

Characteristics of Chinese Hermeneutics Exhibited in the History of *Mencius* Exegesis

HUANG Chun-chieh*

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I. Introduction

I.1: This paper explicates the characteristics of Chinese hermeneutics and its distinctively Chinese cultural characteristics as illuminated and instantiated by its long historical tradition of Confucian exegesis on the Mencian Classics.

This massive exegetical tradition in China has the situation of its origination quite similar to that of Western hermeneutics. Both arose out of a gap between interpretive subject and raw classical text as it confronted him. Interpretation of the past or writings of the past is a process of understanding and decoding which is always linguistic in character. The incommunicable differences between the linguistic environment, in a wide sense, of the reader and that of the text, due to their mutual alienation in time and locality, came to set up a wall standing in the way of our understanding of the ancient text. Such an exegetical impasse provoked an

* Professor of History, National Taiwan University.

inception of hermeneutics.¹

Given this commonality of generation of hermeneutics in China and in the West, the task of this paper is to explore the distinctive features of Chinese hermeneutics that set it apart from those of the Western.

1.2: The long history of Chinese hermeneutics is divided into three different traditions, the Confucian, the Buddhistic, and the Taoist. The Confucian tradition is noted for its peculiarly pragmatic tendency to manage the world. This tradition of Confucian hermeneutics has three distinctive features—personal, political, apologetic:

1. Hermeneutics for *personal* cultivation of life in admiration and imitation of ancient sages: Prominent examples are drawn from Chu Hsi (朱熹, Hui-an 晦庵, 1130–1200). Chu Hsi's *Ssu-shu chi-chu* 四書集註 (Collected commentaries on the *Four Books*) hammered out his own philosophy. And in interpreting Mencius' "*chih yen yang ch'i*" 知言養氣 (knowing words, cultivating *ch'i*), Chu Hsi exhibited in Mencius' notion and passage Chu's own deeply felt and cultivated life-view.

2. Hermeneutics for *political* operations and maneuvers: Chinese monarchy was centered on the ruler; the political ideal of Confucianism is

1 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (tr. and ed. by David F. Linge) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 3–17. Ch'en Li (陳澧, 1810–1882) was a Confucianist of Ch'ing Dynasty who said, "*Ku* 詁 (to interpret) means *ku* 古 (ancient), that is, to cut through our differences with the ancient, which is thus made understandable to us. Time has ancient and present; land has four directions. Once mutually separated far and wide, languages would not communicate. Distance in land requires translation; distance in time requires interpretation. Translation transforms other states into our neighbor villages; interpretation renders ancient and today into morning and evening" (*Tung-shu tu-shu chi* 東塾讀書記 [Notes gathered at eastern study], Taipei: T'ai-wan shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1967, Jen-jen wen-k'u [Everyman's library], 11:183). Both Gadamer and Ch'en point to the same origin of hermeneutics in the breakdown of communication between the ancients and ourselves today.

centered on the people. In desperation, many Confucian scholars devoted themselves to the ostensibly pure scholarly task of writing commentaries on the classics, seemingly completely harmless in itself, to which they entrusted their passionate dreams of “*ching shih chi min*” 經世濟民 (managing the world for popular welfare), as K’ang Yu-wei (康有為, 1859–1927) did when he wrote *Meng-tzu wei* 孟子微 (Mencius in depth) at the critical juncture of the early twentieth century when the western powers came one after another, to “eat up” China piecemeal or in a gulp.

3. Hermeneutics as *apologetics* for a specific school of thought: Many Confucian scholars used their commentaries on the classics as weapons to defend Confucianism against Buddhism and Taoism. For instance, Han Yü (韓愈, 768–824) wrote “Yüan tao” 原道 (Inquiring Tao) and “Yü Meng shang-shu hsü” 與孟尚書序 (Letter to Meng shang-shu), claiming that the *Tao* of Confucius was handed down through Mencius. Han Yü redefined the Confucian *tao* to expel Buddhism and Taoism. Again, Tai Chen (戴震, 1724–1777) was a Confucian scholar in the Ch’ing dynasty who wrote *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng* 孟子字義疏證 (An evidential study of the meaning of the terms in the *Mencius*) to reject the thoughts of Sung Neo-Confucianism, Yang Tzu, Mo Tzu, Buddha, and Lao Tzu.

1.3: Of the above three features of Chinese hermeneutics, the first is most important: reading the Classics is for the sake of the reader’s self-cultivation in longing admiration of the ancient sages. Textual hermeneutics is an expressive means towards “learning for one’s self” (爲己之學 *wei chi chih hsüeh*), weaving textual studies into one’s personal existence, and one’s life with the text’s into a lived unity, in line with the tradition of “welding the old to forge the new” (融舊以鑄新 *jung chiu i chu hsin*). The second hermeneutical feature is related to this-worldly sociopolitics. The Confucian scholars dug into the ancient texts for new interpretations, in order to find some new solutions to their current

political issues. This is the well-known route that “goes back to the roots to open up the new” (返本以開新 *fan pen i k'ai hsin*).

The third feature of Chinese hermeneutics is apologetics. Living in the midst of the maelstrom turbulent with many competing ideas and schools, the exegete of the ancient classical texts tried thereby to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the views he upheld, and prove the opponents' views as unorthodox. This is the way to “stir the turbid to scoop the pure” (激濁以揚清 *chi cho i yang ch'ing*). With Mencius scholarship as focus, this paper explicates the above three features of Chinese hermeneutics. The paper has five sections. The present Section I has presented the gist of the paper.

Section II explicates the hermeneutics of self-cultivation. With interpretations of Mencius' “knowing words, cultivating *ch'i*” (*chih yen yang ch'i*) (2A2) as an example, the Section explains how (2.1) the commentator poured his whole life and mind into understanding and experiencing the passage, and (2.2) let the passages elucidate and explain his process of self-cultivation—existential reciprocity of text-commentator illumination.

Section III explicates the hermeneutics of political pragmatics. Citing Sung Confucian scholars' debates over Mencius' political ideas and K'ang Yu-wei's interpretation of the *Mencius* in the late Ch'ing period, I describe the two characteristics of such political hermeneutics: (3.1) Chinese politics is ethics socialized; (3.2) Chinese politics has been centered on *chih tao* (治道 the way to rule and manage), not on *cheng tao* (政道 the way to reign and govern).²

2 Cf. Mou Tsung-san 牟宗三, *Cheng-tao yü chih-tao* 政道與治道 (Way to govern and way to rule) (Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chü, 1961). Mou said, “China has for long advanced to the highest realm of self-awareness in the way to rule-manage, but is

Section IV cites Huang Tsung-hsi's (黃宗羲, 1610–1695) *Meng-tzu shih shuo* 孟子師說 (On Teacher's views of Mencius) and Tai Chen to explicate the hermeneutics of apologetics, which often has two fronts, (4.1) internally to explicate the true orthodox implications in a specific school the commentator advocates, (4.2) externally to brand the opponent's view as heretical and repudiate it. Section V proposes some concluding observations, Chinese hermeneutics as primarily personal and pragmatic, to sum up the above explications.

II. Chinese Hermeneutics of Self-Cultivation

The first outstanding characteristic of Chinese hermeneutics is that the commentator entrusts his personal process of self-cultivation to the commented ancient texts of the classics. (2.1) Many commentators read the classical texts in light of their personal spiritual experience, making the texts into their record of "pilgrims' progress." Hermeneutics in China is thoroughly experiential. (2.2) And this hermeneutical exercise involves the entirety of the exegete's life, hence the existential character of Chinese classics. We cite generations of various commentaries on Mencius' "*chih yen yang ch'i*" (knowing words, cultivating *ch'i*) to demonstrate this distinctive feature of Chinese hermeneutics.

2.1: The experiential character of Chinese hermeneutics is nowhere more evident than in commentaries on that *locus classicus*, Mencius' "*chih yen yang ch'i*." Chu Hsi devoted much of his energy to this passage. The entire Volume 52 of *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 朱子語類 (*Classified Conversations of Master Chu*) is on this passage. During the prolonged dialogues back and

incapable of the way of reigning-governing. Thus some say that China has had for long only the way to rule, but not to govern, only ruling with bureaucrats, not with government" (p.1).

forth among Chu Hsi and his disciples we never find them regarding the *Mencius* as an objective text unrelated to their personal lives. They all melted their life experiences into their various readings of the *Mencius*. After these hermeneutical struggles of subject-object inter-involvement, Chu Hsi finally sighed, “If any word I said is not with Mencius, Heaven detest me, Heaven detest me!”³

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

In his *Meng-tzu chi-chu* 孟子集註 (Collected commentaries on the *Mencius*), *Meng-tzu huo wen* 孟子或問 (Various discussions on the *Mencius*), and Volume 52 of *Chu-tzu yü-lei*, Chu Hsi always consistently interpreted *Mencius*’ “*chih yen*” 知言 (knowing words) and “*yang ch’i*” 養氣 (cultivating *ch’i*) with “*ch’iung li*” 窮理 (utmost pursuit of *li*).

3 Li Ching-te 黎靖德, ed., *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 朱子語類 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, hsin chiao-tien pen, 1986; later references are to this edition), 52:1250-1251.

4 *Ibid.*, 136: 3243.

5 Chu Hsi, “Ta Kuo Chung-hui” 答郭仲晦, in *Chu Wen-kung chi* 朱文公集 (Collected works of Chu Hsi) (*Ssu-pu ts’ung-k’an ch’u-pien suo-pen*), 37: 601 (former half)-602 (latter half).

This line of approach generated a new bunch of questions such as “Why and how could our mind–heart (*hsin* 心) know the *li* of things and events?” “Which comes first, ‘knowing words’ or ‘cultivating *ch’i*’?”⁶ These questions are nonexistent or only latent in the classical Mencius studies, yet turned out to be major problems in Chu Hsi’s Mencius hermeneutics. This is due to Chu Hsi interpreting Mencius through his own personal undergoings, no longer an ivory–tower engagement but an experiential approach.

2.2: Such an experiential approach in exegesis endows the classics with profound existential significance, never mummies in the museum, never objects of “*k’ou erh chih hsüeh*” 口耳之學 (mouth–and–ears studies). The classics are now the commentator’s personal record of spiritual life–progress. A case in point is generations of commentators’ views on “*chi i*” (gathering rightness) in *Mencius*’ Chapter on “*chih yen yang ch’i*” (knowing words, cultivating *ch’i*).

Wang Yang–ming (王陽明, 1472–1829) parted with Chu Hsi’s studies after years of close mutual involvements with them.⁷ Wang Yang–ming had Mencius’ “*chi i*” (gathering rightness) mutually corroborate with Wang’s hard–won notion of “*chih liang chih*” (attaining the original

6 See further, Huang Chun–chieh, “Chu–tzu tui Meng–tzu chih–yen yang–ch’i shuo ti ch’üan–shih chi ch’i hui–hsiang” 朱子對孟子知言養氣說的詮釋及其迴響 (Chu Hsi’s commentaries on Mencius’ “knowing words, cultivating *ch’i*” and their repercussions), *Ts’ing–hua hsüeh pao*, new 18:2 (December, 1988), pp. 305–343, the revised version of which became part of my *Meng hsüeh ssu–hsiang shih lun* 孟學思想史論 (On the history of Mencius scholarship), Volume 2, Chapter 5, (Taipei: Chung–yang yen–chiu–yüan Chung–kuo wen–che yen–chiu–so, 1997).

7 Cf. Wing–tsit Chan 陳榮捷, “Ts’ung Chu–tzu wan–nien ting lun k’an Yang–ming chih yü Chu–tzu” (Viewing the Wang–Chu relation from ‘Chu’s definitive views in his later years’), in *Chu hsüeh lun chi* 朱學論集 (Collected studies on Chu Hsi) (Taipei: T’ai–wan hsüeh–sheng shu–chü 1982), pp. 353–383.

knowledge), saying, “‘Gathering rightness’ is sheerly ‘attaining the original knowledge.’ To say ‘gathering rightness’ may not appear intelligible at first; to mention ‘attaining the original knowledge’ at once gives us its practical utility.”⁸ Again, “the original knowledge is the inner core of the heart–mind.”⁹ To “attain the original knowledge” is to “sheerly attain the original knowledge of my heart–mind.”¹⁰ In Wang’s mind, the heart–mind (hsin) and the principle (*li*) are of the same essence, in tandem, in unity. Inevitably, Wang interpreted Mencius’ “gathering rightness” as “attaining the original knowledge,”¹¹ stating that “‘gathering rightness’ is to restore the original essence of the heart–mind.”

Clearly, Wang interpreted Mencius’ “gathering rightness” in terms of Wang’s own experiential “attainment of the original knowledge.” In a similar experiential vein, Chu also interpreted Mencius in terms of Chu’s own “*ke wu ch’iung li*” 格物窮理 (investigating things, thoroughly pursuing principle), saying, “‘Gathering rightness’ is gathering goodness, that is, having all events conform to rightness.”¹² Many places in Volume 52 of *Chu-tzu yü-lei* develop this thesis. With his personal experience as the

8 Wing-tsit Chan, *Wang Yang-ming Ch’uan-hsi lu hsiang-chu chi-p’ing* 王陽明傳習錄詳註集評 (Wang’s *Instructions for practical living*, its detailed commentaries and collected comments), Volume II, “Ta Nieh Wen-wei, erh” 答聶文蔚，二 (answering Nieh Wen-wei, 2), Item 187, p. 268.

9 *Ibid.*, Volume II, “Ta Lu Yüan-ching shu” 答陸原靜書 (Answer to Lu Yüan-ching), Item 152, p. 214.

10 Wang Yang-ming, “Ta Hsüeh Wen” 大學問, *Wang Wen-ch’eng-kung ch’üan-shu* 王文成公全書 (Complete works of Wang Yang-ming) (*Ssu-pu ts’ung-k’an ch’u-pien suo-pen*), 26:736–740.

11 Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, Item 81, p. 107, quoted in my *op. cit.*, Chapter 5.

12 *Meng-tzu chi-chu*, in *Ssu-shu chang-chü chi-chu* 四書章句集註 (Collected commentaries on chapters and phrases of the *Four Books*) (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1982), 3:232.

basis, Chu took Mencius' *chi* (collecting) as *chu* (gathering), *i* (rightness) as *li* (principle) variously residing in things.¹³ They turned the Classics into records of, if not commentaries on, their own personal experience, existentializing the Classics, as it were. All this demonstrates the experiential and existential character of Chinese hermeneutics.

III. Chinese Hermeneutics as Political Pragmatics

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

3.1: We best explain the Chinese hermeneutics as moral politics by citing the debates among Sung Confucian scholars on Mencius. My previous studies on them revealed that the explosive cinder that touched off their debates was in the thesis, "Mencius did not honor the Chou kings." Here at issue were three points: (a) the king-hegemon distinction, (b) the ruler-subject relation, and (c) whether or not to honor Confucius.

The debates were between two groups of scholars, those who honored Mencius and those who did not, and they conducted their hermeneutical debates in a moral context. Wang An-shih (王安石, 1021-1086) was a moral idealist, who defended Mencius' "pro-king, anti-hegemon" stand,

13 *Chu-tzu yü-lei*, 52:1259.

took the Classical Three Dynasties as his model, and insisted on patterning the current political institution after the legendary kings, Yao and Shun.

Ssu-ma Kuang (司馬光, 1019–1086), who realistically opposed Mencius, also adopted the position of government by morality. On the ruler–subject relation, Ssu-ma Kuang criticized Mencius for not honoring the Chou kings.

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

The moral character of Chinese hermeneutics came from the predominantly moral tendency of Chinese intellectual tradition, and specifically from Mencius' political ideals as fundamentally moral. We are used to the Western idea of political realm as where negotiations and compromises take place among conflicting interests of various social groups and classes. In contrast, Mencius regarded the political realm as that of moral community guaranteed by the universal necessity of value–awareness deep within the human heart–mind. Thus Mencius said (4A3), “It was with humaneness that the classic Three Dynasties won the world,

14 Huang, Chun-chieh, “Sung-ju tui-yü Meng-tzu ssu-hsiang ti cheng-pien chi ch'i yün-han ti wen-t'i” 宋儒對於孟子政治思想的爭辯及其蘊涵的問題——以孟子對周王的態度為中心 (Sung scholars' debates on Mencius' ideas and their implied problems), in Huang Chun-chieh, ed., *Meng-tzu ssu-hsiang ti li-shih fa-chan* 孟子思想的歷史發展 (Historical developments of Mencius' ideas) (Taipei: Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan Chung-kuo wen-che yen-chiu-so, 1995), pp. 69–128.

and with inhumanity that they lost it.”¹⁵ Such Mencius’ moral orientation in political thinking much influenced later generations of exegetes, who naturally infused many moral implications into their Mencius hermeneutics.

3.2: Strangely, however, this moral orientation of Chinese political hermeneutics is coupled predominantly with the way of managerial ruling (*chih tao*) more than the way of analysis of principles of politics (*cheng tao*). K’ang Yu-wei’s interpretation of Mencius can be cited to illustrate this point. K’ang Yu-wei wrote his *Meng-tzu wei* in 1901, at the critical time when many Western powers were daily coming over to invade China. K’ang intended to write on Mencius so as to propose a solution for China to be out of its early twentieth-century crisis, through a creative amalgamation of the age-old Mencius tradition with Western democracy, liberty, equality, social Darwinism, etc.¹⁶

We find, upon its close reading, that K’ang was primarily interested in institutional arrangement such as setting up legislative assembly, promoting trade and commerce, seeking balance, etc., instead of paying attention to democratic principles. This may have been due to the national critical situation where the intelligentsia at the time had to seek some quick enlightenment for a way out.

15 Huang, Chun-chieh, *Meng Hsüeh ssu-hsiang shih lun* (On the history of Mencius scholarship), Volume 1 (Taipei: Tung-ta t’u-shu kung-ssu, 1991), Chapter 6.

16 Huang Chun-chieh, “Ts’ung *Meng-tzu wei* k’an K’ang Yu-wei tui Chung-Hsi ssu-hsiang ti t’iao-jung 從《孟子微》看康有為對中西思想的調融” (K’ang’s reconciliation of Chinese ideas and Western thought via his *Mencius in Depth*), in Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan Chin-tai-shih yen-chiu-so, ed., *Chin-shih Chung-kuo ching-shih ssu-hsiang yen-t’ao-hui lun-wen-chi* 近世中國經世思想研討會論文集 (Proceedings of conference on political ideas in modern China) (Taipei: Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan Chin-tai-shih yen-chiu-so, 1981), pp. 577-605. This essay is in my *Meng hsüeh ssu-hsiang shih lun*, as Chapter 9.

IV. Chinese Hermeneutics as Apologetics

The third feature, Chinese hermeneutics as apologetics, has two types: (4.1) Internally, textual hermeneutics of the classics was often a means to refute as “unorthodox” opposing views or interpretations within a school of thought, (4.2) externally, such a hermeneutics was often a weapon with which to reject other schools of thought as “heretical.”

4.1: In the long tradition of Chinese hermeneutics, the same passage often gave rise to several mutually inconsistent views and interpretations. A renewed exegesis of the passage in question would be attempted to establish one’s ideas to be “orthodox” and others not.

Huang Tsung-hsi (黃宗羲, 1610–1695), for instance, renewed his Mencius hermeneutics so as to criticize Chu Hsi. Huang’s *Meng-tzu shih shuo* 孟子師說 was a representative case of new-scholarship in the *Four Books* in the late Ming period.

Chu Hsi’s *Ssu-shu chi-chu* came to be the standard volume to be tested on in the civil-service examination since 1313. With this event, the Chu-Hsi-scholarship came to be established as an orthodox tradition in the state officialdom. Interpretations of the *Four Books* till the middle of Ming dynasty (1368–1662) were very much within the orbit of Chu’s *Chi-chu*. As Sano Koji 佐野公治 pointed out, studies of the Classics from Sung to Ming dynasties can be regarded as centered on Chu’s studies of the *Four Books* (and *Five Classics*)—inheriting them, developing them, then discarding them. Wang Yang-ming was the *watershed* in this process. In the late Ming period, the *Great Learning* was liberally interpreted, and Buddhist ideas were also infused in great amount.¹⁷

17 Sano Koji, *Shi-sho Gaku Shi no Kenkyu* 四書學史研究 (Researches on the history of studies of the *Four Books*) (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1988), Introduction, Section 1.

During the late Ming period, there arose a “new scholarship on the *Four Books*,” whose fashion it was to criticize and reject Chu’s interpretation. Huang Tsung-hsi’s *Meng-tzu shih shuo* was one instance in this period, where he criticized Chu Hsi on two theses: (a) *Hsin* (heart-mind) and *li* (principle) are two, not one, (b) *Chih yen* (knowing words) is prior to *yang ch’i* (cultivating ch’i). This critique originated in Huang’s inner monism as divergent from Chu’s *li-ch’i* dualism.¹⁸ This is a clash of two schools via divergent Mencius hermeneutics, an instance of hermeneutics as apologetics.

4.2: The second feature of Chinese hermeneutics as apologetics is that it was used as weapon against other traditions of thought. We know that historically China has three traditions, each attacking the other with their own renewed exegeses of the classics to show how wrong the other school is. As Hsiao Kung-ch’üan once said, “the pre-Ch’in thoughts amounted to forging the novel out of the old, so as to establish norms and set up models for later thinking.”¹⁹

Tai Chen 戴震 (1724–1777) was a Confucian scholar in Ch’ing dynasty who wrote *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*, probing into the “true” original meanings of Mencius’ words and phrases in order to criticize Sung Confucians and reject Buddhists and Taoists. In his Preface he said,²⁰

18 Huang Chun-chieh, “Huang Tsung-hsi tui Meng-tzu hsin-hsüeh ti fa-hui” 黃宗羲對孟子心學的發揮 (Huang Tsung-shi development of Mencius’s thought of heart-mind), in my *Meng-hsüeh ssu-hsiang-shin lun*, II, Chapter.7.

19 Hsiao Kung-ch’üan 蕭公權, *Chung-kuo cheng-chih ssu-hsiang shih* 中國政治思想史 (History of Chinese political thought) (Taipei: Lien-ching ch’u-pan shih-yeh kung-ssu, 1980), 1:4.

20 See *Tai Chen ch’üan-chi* 戴震全集 (Collected works of Tai Chen) (Peking: Ch’ing-hua ta-hsüeh ch’u-pan-she, 1991), Volume I, p. 150. Cf. Ann-ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman, *Tai Chen on Mencius: Explorations in Words and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 66.

“Mencius argued with Yang Tzu and Mo Tzu. Later people often hear about words of Yang Tzu, Mo Tzu, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Buddha, taking them to confound Mencius’ words; thus people of later times should not be silent on this point. If I were to be incapable of knowing this, I would be silent. If I were to know it and not speak out, I would be disloyal, betray my studies in relation to ancient sages, and betray my humanity in relation to all people who come after me. Thus with trepidation I had to write these three volumes of *Meng-tzu tzu-i shu-cheng*. Han Yü once said, ‘Following schools of Yang Tzu, Mo Tzu, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Buddhism to desire the Ways of the sages, is to cut off the harbor and water to desire going to the sea. To seek the Ways of the sages, we must begin with Mencius.’ These words, indeed, cannot be changed.”

Tai re-fathomed the original meanings of Mencius’ important concepts such as *li* 理 (principle), *t’ien tao* 天道 (heavenly Tao), *hsing* 性 (nature), *ts’ai* 才 (ability), *jen i* 仁義 (humaneness, righteousness), *ch’eng* 誠 (sincerity), *ch’üan* 權 (expediency), etc., to point out how unaware the previous Sung hermeneutics was of being mixed with elements of Buddhism and Taoism, and criticized the dualism of *li* (principle) and *yü* 慾 (desire) as a view polluted with Buddhism and Taoism. Tai continued, saying,²¹

Their harms much exceed those of Shen–Han legalists as this! Have the Six Classics and books by Confucius and Mencius ever regarded *li* as a thing external to humans, who give out feelings and desires, and exerted pressures on them?

Tai interpreted Mencius’ *li*, saying, “It is what is in conformity with our heart–mind (*hsin*) that is called *li* (principle), *i* (righteousness); what is not

²¹ *Ibid.*, Volume I, p. 161.

yet, but only existing in human opinions, is not yet *li, i.*”²² Tai thus concretely refuted Sung Confucians’ view that *li* originated in *t’ien* (heaven).

V. Conclusion

5.1: This essay has explained Chinese hermeneutics to have three types: hermeneutics as personal cultivation, as political pragmatics, and as apologetics. Since hermeneutics originated in the breakdown of communication between the contemporary reading subject and the ancient text, the first type of hermeneutics as personal cultivation is primary in origin and importance. For hermeneutics bridges our gap—linguistic, contextual—with the ancient sages, so as for us to befriend them, be in dialogue with them, in order to cultivate and fulfill ourselves.

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

5.3: The above three types share in common the writing commentaries on the Classics, so as to poetically *evoke* (*hsing* 興) the reader to metaphorically (*pi* 比) grasp what is truly there from time immemorial, by way of longing aspiration towards the sages and their views expressed in the classics, of advising the power that be with the immutable political

²² *Ibid.*, p. 153; Chin and Freeman, *op.cit.*, pp. 72–73.

views of the classical ancients, of redressing mistaken views in various divergent schools.²³

5.4: Finally, we must ask whether such Chinese hermeneutics is an intellectual activity or a practical one, that is, whether it is an intellectual exploration of the unknown ancient world in cognitive curiosity, or using such exploration as an effective means towards the sociopolitical world of action. We must answer that Chinese hermeneutics belongs to the latter class, an intellectual praxis. This praxis is twofold, inner and outer. Deep within, the hermeneutical praxis crucially assists our existential cultivation, excitingly sublimating our total life up to the level of ancient sages. Chinese hermeneutics is “learning for one’s self” (爲己之學 *wei chi chih hsüeh*)²⁴. Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming, for instance, have all gone through Mencius with their own personal life-experiences, thereby opened out in their novel directions, respectively creating their distinctive schools.

Externally, Chinese hermeneutics is pragmatic, actively engaged in the struggles with the cultural world and the political world, to apply their fruits of personal cultivation therein. The intelligentsia during Southern and Northern Sung periods were engaged in debates over Mencius’ political ideas. K’ang Yu-wei of the late Ch’ing period drew democratic ideas into the studies of Mencius. They all exhibited external pragmatic

23 Cf. Huang Chun-chieh, “Chung-kuo ku-tai Ju-chia li-shih ssu-wei ti fang-fa chi ch’i yün-yung” 中國古代儒家歷史思維的方法及其運用 (Methods and functions of historical thinking in Chinese classical Confucianism), in *Chung-kuo wen-che yen-chiu chi-k’an*, No.3 (March, 1993), pp. 361-390; “Historical Thinking in Classical Confucianism: Historical Argumentation from the Three Dynasties,” in Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher, eds., *Time and Space in Chinese Culture* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 72-88.

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

hermeneutics at work. Furthermore, in all these cases pragmatic exigencies often provoked the intellectual hermeneutical endeavors on the classics.

Thus, ostensibly intellectual activities of Chinese hermeneutics are really all of a piece with the exegetes' life-situations. In this regard, Chinese hermeneutics is a "learning of life" truly so called.

Characteristics of Chinese Hermeneutics Exhibited in the History of *Mencius* Exegesis

HUANG Chun-chieh

This paper explicates the characteristics of Chinese hermeneutics and its distinctively Chinese cultural characteristics as illuminated and instantiated by its long historical tradition of Confucian exegesis on the Mencian Classics.

This essay has explained Chinese hermeneutics as having three types: hermeneutics as personal cultivation, as political pragmatics, and as apologetics. Since hermeneutics originated in the breakdown of communication between the contemporary reading subject and the ancient text, the first type of hermeneutics as personal cultivation is primary in origin and importance. For hermeneutics bridges our gap—linguistic, contextual—with the ancient sages, so as for us to befriend them, be in dialogue with them, in order to cultivate and fulfill ourselves. In this respect, hermeneutics as political pragmatics and as apologetics are two directions in which the subjectivity of the exegete stretches to express himself. Faced with the risky complex political situation of the times, the exegete has no option but to propose his view through the route of his ostensibly objective textual research, reinterpretations of the classics. Faced with the bewildering plethora of competing schools and views, one has to return to, to dig into, the original classics, to bring out, to demonstrate “truths” to which he is committed, thereby to refute “heresies.” The above

three types share in common the writing commentaries on the Classics, so as to poetically *evoke* (*hsing* 興) the reader to metaphorically (*pi* 比) grasp what is truly there from time immemorial, by way of longing aspiration towards the sages and their views expressed in the classics, of advising the powers that be with the immutable political views of the classical ancients, of redressing mistaken views in various divergent schools.

從孟學詮釋史論中國詮釋學之特質

黃 俊 傑

提 要

本文以中國思想史所見之孟子學詮釋史為中心，分析中國詮釋學之三大面向：一、作為解經者心路歷程之表述的詮釋學：許多儒者透過註經以表述企慕聖賢境界之心路歷程，如朱子集註《四書》以建立一己之哲學，解釋《孟子》「知言養氣」說以表詮個人對生命之體認；王陽明（1472-1529）在其「百死千難」的心路歷程中所得之「心即理」與「致良知」之精神體驗中，重新解釋孟子學，都是具有代表性的例證。二、作為政治學的儒家詮釋學：由於帝制中國的政治體制是以君主為主體，而儒家政治理想是以人民為主體，儒家之價值理想難以在現實世界中實踐，於是，許多儒家學者在有志難伸之餘，以經典註疏之學術事業寄寓其經世濟民之政治理想。這種詮釋學是一種道德學，而且其中「治道」遠多於「政道」，如康有為（1859-1927）著《孟子微》於二十世紀列強對中國鯨吞蠶食之危機年代，皆寄託其救世宏圖於名山事業之中。三、作為護教學的儒家詮釋學：歷代儒者以經典註疏作為武器，批駁佛、老而為儒學辯護者代不乏人，如韓愈（768-824）撰〈原道〉、〈與孟尚書書〉，以孟子傳孔子之道，認為其「功不在禹下」，皆有詮釋經典以護教之用心在焉。王陽明通過對孟子的「盡心」與「集義」等概念的重新解釋以批駁朱子學；清儒戴震（1724-1777）在西元一七七七年撰《孟子字義證疏》駁斥宋儒及佛、老之思想，也是這種類型的中國詮釋學的代表作品。

在以上這三個中國詮釋學的突出面向中，第一個面向較為重要。歷代許多儒者註疏經典，常常或是作為一種個人安身立命的手段，或是作為表達個人企慕聖域的心路歷程的一種方式。這正是儒家「為己之學」的一種表現，而將經典解釋與個人生命交織為一，這是「融舊以鑄新」的傳統思考方式。第二種面向與詮釋者對社會、政治世界的展望有關。詮釋者企圖透過重新解釋經典的途徑，對他所面對的社會、政治問題提出解決方案，這是一種「返本以開新」的思考模式。第三面向則是詮釋者身處於各種思潮強烈激盪的情境中，為了彰顯他所認同的思想系統之正統性，常通過重新詮釋經典的方式，排擊「非正統」思想。這是一種「激濁以揚清」的思考模式。

關鍵詞：詮釋學 《孟子》 儒學