

John MAKEHAM: *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 2003. 457 S. ISBN 0-674-01216-x. US\$50.00.

Commentary is the last truly neglected great genre of early Chinese writing. Commentaries have received little scholarly attention on their own merit, both within and without China. In the west, some readers seem proud to claim that “they don't read commentaries,” despite the impossibility of a modern reader remaining uninfluenced by more than two thousand years' worth of exegesis. Or as if the compilers of the *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典, *Ciyuan* 辞源, or any serious classical Chinese lexicon could have done their work without reference to commentary. A glance shows that any good dictionary—not to mention any reading of an early text—inevitably draws on the works of glossators and exegetes, including some of the most important scholars and thinkers of Chinese antiquity: famous polymaths like Zhu Xi 朱子 (1130–1200) and Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), along with the Zheng Xuan 郑玄 (127–200), Yan Shigu 颜师古 (581–645), Li Shan 李善 (ob. 689), and others best known for their commentaries.

John Makeham has stepped into this gap with his outstanding book, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*. Through analysis of four example commentaries on the *Lunyu* 论语, Makeham demonstrates that the commentarial genre consists not merely of explanatory notes, but of scholarly works worthy of consideration in their own right.

Makeham's book will be required reading for anyone interested in study of the *Lunyu*, as well as for the growing number of scholars who take commentary seriously. It also exemplifies the manner in which good analysis of seemingly disjointed source materials can reveal the unifying intellectual underpinnings, and thus could be of interest for scholars of literature and philosophy as well.

Transmitters and Creators divides into four sections, in turn subdivided into chapters. Each section focuses on a particular *Lunyu* commentary. There is also an “Introduction” and an “Epilogue.” The introduction includes what amounts to an *apologia* for the study of commentary, as well as suggestions for how to go about this study. Makeham adduces not only information about the Chinese tradition but also other relevant fields, particularly hermeneutics, bringing sophisticated reasoning to bear without bogging down in jargon or unnecessary abstraction. The “Introduction” also gives the author's rationale for selecting the texts he considers and his methods of dealing with them. He lays out the structure of the book, as well as a set of questions that will reappear throughout the work regarding, “the quality and nature of sagehood as exemplified by Confucius” (7).

The first section treats the *Lunyu jijie* 论语集解, conventionally attributed to Xuanxue 玄学 (whatever that means exactly) thinker He Yan 何晏 (190–249). As he does for each of the four commentaries he discusses, Makeham outlines the structure of the commentary itself and the lives of its author(s). Makeham proceeds to critique the attribution of *Lunyu jijie* to He Yan, based on the lack of persuasive support for it. In particular, the absence of identifiable Xuanxue thought in the work calls into question its sole attribution to He Yan. This undermines any attempt to use He's ideas to analyze the content of the commentary. Instead, Makeham would give greater weight to the group nature of the creation of *Lunyu jijie*, and thus more credit to He Yan's often overlooked

collaborators, Sun Yong 孙雍 (3rd c.), Zheng Chong 郑冲 (ob. 274), Cao Xi 曹喜 (ob. 249), and Xun Yi 荀彧 (205–74).

Makeham goes on to argue that the editors conceived of their interpretive project as emulation of the Sage: “[T]he editors of the *Collected Explanations* [*Lunyu jijie*] sought to present that commentary as a performative expression of Confucius’ claim to have been a transmitter rather than a creator” (48). Makeham suggests that one of the purposes of this commentary was to challenge the interpretive influence of Sima Qian’s 史记 (145–ca. 86 BC) biographical depiction of Kongzi 孔子 in the *Shi ji* 史记 “Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家, and the pseudo-Kong Anguo 公羊传 on understanding of the *Analects*. They carried out their project through selective citation of earlier commentaries, minimizing the appearance of creation but adding their own explanations as necessary.

Huang Kan 黄侃 (488–545) and his *Lunyu yishu* 论语义疏 are the subjects of Makeham’s second section. Huang’s work is an example of *shu* 疏 sub-commentary, and this section is also an investigation of this form. Like He Yan et al., Huang draws from the works of his predecessors, but without effacing his editorial fingerprints. Indeed, Huang uses his commentary to openly advance his own ideas, and the work is “a mature example of the commentary form as a mode of philosophical writing” (80).

Huang’s ideas center around a hierarchy of intrinsic ability among people. The “desires” and “emotional responses” (106) that a person possesses determine his potential. A sage, however, is something else. He is beyond desire and emotion, and is born already possessed of supreme knowledge. A non-sage can aspire, at best, to “becoming a ‘public’ model for the edification of others”, and “a gentleman ... an essentially ‘private’ goal”—but, “the quality of one’s nature was immutable” (124). Sagehood is out of the reach of the common person. Huang conceives of studying sages, particularly Kongzi, as following their “traces” (*ji* 迹) in the written word, which allow the latter-day reader to encounter the sage’s teachings, albeit in an inferior manner. Thus, the way of the sage is yet available to the person endowed with the requisite aptitude. Makeham shows that Huang’s ideas are similar in many respects to certain notions current in his time, particularly those found in certain schools of Buddhism, and in the practice of applying grades to candidates for official positions.

The next commentary that Makeham examines is the *Lunyu jizhu* 论语集注 compiled by Zhu Xi. Zhu Xi is one of the most influential Chinese intellectuals in history, and Makeham’s treatment is correspondingly nuanced and multifaceted. He begins with a discussion of the historical background of *daoxue* 道学. Zhu Xi saw himself connected to this lineage of thinkers, which included Kongzi and others, by *daotong* 道统, “the interconnecting thread of the way” (177).

Zhu’s single most influential work is probably the 12th century anthology of texts and commentary now called the *Sishu zhangju* 四书章句, which formed as a central part of the official examinations for centuries.¹ These four works formed an “alternative canon” (181), and they—especially the *Lunyu*—offered access to the teachings of Kongzi. The teachings of the sage are not captured in the written words, but exist outside the text. Contrary to what is sometimes reported about Zhu Xi, he did not reject all earlier commentaries and valued them for scholia. However, “Primary and fundamental authority emanated from the teachings and personalities of the sages and worthies of antiquity” (189), as revealed through the right commentaries (including Zhu’s own).

1 The *Sishu* (Four books) are the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* 孟子, together with two texts excerpted from the *Li ji* 礼记, the *Daxue* 大学 and the *Zhongyong* 中庸.

Zhu Xi thought that reading the right texts with proper technique would enable even a mundane person to achieve the understanding and other personal characteristics that comprise sagehood. This is the center of Zhu Xi's hermeneutic project: "learning to be a sage" (197). This object is achievable only through study, for sages as well as the ordinary, though the greater inherent abilities of the sage make learning easier. But this potential for sagehood is only theoretical. Through examination of Kongzi's disciples as depicted by Zhu Xi, Makeham shows how the virtues necessary for sagehood lay beyond what could be attained through deliberate exertion. In the end, Zhu cites no ordinary person who achieved sagehood through study, suggesting that this is impossible.

The final commentary discussed is the *Lunyu zheng yi* 论语正义, begun by Liu Baonan 刘宝楠 (1791–1855) and completed by his son Liu Gongmian 刘恭冕 (1824–1883). Makeham convincingly shows how even in this dense commentary, there is a deeper argument, that, "philology (or method) is the path of 'philosophy' ... the latter provides the *raison d'être* for the practice of the former" (257).

Liu Baonan identified himself with the Hanxue 汉学 movement, a Qing dynasty scholarly movement that gave precedence to Han dynasty source materials. Despite this, Liu had a complex relationship with Han and other sources. Convinced that Qing philology was superior to its predecessors, he neither accepts everything asserted even by such respected Han-era exegetes as Zheng Xuan, nor rejects categorically even "heterodox texts" like the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 (286). Instead, he confidently draws from across the range of early texts. This is part of an evolution in ideology, which led Liu to argue in favor of an expanded canon, to include the works of other exponents of Confucian thought, like Xunzi 荀子 (ob. 238 BC). It is also emblematic of Liu's ability to combine information of disparate provenance in his quest for the thread of Kongzi's teachings.

Liu understood Kongzi as a "preserver and transmitter of the cultural legacy of the early Zhou" (301), an understanding communicated through interpretation of signs left within his works. As an exegetical strategy, Liu interpreted the *Lunyu* in terms of a context formed by historical and quasi-historical texts, particularly the *Chunqiu* 春秋 and the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊传. Through his works, Kongzi achieved as transmitter the high position denied to him in the political sphere. And like Kongzi, who tried to "re-establish a balance between *wen* [文] and *zhi* [礼] ritual institutions" (320), Liu tried to re-create a syncretic harmony between the abstract and factual, "theory/philosophy" and "philology" (345). Last comes the "Epilogue," which mainly recapitulates the major arguments of the book.

Overall, *Transmitters and Creators* is clearly written and persuasively argued. The sophistication of Makeham's theoretical framework is nicely balanced with sinological detail. The book is well-structured, and includes summary and recapitulation to make sure that the main points don't get lost. It is clearly the best western treatment of commentary since Steven van Zoeren's *Poetry and Personality*.²

Since Makeham defines his project narrowly and clearly, and fulfills his stated aims, I find little to criticize. I do wish that he had treated Zheng Xuan, an interesting and controversial figure who is often lightly dismissed. Makeham excuses himself from this task, as he has already written an article on Zheng Xuan.³ But without denigrating the earlier, solid work, I think this book represents a significant advance, and Zheng Xuan could

2 Stanford: Stanford University Press 1991.

3 John MAKEHAM: „The Earliest Extant Commentary on *Lunyu: Lunyu Zheng shi zhu*“, in: *T'oung Pao* 83 (1997), p.260–99.

prove a fruitful topic. I also wonder about the decision to treat Zhu Xi, well-known in his own right and the subject of a really colossal body of secondary literature, alongside men like Huang Kan and Liu Baonan, who are much less well-known and thoroughly treated. Of course, it is part of Makeham's point that these commentators were all thinkers, not only Zhu Xi. But the book might have been even more original and satisfying if it had shed further light on those who have received relatively little scholarly attention. Finally, Makeham is sometimes lightly dismissive of those positions with which he disagrees, deeming their proponents to be, e.g., possessed of "specious logic" (280). In general, arguments belonging to another episteme can seem questionable, but they are better treated with analysis instead of pejorative. This can permit the reader to understand not only the author's opinion (which will surely be clear enough), but also the internal logic of the position discussed.

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