

English Translation
of
The Four Books

The Council of Chinese Cultural Renaissance
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Taipei, 1979

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of
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Preface

The Four Books of Confucian philosophy have long been regarded as the foundation of Chinese culture. Their influence on the Chinese way of life has been indelible. In them are found not only a vast reservoir of humanistic thought and practical wisdom but also excellent specimens of epigrams, proverbs, dialogues and sketches. Great works like the Four Books are indeed the treasure of not just one nation nor of one age alone. They have a perennial appeal to men and women of all ages and belong to the common heritage of mankind.

That the importance of these Chinese classics has been acknowledged even beyond the boundaries of China may be seen from the deep interest with which Sinologists everywhere have devoted themselves to their study and their translation. There are several English versions of the Four Books, but not one of them does full justice to the original.

In view of this, Dr. Paul K. T. Sih, Dr. Chin-tung Liang and Dr. T. C. Tsao, the three executive directors of the New York Chapter of the Council of Chinese Cultural Renaissance, jointly suggested in early 1976 that by tapping the resources of present-day scholarship a new improved English translation should be made as an attempt to come closer to the ideal. The suggestion was adopted by the standing Committee of the Council, and Dr. Sih was asked to be in overall charge of the project.

Under Dr. Sih's careful planning, a committee of reviewers was organized in the United States to prepare the first draft of the new translation. The committee consisted of Dr. Shih Shun Liu, Dr. Kung-chuan Hsiao, Dr. Vincent Y. C. Shih, and Dr. Sih himself, with Dr. Liu as coordinator and Sih as secretary. The committee began work in July 1976. They chose James Legge's translation of *the Great Learning* and *The Works of Mencius*, and Ku Hung-ming's translation of *The Analects* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* as basis for revision, but they also used other existing versions for reference and comparison to make sure that good points of previous versions were taken into consideration.

After almost two years of painstaking work, the first draft of the new version was completed in April 1978. It was then sent back to Taiwan for review and adoption. The last review was undertaken by Dr. John C. H. Wu and professors Liang Shih-chiu, P. E. Demers and Edward P. Vargo. They all offered valuable suggestions about the text on the

draft. These suggestions were all transmitted for reference to Dr. Liu, who brought the manuscript to its final form. The publication of this translation thus represents the culmination of cooperative efforts of distinguished scholars.

It remains for me to express on behalf of the Council our gratitude to all who have helped to make this project possible. First of all, the success of this undertaking is due to Dr. Chen Li-fu, Vice Chairman of the Council and an accomplished scholar of the Four Books, whose vision and staunch support enabled the work to be carried out. Dr. Sih, Vice President for International Studies and Education and Director of Center of Asian Studies at St. John's University in New York, who is the author of the appended report from the Committee of Reviewers in the United States, and whose recent demise after a lifelong valiant fight for the cause of freedom and democracy has been mourned by all his friends and admirers, is the guiding spirit of the project. Both Dr. Liang and Dr. Tsao have also rendered valuable assistance. Dr. Liu, by his rare bilingual talent and by his complete dedication, did more than anyone else to conduct the draft work from the beginning to the end. Our special thanks are also due to the six reviewers, Dr. Hsiao and Dr. Shih in the United States and Dr. Wu and Professors Liang, Demers and Vargo in the Republic of China, for their valuable suggestions, without which the book could not have become what it is.

All translation is a compromise between the effort to be faithful and the effort to be expressive. It cannot but result in a choosing between various approximations. While no effort has been spared in trying to make the English translation now offered an ideal representation of the original Four Books, all those who have been responsible for the undertaking are fully conscious of possible human fallibility in this choosing game. They will appreciate any oversight pointed out by the readers and will welcome any suggestions for improvement. These will be given careful consideration in any future edition.

C. K. Yen
Chairman

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The Great Learning

My Master, Ch'eng Tzu, says: 'The Great Learning is a book transmitted by the Confucian School, and forms the gate by which first learners enter into virtue. That we can now perceive the order in which the ancients pursued their learning is solely owing to the preservation of this Work, the Analects and Mencius coming after it. Learners must commence their course with this, and then it may be hoped that they will be kept from error.' – Chu Hsi

The Classical Text

1. The Way of the Great Learning lies in refurbishing pristine virtue, renewing the people, resting in the most excellent moral conduct.

2. Once the point of rest is known, the object of pursuit is determined; and, that being determined, a calmness may be achieved. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.

3. Things have their roots and their branches. Affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what is first and what is last will lead near to the Way.

4. The ancients who wished to refurbish pristine virtue throughout the empire first put their own states in good order. Wishing to put their states in good order, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first achieved perfect knowledge. Such to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their minds. Wishing to rectify