confucian thought in the institutionalized setup surrounding contemporary philosophical practices, such as its inclusion in the philosophy curriculum or its representation in professional philosophy journals and conferences.

The different ways in which the inward and outward pulls are combined result in different approaches in our study. Any such approach can be legitimate relative to its goals, as long as its goals are made explicit and its methods appropriate to its goals, and as long as the way it presents its conclusions properly reflects its goals and methods. At one extreme, a project may be directed primarily to approximating the ideas of the Confucians, with little interest in the contemporary relevance of such ideas. One engages in detailed historical and textual analysis, and bases one's conclusions about the ideas of the Confucians on historical, linguistic, and textual evidence to the greatest extent possible. Many of the excellent historical and philological studies found in the literature are of this nature. Although such studies still focus on ideas of the relevant thinkers, there is no attempt to relate such ideas to contemporary philosophical discourse, and so they do not constitute a 'philosophical study of Confucian thought' in the sense described earlier. Such an approach is entirely legitimate relative to its goal of approximating the perspectives of the Confucians.

[15] I am indebted to comments by Huang Yong and by an anonymous referee for alerting me to the need to clarify this point.

At the other extreme, a project may have little interest in approximating the perspectives of the Confucians. One's focus may be pragmatic – one seeks to make Confucian thought accessible and of interest to a contemporary philosophical audience, and to do so one freely represents Confucian ideas in familiar terms, fitting them into the familiar frameworks of contemporary philosophical discourse. This kind of work is commonly found in the initial introduction of a foreign cultural tradition to a native audience. For example, in the early stages of the introduction of Buddhism or Christianity into China, Buddhist or Christian ideas were framed in familiar Chinese terms for accessibility by the common populace. As long as it is made clear that the presentation does not seek to faithfully represent the perspectives of the Confucians themselves, the project is entirely legitimate relative to its goals. Alternatively, one's focus may be intellectual – one looks to Confucian thought as a source of intellectual stimulation, but with little interest in understanding the ideas of the Confucians in their historical and cultural context. One's focus is on a certain contemporary philosophical issue, and as long as one's thinking has been stimulated in some fruitful direction, whether the way one understands the ideas of the Confucians is faithful to their perspectives is not important in itself. Again, such a project is entirely legitimate relative to its goals, as long as it is made clear that one is not seeking to faithfully represent the perspectives of the Confucians. Whether one's focus is primarily pragmatic or intellectual, a project that has little interest in approximating the perspectives of the Confucians does not constitute a 'philosophical study of Confucian thought' in the sense described earlier.

In between these two extremes, there are other approaches that have an explicit interest in *both* approximating the ideas of the Confucians in their historical and cultural context *and* exploring how an understanding of such ideas can contribute in an intellectually fruitful manner to contemporary philosophical discourse. The combination of the two kinds of interests means that one is subject to both the inward and outward pulls in a substantive manner. Still, there can be different approaches depending on the degree to which the inward or outward pull is more dominant. The approach that I describe as studying Confucian thought from the inside out is one on which the inward pull is *maximally dominant*. That is, the inward pull pervades one's psychological orientation to the greatest extent possible compatible with the outward pull being also present in a sufficiently substantive manner for this approach to constitute a 'philosophical study of Confucian thought'.

3. Studying Confucian Thought from the Inside Out

The pervasiveness of the inward pull on the inside-out approach affects our study at every step. To start, we seek to approximate the perspectives of the Confucians by engaging in detailed historical and textual studies, attending closely to the language they work with and the historical and cultural context in which their ideas evolve, coupled with a detailed analysis of the texts that record their ideas. This involves paying close attention to the connotations of the key terms they employ and how these have evolved over time, and avoiding being misled by translations or by

modern usages of the terms into ascribing to these terms connotations that are foreign to them. In the analysis of a text, this involves paying careful attention to textual details, while at the same time viewing specific parts of the text in relation to the whole text and to other related texts. It also involves being alert to different possible interpretations of a specific part of the text, often aided by consulting commentaries and translations, and carefully adjudicating between them on the basis of the available textual evidence. Having conducted the needed analysis of the language and the texts, we then set the ideas that can be extracted from this process against the background of what we know of the historical circumstances in which the relevant thinkers lived, the kind of concerns they have and the activities they engage in, in order to understand their ideas in the proper historical and cultural contexts.

Throughout the process, there are various pitfalls that we need to be cautious about and habits of thought that we need to overcome. Examples include being misled by translations or modern usages of key terms, or allowing contemporary philosophical frameworks to shape our understanding of ideas in the texts. Even though we might consult secondary discussions along the way, we need to ensure that they do not influence our conclusions, which should be based entirely on evidence in the primary texts. The goal is to minimize the influence of our present perspectives and habits of thoughts on our understanding of the texts, and instead allow our conclusions to be driven to the greatest possible extent by the textual evidence.[16] The need to do so is emphasized by the Confucians themselves, such as the way Zhu Xi comments on the method of studying the Confucian classics. According to him, we should maintain an open and receptive mind (*xu xin* 虛心) and avoid the influence of what he refers to as "personal opinions" (*si yi* 私意) in studying the classics, so that our conclusions follow the textual evidence. (*Zhuzi Yulei*: 179, 180, 185)

Having approximated the ideas of the Confucians to the greatest extent possible on the basis of textual evidence, we can then seek to understand these ideas against the background of their life experiences, set in the context of their concerns and activities as described in the previous section. We see, for example, how their ideas reflect their experiences in the context of their personal moral struggles in the process of moral cultivation, the trials and tribulations as they confront various adversities and personal attacks in the political realm, their efforts to stay unperturbed in face of obstruction and failure of their endeavors, or their attempts to find ways of assisting their students in addressing the recalcitrant inclinations of the mind, both preemptively and correctively.[17] It is important to keep in mind that the Confucian thinkers are very much unlike contemporary academic philosophers in the nature of their concerns and activities, and the kinds of issues and questions that centrally engage their attention are often different from those that centrally engage contemporary academic philosophers.

To simplify discussion, let us regard the agendas of contemporary philosophical discourse as constituted by various questions, some formulated in a more general fashion and some more specific, and especially for the latter, some more central to contemporary

[16] In Shun (2009), I referred to this process as textual analysis.

[17] I discussed their ideas in relation to some of these issues in Shun (2010), Shun (2014), Shun (2015c) and Shun (forthcoming a).

philosophical discourse and some more peripheral. Similarly, we can regard Confucian thought as having agendas similarly constituted by various questions. There will be significant overlap between the two sets of agendas, such overlap being grounded in fundamental human concerns and experiences that are shared across time and cultures. At the same time, given the different ways in which the different cultural and ethical traditions have evolved, and the fact that the ideas of the Confucians are rooted in the distinctive kinds of concerns and activities described earlier, it would also be reasonable to expect significant divergence between the two sets of agendas. Some of the questions that are central to the agendas of the Confucians might be absent from, or only peripheral to, contemporary philosophical agendas, and vice versa.

Having approximated the Confucians' perspectives to the greatest extent possible, the inward pull again manifests itself in the way we focus our study. We take as our focus the questions that are central to the agendas of the Confucians as seen from their perspectives, such questions being determined by the historical and textual studies just described. Given the nature of their concerns and activities, the Confucians are much more intimately engaged with such questions as how to cope with the moral trials and tribulations of life in their own efforts at moral cultivation, how to deal with the humiliation and personal injury they confront in their administrative roles and political endeavors, how to inspire their students and advise them on the management of morally recalcitrant thoughts and sentiments, or how to maintain equanimity in the midst of all kinds of hardships, challenges, and frustration as they work in pursuit of their mission in life. These are questions that are intelligible to a contemporary philosophical audience, but are often not prominent in contemporary philosophical agendas though some of these questions may be the focus of western literary works.

Thus, instead of starting with questions central to contemporary philosophical agendas, we identify the questions central to the agendas of the Confucians, and make sense of the way they address such questions. On the assumption that these questions often relate to fundamental human concerns and experiences that are shared across time and cultures, we also seek to make sense of their ideas in relation to our own concerns and experiences that are akin to theirs. To the extent that similar questions are also prominent in contemporary philosophical agendas, our study of the Confucian perspectives will, through their different emphases and approaches, illuminate contemporary philosophical reflections on these questions. And to the extent that they are not part of or only peripheral to contemporary philosophical agendas, our study will help refocus our attention on these overlooked or understudied questions. Through illuminating our reflections or refocusing our attention on such questions, the study can itself transform our own experiences.[18] In this way, we can start from *inside* the Confucian tradition by focusing attention on questions central to the Confucians' own concerns, and move *outward* from our understanding of the Confucians' perspectives to bring their ideas to bear on our contemporary concerns and experiences and to link them up with contemporary philosophical discourse.

Since the ideas of the Confucians are not primarily theoretical constructs but are deeply embedded in their actual life experiences, it is only by relating them to our own life experiences

[18] I am indebted to Winnie Sung for helping me think through this point.

that are akin to theirs that we can grasp their true import.[19] Put differently, we will have to personally experience these ideas to arrive at a proper understanding. As noted in connection with their view of learning, a similar point is highlighted by the Confucians in relation to the study of classics. For example, according to Zhu Xi, we need to personally experience (*ti yan* 體驗) the ideas in the classics to make them personally relevant to ourselves (*qie ji* 切己). (*Zhuzi Yulei*: 165, 179, 181) By doing so, we come to personally recognize their validity (*ti ren* 體認) and can enter into what we read. (*Zhuzi Yulei*: 173, 176, 177, 179) This is a reasonable observation in relation to ideas with a predominantly experiential basis. For example, we cannot truly understand ideas related to ways of coping with grief upon the death of someone close to oneself unless we have, if not personally experienced such grief, at least witnessed it in others or seen it portrayed in literature and film, or experienced something of a similar nature such as distress at someone's severe illness. Similarly, we cannot truly understand the Confucians' ideas about ways of coping with personal humiliation or injury unless we can in some way relate these ideas to our own life experiences. Relating their ideas to those experiences of ours akin to their experiences in which the ideas are rooted enables us to articulate their ideas in a way that does justice to their perspectives.[20]

This does not mean that we have to be Confucians in the sense of actually endorsing their ideas in order to make sense of these ideas.[21] That we need to relate their ideas about ways of coping with grief to some relevantly similar experiences of ourselves does not mean that we have to actually endorse their ideas. All it means is that we can see the appeal of such ideas in the sense of seeing that they provide certain ways of coping with grief that make sense to us, and perhaps also in the sense that we can understand how such ideas can be attractive, if not to us, then at least to the Confucians in their own times and culture, as well as to our contemporaries who have been brought up in a culture influenced by such ideas. Being able to see their appeal means only that we have some sympathetic understanding of the ideas, not necessarily that we ourselves endorse and seek to live up to them.

Up to this point, to identify the questions that centrally engage the Confucians and to make sense of the way they address these questions, we need to stay close to the textual evidence and keep in mind the nature of the concerns and activities of the Confucians. Once we have determined the nature of the questions and the direction the Confucians take in addressing them, we might in our elaboration on their perspectives consult selected contemporary philosophical writings that bear on this direction. Still, we need to be vigilant that our elaboration is continuous with the experiential basis of the Confucian ideas, rather than being inadvertently influenced by

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[19] In speaking of experiences of ours *akin* to those of the Confucians, I have deliberately avoided describing our experiences as the same as theirs, thereby sidestepping the question whether there can be conception-free experiences that are shared across time and cultures. All I assume is a sense of the similarity of human experiences across time and cultures, where such similarity may have to do with both the object and the nature of the experiences. For example, "grief" in the English language refers to intense emotions of sorrow directed to the loss of someone close to oneself, while there are expressions in the Chinese language that refer to similar emotions directed to similar situations. I am indebted to Zheng Zemian for alerting me to the need to clarify this point.

[20] In Shun (2009), I referred to this process as articulation.

[21] I am indebted to Eric Hutton for a comment on a presentation I gave on methodology that alerted me to the need to clarify this point.

ideas in contemporary philosophical writings that are alien to the Confucians. In this way, the inward pull continues to exert its influence.

In probing a certain idea of the Confucians, we might come to see its connection to other ideas of theirs that we have previously studied or its implication for other ideas potentially ascribable to the relevant texts. To determine if the latter ideas are indeed so ascribable, we will need to engage in further textual analysis to see if the textual evidence supports such a conclusion. For example, in understanding the way the Confucians cope with grief upon the death of someone close to oneself, we may come to see its connection to the way they cope with the failure of their political endeavors or with the personal humiliation and injury they encounter in the political realm. Just as our probing more deeply each of their ideas enables us to see such connections, seeing such connections also enables us to view the relevant ideas in a larger context. Through such an exercise, we come to better appreciate the overall perspectives of the Confucians.[22]

After having arrived at a sympathetic understanding of the ideas of the Confucians and drawing the appropriate connections, we can further elaborate on them in a way that goes beyond the Confucians' own discourses by coming up with a more reflective and systematic account that links up with contemporary philosophical discourse.[23] Even when making sense of their ideas in a way that relates to our own life experiences that are akin to theirs, we are to some extent already going beyond what might be directly supported by the textual evidence. In building a reflective and systematic account, we go further in that direction. Still, the inward pull manifests itself as we aim at an elaboration that is continuous with their ideas to the greatest extent possible. The account attains such continuity to the extent that it does not conflict with (even though it goes beyond) the textual evidence, is an elaboration on the Confucians' ideas that links up in appropriate ways with their agendas (rather than being driven by our own agendas), fits in with the whole body of ideas (rather than just some specific idea in isolation from other ideas) that can be extracted on the basis of textual evidence, and is a natural and non-contrived way of developing their ideas as presented in the relevant texts. We continue to be drawn by the inward pull in that, in developing such an account, we constantly think back to the perspectives of the Confucians even as we also seek to go beyond their perspectives, often having to conduct further textual analysis of other parts of the relevant texts to ensure that our account does fit in with the body of ideas ascribable to the relevant texts as a whole. Having started with approximating their perspectives before going beyond them, and by exercising care and judgement in the process of elaboration, constantly looking back at what we understand to be their life experiences and perspectives and striving to do justice to such experiences and perspectives, we increase the likelihood of attaining such continuity.

In constructing a more reflective and systematic account that links up with contemporary philosophical discourse, we might consult the contemporary philosophical literature more broadly. At the same time, we need to ensure that we do not employ western philosophical terms

[22] I elaborated on this point in Shun (forthcoming c) when discussing what I presented there as the second and third aspects of the Confucian view of learning.

[23] In Shun (2009), I referred to this process as philosophical construction.

with presuppositions alien to the Confucians' perspectives. To do so, we can first explain any such terms in non-technical and generally accessible language before using them, so as to make clear that their use is not laden with such alien presuppositions. Just as we exercise care to avoid the influence of western philosophical agendas in identifying the questions that focus our study, we also need to exercise care to avoid the influence of western philosophical frameworks and habits of thought in the substance of our discussion. Doing so further helps increase the likelihood of attaining a continuity with the Confucians' own perspectives.

By striving to maximize the likelihood of such continuity, even if the final outcome is an account that looks quite different – in style of presentation, in the level of details and degree of reflectivity, and so forth – from the way the Confucians' ideas are presented in the texts, it would still be appropriate to describe the account as a Confucian, or at least a Confucian-inspired, account. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that the more reflective and systematic direction in which we take their ideas is not the direction they themselves take, and hence that our approach to their ideas is not their own approach. Keeping this in perspective helps avoid the temptation to ascribe the outcome of our study to them.

In moving from textual study to the construction of the more reflective and systematic account, we also have to undertake a shift in the criteria of assessment that we apply to our study even as we work toward ensuring maximal continuity with the perspectives of the Confucians. The earlier textual study should be assessed by the criteria of excellence that characterize the philological community, while the later construction of a more reflective and systematic account should be assessed by those that characterize the philosophical community. Accordingly, we should undergo a corresponding shift in our target audience, from the philological to the philosophical, to ensure that our work at each stage measures up to the appropriate standards in their full rigor. This helps ensure that we confront rather than evade the substantive and difficult tasks at each stage. At the same time, this shift does not mean that we are undertaking two different and unrelated tasks, one aimed at historical understanding and the other at philosophical construction. Instead, the philosophical work builds on and is continuous with, rather than separate from, the philological work.[24]

4. Significance of the Approach

The inward pull draws us *inward* toward the perspectives of the Confucian thinkers, while the outward pull draws us *outward* away from their perspectives to address our contemporary philosophical concerns. On the inside-out approach, the inward pull is maximally dominant in the sense that, at every step, even as we are drawn outward toward addressing our own philosophical concerns, we consciously shift our attention inward back to the perspectives of the Confucians to ensure that our elaboration on their ideas is maximally continuous with their perspectives. Understanding their perspectives involves careful textual analysis and

[24] For further elaboration on this point, see Shun (forthcoming b).

consideration of the distinctive nature of their concerns and activities. Thus, on the inside-out approach, textual analysis plays a foundational role in our study, coupled with a constant reminder that the Confucians' concerns and activities are very different from those of contemporary academic philosophers. On this approach, the inward pull manifests itself at the start when we seek to approximate the perspectives of the Confucians, then in the way we identify the questions that focus our study to ensure that these are also questions that centrally engage the Confucians, and then in the way we work toward ensuring that our elaboration on their ideas is at every step continuous with their perspectives to the greatest extent possible. In this way, the inward pull keeps the outward pull in check at every step to ensure that the latter does not lead to significant deviations from the Confucians' own perspective.

One might deviate from this approach in the way one sets the questions that focus one's study, or in the way one elaborates on the Confucian response to such questions. In relation to the former, instead of first determining the questions central to the agendas of the Confucians, one might start with questions central to contemporary philosophical agendas and probe the Confucian response to such questions. Such questions might happen to be also ones central to the agendas of the Confucians – they might be questions formulated in very general terms, such as questions about how humans should live or how one might fail to be ethical, or more specific questions such as how to confront death and cope with other challenges of life. In that case, as long as the way we elaborate on the Confucian response is based on careful textual analysis and takes seriously the distinctive nature of the Confucians' concerns and activities, the outcome of the study would not be different from that of the inside-out approach.

Often, though, questions central to contemporary philosophical agendas are not ones that centrally engage the Confucians' attention. There are different ways in which this can happen. First, the questions might be framed in terms that are specific to a certain philosophical tradition and carry presuppositions not shared by the Confucians. For example, one might be interested in the relation between the moral and the personal or the way to understand the intrinsic worth of persons, where the notion of the moral or of intrinsic worth is understood in Kantian terms. These are not just questions that the Confucians do not ask, but are ones that they could not have asked unless they share – which they do not – the relevant philosophical presuppositions. In seeking a Confucian response to such questions, one will have to reformulate their ideas in a way that deviates drastically from their perspectives and that is shaped primarily by one's own preoccupation with the western tradition involved.

Second, one might start with questions that can be framed without comparable substantive philosophical presuppositions but are nevertheless not ones that engage the Confucians' attention except in a peripheral manner. For example, one might be interested in questions about the reliability of sensory perception in furnishing knowledge of the external world, or about the nature of the referential relation between names and referents. Admittedly, Confucian texts do occasionally touch on related issues, but these questions are at best of only peripheral interest to them. To reconstruct an elaborate Confucian response to such questions would again involve a drastic reformulation of Confucian ideas.

Third, one might start with questions that, in their general shape, are shared by the Confucians, though the way these questions are conceptualized in western philosophical discourse takes on directions quite different from what we find in Confucian thought. This would be true, for example, of certain foundational questions about moral justification, such as whether moral reasons derive ultimately from rational considerations or from pre-existing pro-attitudes, or how to rationally convince the egoist to be moral. The Confucians do have an interest in the "why" question in specific ethical contexts, as when they seek to respond to doubts raised by a student or to convert someone in an official position. But their interest is driven primarily by the kind of practical concerns described earlier, and so their interest is primarily in answers to the question that are practically efficacious. These answers would appeal to considerations that engage the actual psychological makeup of their audience, which has already been shaped by various social forces. They have little interest in taking the question in the direction of a search for some foundational consideration that grounds normative claims in a way that filters out the complexities of the actual human psychological makeup.[25] Nor do they have an interest in such questions as how we can convince the hypothetical egoist to be moral; their actual audience have a much more complex psychology than this hypothetical figure, and coming up with an answer to this question would not have the kind of practical efficacy that they seek.[26]

These are examples of ways in which one might start with questions central to contemporary philosophical agendas that are not central to the Confucians' own agendas, and look to Confucian thought for possible responses. In relation to any of these examples, or any other example that we might put forward, one might, of course, disagree on the ground that the question is in fact also central to the Confucians' own agenda.[27] But as long as we agree that the two sets of agenda do diverge in substantive ways, there will be questions central to one agenda but not to the other so that, in developing elaborate responses to such questions on the basis of Confucian ideas, we would inevitably depart drastically from the Confucians' own perspectives. This does not mean that it is illegitimate to inquire into what answers could be given to these questions if we are to develop such answers on the basis of Confucian ideas. To the extent that this inquiry can stimulate our thinking on the philosophical questions at hand, especially when it leads us to think of alternative answers that we find philosophical appealing and that we would not have arrived at on our own without looking to Confucian thought, it would be a fruitful kind of inquiry even if the questions themselves are not posed by the Confucians. What is important is to make explicit that the questions we pose are *our* questions and not *theirs*, so that we do not present the outcomes of our inquiry as elaborations on the Confucians' answers to these questions. Rather, these are *our* answers to *our* questions that have been stimulated by Confucian ideas. Since the questions are not ones that the Confucians would themselves pose or focus on, our answers to them, just like the questions themselves, are at a significant distance from the Confucians' own perspectives.

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[25] See Shun (2015a) for a more elaborate discussion.

[26] In Shun (1997), 44-47, I argued that even the Yangist is not an egoist but shares a concern for social order.

[27] I am indebted to Huang Yong and an anonymous referee for pointing out the need to address this objection. As both have noted, there are some scholars who do interpret Confucian thought in Kantian terms.

Even if one starts with questions central to the agendas of the Confucians, one might still deviate from the inside-out approach by developing responses to such questions that are not grounded in close textual analysis but reflect the influence of contemporary philosophical frameworks. For example, in seeking to understand the Confucian view of *jing* 敬 toward other human beings, one might interpret it in terms of respect for the equal intrinsic worth of persons understood in Kantian terms.[28] Again, such an approach can be legitimate if it is made clear that its goal is to reinterpret Confucian thought to fit into familiar contemporary philosophical frameworks. Minimally, it might help stimulate interest in Confucian thought among a contemporary philosophical audience. And to the extent that it can come up with novel and appealing philosophical perspectives on the basis of its reinterpretation of Confucian thought, it can make a contribution to contemporary philosophical discussions.

In earlier publications, I have highlighted an asymmetry in the study of comparative (Chinese and western) ethics, a tendency to approach Chinese thought from the perspective of western philosophical agendas and frameworks, but not vice versa.[29] This asymmetry can be explained in terms of the pervasiveness of the alternative approaches just described, which allow western philosophical agendas to determine the questions that focus our study and western philosophical frameworks to influence our elaborations on Confucian ideas in response to such questions. What differentiates the inside-out approach from these other approaches is that, in adopting a psychological orientation in which the inward pull is maximally dominant, it thereby also minimizes the influence of contemporary philosophical agendas and frameworks on our understanding of Confucian thought.[30] While these alternative approaches can be legitimate relative to their respective goals, the inside-out approach conduces to the goal of drawing out the distinctive characteristics and insights of Confucian thought.

Given the distinctive nature of the Confucians' concerns and activities, we have reason to expect a significant divergence between the agendas of the Confucians and contemporary philosophical agendas. Questions central to the agendas of the Confucians are often ones that lie at best on the periphery of contemporary philosophical agendas. But it is in relation to such questions that we may reasonably expect the distinctive characteristics and important insights of Confucian thought to reside. The inside-out approach serves to bring to the forefront such characteristics and insights by focusing on these questions and by elaborating on the Confucians'

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[28] See Shun (2013) for a related discussion.

[29] See Shun (2009).

[30] While the methodological approach proposed here and the psychological orientation it involves have evolved over a long period, I was initially led in this direction through reflecting on fundamental errors in my earlier works. In my doctoral dissertation "Virtue, Mind and Morality: A Study in Mencian Ethics" completed in 1986, I framed my study of Mencius in terms of contemporary discussions of virtue ethics, and in "Moral Reasons in Confucian Ethics", a conference presentation in 1987 subsequently published in 1989, I framed my discussion of Mencius in terms of contemporary discussions of moral reasons. In both works, I was working under the influence of contemporary western philosophical agendas and frameworks while presenting the outcomes as if they were representations of or elaborations on Mencius' own ideas. To address this error, I decided in 1988 to undertake a multi-volume work that separates the philological and the philosophical tasks, gradually moving from the former to the latter in stages. The methodological approach and psychological orientation presented in this paper are further refinements of that initial methodological direction.

responses to these questions in a way maximally continuous with their perspectives. By focusing on such questions and minimizing the influence of western philosophical agendas, it helps refocus attention on questions that bear on fundamental human concerns and experience but that might have previously been neglected or lied at best on the periphery of contemporary philosophical agendas. And by elaborating on the Confucians' ideas in a way that maximizes continuity with their perspectives and minimizes the influence of western philosophical frameworks, it helps draw out their distinctive insights in their reflections on such questions.[31]

That the inside-out approach can help draw out the distinctive characteristics and insights of Confucian thought also speaks in its support independently of its bearing on contemporary philosophical discourse. It helps further a direction of inquiry in the study of Chinese thought that have been emphasized by the Confucians themselves, such as Tang Junyi who has empathetically urged that we take the distinctive concerns and life experiences of Chinese thinkers seriously, instead of allowing western philosophical agendas and frameworks to shape our study of Chinese thought. He makes a similar point in a joint statement on the study of Chinese culture that he co-authors with Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, and Zhang Junmai.

In a paper published in 1961, Tang conveys his distress over the erosion of traditional values on the mainland, while also lamenting what he perceives as a failure of overseas Chinese to take their own cultural heritage seriously. (Tang (1961): 2-4) In a subsequent paper published in 1964, he concedes, in response to readers' comments on the earlier paper, that wherever one might reside, one could still "self-replant one's spiritual roots" (*zi zhi ling gen* 自植靈根) in the sense that one could still embody one's cultural values and aspirations in one's way of life, albeit in a foreign environment. (Tang (1964): 53) And he injects the hope that one could eventually be more respectful of one's own cultural heritage and take it seriously (*zi zun zi zhong* 自尊自重) if one could be more self-reflective, reflecting on one's own life experiences so as to see how it resonates with one's own cultural heritage. (Tang (1964): 52, 58-59) He makes a similar point specifically in relation to the study of Chinese thought in an earlier paper published in 1940. There, he points out that traditions of thought are cultural products, and their proper understanding requires one to attend seriously to the historical and cultural context in which they evolved. He notes the tendency of some scholars of his times to impose western agendas and frameworks onto their study of Chinese thought, thereby presenting Chinese thinkers as if they were working with the same agendas as western philosophers, and Chinese thought as a variant of western philosophical thought. According to him, we need to have confidence in our own cultural heritage, and make sincere and serious efforts to draw out its distinctive characteristics and insights. (Tang (1940): 390-391)

Similar observations are found in a statement that he jointly issues with Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan and Zhang Junmai in 1958 on the study of Chinese culture. The focus of the statement is on the psychological orientation – the goals and motives (*dong ji* 動機) and the attitudes (*tai du* 態度) – that we should adopt in such study. (Mou, Xu, Zhang and Tang: 871-

[31] I am indebted to Huang Yong's extensive comments, as well as his own methodological discussion in Huang (2013), for helping me clarify the nature of the differences between the inside-out approach and these other alternative approaches.

872) We should view Chinese culture as an organic entity that manifests itself in the life of a people, including those whose life exemplifies such a cultural heritage and those who consciously seek to continue the heritage. (Ibid. 872) To attain the proper understanding in our study, we need both sympathetic understanding (*tong qing* 同情) and dedicated seriousness (*jing yi* 敬意). Such sympathetic understanding involves using one's own life experiences (*sheng ming xin ning* 生命心靈) to come to grips with the life experiences that the cultural heritage reflects. And dedicated seriousness involves one's making conscious efforts to avoid the influence of personal preconception (*zhu guan* 主觀) and habits of thought (*xi guan de cheng jian* 習慣的成見) in one's study, so that one can truly approximate the spiritual values and life experiences (*jing shen sheng ming* 精神生命) that such heritage embodies; it also involves one's being respectful of its organic character and seeing one's study as contributing to its continuity. (Ibid. 873-875)

In both Tang's writings and the joint statement, these Confucian scholars are speaking from the perspective of one who identifies with the cultural heritage of China, viewing it as one's own and dedicating oneself to its continuation. But the significance of their observations is not restricted to those who share this perspective. Earlier, I mentioned how one's interest in doing justice to the ideas of the Confucians in their proper historical and cultural context can be a matter of intellectual seriousness or a passion of the heart. Even if we are approaching Confucian thought out of intellectual seriousness, with the goal of arriving at an intellectually sound account of their ideas, we would still need to have the kind of sympathetic understanding and dedicated seriousness described in the joint statement. As noted earlier, sympathetic understanding of the ideas of the Confucians does not necessarily mean that we ourselves actually endorse and seek to live up to them. It means only that we make serious efforts to relate their ideas to those life experiences of ours akin to theirs, so that we can come to appreciate the import and appeal of these ideas in the sense of seeing how they make sense in relation to certain common human concerns and experiences and how they can be attractive, if not to us, then at least to the Confucians in their own times and culture and also to our contemporaries who have been brought up in a culture influenced by such ideas.

As for dedicated seriousness, it involves a serious and respectful attitude toward the object of our study, a dedication to consciously minimizing the influence of our own habits of thought, and taking seriously the distinctive nature of the Confucians' own concerns and activities as well as their life experiences in such a context. The term *jing* 敬, which I have translated as "dedicated seriousness", refers to a posture that Confucian thinkers generally regard as crucial to the study of an earlier thinker.[32] The posture involves a focus of attention and caution in how one proceeds in one's study, attending to every relevant detail and being always on guard against errors, missteps, and pitfalls. It also involves a sense of one's own limited capabilities in relation to the task, and a serious dedication to putting in as much effort as possible into the task to ensure its proper completion.

[32] See Tang (1966), 382-388; Xu (1975b), 2-6; Zhu Xi *Zhuzi Yulei* 168, 176; also see Shun (forthcoming b).

Jing runs through the whole process on the inside-out approach. It manifests itself in obvious ways in the earlier stage of our study, when we devote care and detailed attention to investigating the connotations of key terms, analyzing different parts of the texts, and examining all the relevant textual details to ensure that we base our conclusions primarily on textual evidence. It also manifests itself in the caution we exercise to avoid various potential pitfalls and missteps and to avoid reading our own ideas into the texts because of certain habits of thought. Going beyond the initial textual studies, *jing* involves dedicated efforts at elaborating on the ideas of the relevant thinker in a way that is continuous with the thinker's perspectives to the greatest extent possible. This involves relating the thinker's ideas to our own life experiences that are akin to his, and elaborating on these ideas in a way that fits in with his agendas rather than agendas of ours not shared by him. Throughout the process, we constantly look back at what we understand to be his concerns, agendas, and perspectives, and do our best to do justice to them. To the extent that we do go beyond his perspectives in any substantive way, we should explicitly acknowledge this and avoid ascribing these elements of our study to him. In addition, we have to exercise a reflectivity that extends beyond the actual details of the study to also include reflections on the methodology we adopt. We have to be reflective and vigilant not just about the way we execute each step of the process, but also about the methodological approach that underlies the process. The care and reflectivity that go into the study demonstrate one's sense of the largeness of the task and of one's limited capabilities.

Thus, the significance of the kind of sympathetic understanding and dedicated seriousness highlighted in the joint statement does not depend on one's identifying with the Confucian tradition. Even someone approaching Confucian thought out of intellectual seriousness will have reason to adopt such attitudes as well as the psychological orientation that characterizes the inside-out approach, as long as they are seriously interested in understanding the perspectives of the Confucians in their historical and cultural context. But for those of us who do identify with the tradition, it is particularly important that we do justice to our own cultural heritage by examining the ideas of the Confucians on their own terms, taking into account their own concerns and agendas rather than fitting their ideas into western philosophical agendas and frameworks. Studying Confucian thought from the inside out will contribute to such goals, putting us in a better position to do justice to the rich ethical insights of the Confucian thinkers, and enabling the kind of 'self-replanting of our spiritual roots' to which Tang alludes.

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