

Introduction

JIM BEHUNIAK

Over the last four decades, no scholar of Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world has had a greater impact than Roger T. Ames. In fact, one needs to step back considerably to appreciate the scale of Ames's impact on the field—far enough to consider it alongside the monumental achievements made in the late nineteenth century, when the Scottish missionary and sinologist James Legge (1815–1897) defined his own epoch by first translating the Chinese classics into English.

Earnest in his desire to convey the good news of Jesus Christ to the Chinese, Legge left Aberdeen in 1839 for the Orient. During the nearly three decades that he spent in China, Legge came to appreciate the depth and density of Chinese culture. He soon realized that, in order to deliver China to the true faith, one needed to approach this ancient civilization on its own terms. “The rest of the world should really know this great empire,” Legge explained, and such is now required so that “our missionary labors among the people should be conducted with sufficient intelligence and so as to secure permanent results.”¹ Thus began a most remarkable career, one of transmitting China's ancient classics to the Western world. Legge's prodigious achievements include his initial 8-volume edition of the *The Chinese Classics*, and a subsequent 6-volume edition of the *Sacred Books* of Confucianism and Daoism as part of Max Müller's celebrated series, *Sacred Books of the East*. Legge's pioneering work would establish the foundation upon which twentieth-century Sinology was built.

In an interview with *Confucius Institute Magazine* in 2015, Roger Ames was asked why he found it necessary to change the English translations of so many key terms in Chinese philosophy. Specifically, he was asked why

he elected to re-translate “the generally accepted ‘benevolence’ for *ren* 仁.” Ames answered:

The word “benevolence” is a relatively narrow, psychological disposition which bears little resemblance to the broad meaning contained in *ren* that references an entire person—the cultivated moral, aesthetic, religious, intellectual, and even physical habits that are expressed in one’s relations with others.²

Ames returns a wholly sufficient answer. There is, however, an altogether different question that might have been asked—namely, how exactly did the word “benevolence” become the “generally accepted” translation of *ren* 仁 in the first place?

The genealogy of this particular word, in fact, has nothing to do with Chinese thought. Theologically, Legge aligned himself with the Presbyterian bishop, Joseph Butler (1692–1752). Butler devoted his philosophical talents to blunting Deism and to refuting the Egoism of the firebrand Thomas Hobbes, who in his *Leviathan* (1651) argued that human nature was essentially self-interested. In sermons such as “Upon the Love of Our Neighbor,” Butler argued that “benevolence”—the desire to promote the general happiness of humankind—was an innate virtue of human nature as created by God. “Human nature is so constituted,” proclaimed Butler, “that every good affection implies love of itself . . . Thus, to be righteous implies in it the love of righteousness; to be benevolent, the love of benevolence.”³ Legge saw the teachings of Bishop Butler prefigured in Confucians like Mencius, for whom “Heaven is served by obeying our Nature.” Legge admitted that he could “get no other meaning” from the text. He even considered his translation of the term “Heaven” (*tian* 天) to be a compromise of sorts. As he writes, “it is much to be wished that instead of the term Heaven, vague and indefinite, Mencius had simply said ‘God.’”⁴

The ideas of Bishop Butler would be inscribed directly into Legge’s translations of the Chinese classics. Mencius’s attitude toward self-doubting rulers, for instance, is pure Butler: “Let the prince be benevolent (*ren* 仁) and all his acts will be benevolent, let the prince be righteous (*yi* 義), and all his acts will be righteous.”⁵ Mencius’s doctrine of human nature was, according to Legge, “as nearly as possible, identical with that of Bishop Butler,” and since Butler maintained that “there is a natural principle of benevolence in man,” Legge translated *ren* 仁 as “benevolence.”⁶ By historical accident, this peculiar translation stuck, and along with other Victorian-era coinage such as “nature” (*xing* 性), “fate” (*ming* 命), “righteousness” (*yi* 義), and “Heaven” (*tian* 天) it would persist for over a century as the standard English translation. As the *Confucius Institute Magazine* interviewer implies, such translations have

become “generally accepted.” Why change them now? Again, Ames’s response is substantive—wholly sufficient. It does not begin, however, to answer the larger question. The *actual* reason that Ames first, and now others in the English-speaking world reconsider their translations philosophically is that the Leggian epoch has come to a close and another has begun.

Roger Ames made his first trip to Asia in 1966, a “curious 18-year-old,” enrolled for one year at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Born in Toronto and raised in England and Vancouver, Ames was instantly charmed by the new and unfamiliar ways of life that he encountered in the Chinese world. He would return to the University of British Columbia to complete his Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and Chinese before beginning graduate work with two years of coursework at National Taiwan University between 1970 and 1972. In Taiwan, he would read the classics with the inimitable Yang Youwei 楊有維, whose simultaneously exacting and antinomian style initiated Ames into the vast, interminable vocation of reading and thinking through ancient Chinese texts. After finishing his MA coursework in British Columbia, Ames studied for two additional years in Japan before pursuing his PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London between 1975 and 1978. In London, he would study under the eminent sinologist D. C. Lau (Liu Dianjue 劉殿爵). Lau had established SOAS as a center for Chinese philosophy, with a department that included A. C. Graham, Sarah Allan, and Paul Thompson. Ames benefitted from all of them, and most importantly from Graham and Lau. As teacher, mentor, collaborator, and friend, Lau especially would impart to Ames more than just a deep understanding of the Chinese classics; he would provide Ames with a model for becoming a genuine scholar in the Chinese tradition. In 1978, Ames joined the Philosophy department at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, where he would remain until his retirement in 2016.

Ames’s earliest work, *The Art of Rulership*, focused on the political philosophy of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子. In the book’s Introduction, one sees already the guiding principle behind Ames’s work: the idea that no text or thinker in classical China can be adequately understood without first becoming aware of the general philosophical assumptions that shaped early Chinese discourse. In the Preface, Ames would thank his friend, David L. Hall, for having read the entire manuscript and for being “generous with important and positive criticisms.” Hall, a spirited Yale-trained philosopher of culture in the pragmatic and process traditions, had recently released a pair of remarkable books, *The Uncertain Phoenix: Adventures Toward a Post-Cultural Sensibility* (1982) and *Eros and Irony: A Prelude to Philosophical Anarchism* (also 1982). The former, an essay in cross-cultural philosophy, explored the limits of Western metaphysical and technological thinking in light of alternatives suggested in the

Daoist tradition; the latter, a careful study of Greek thinking, reevaluated the cultural role of philosophy in an age that called into question its traditional epistemological purposes. In the latter's Acknowledgments, Hall thanked Ames for his "assurance that my understanding of philosophic Taoism is not altogether beside the mark." Hall and Ames each admired in the other some wanting expertise, and before long they pooled their resources to embark on a body of work that neither scholar could have produced alone.

The publication of their *Thinking Through Confucius* in 1987 would be a watershed moment in modern Chinese philosophy. In English-language scholarship, there had never been a book quite like this one in ambition and scope. Of course, it was not conceived in a vacuum. Hall and Ames drew upon the work of a number of scholars in formulating their arguments—the contributions of Peter Boodberg, Herbert Fingarette, Chad Hansen, D. C. Lau, Henry Rosemont Jr., and others were carefully considered in formulating their own positions. In his Forward to the book, Robert Cummings Neville announced without hesitation its epoch-making status: the work was "both the consummation of a century-old scholarly effort [referring to "the great projects, begun in the nineteenth century"] and the beginning of a new stage of philosophic understanding among Chinese and Western thinkers." Three decades later, Neville's estimation is confirmed—*Thinking Through Confucius* marks the beginning of the present epoch in English-language Chinese philosophy.

Neville also observed that, by calling into question "common assumptions about Chinese and Western cultures," the book "will be controversial."⁷ This has also proven true. Immediately from the quarters of those producing scholarly papers on "Heaven" and "benevolence" in Chinese moral thought, *Thinking Through Confucius* was treated as a bombastic impertinence. Hall and Ames, however, were answering to what they understood to be a "real dissatisfaction" with such Victorian-era treatments voiced by scholars such as Wing-Tsit Chan, D.C. Lau, and Wm. Theodore de Bary. Such scholars "have moved, through lengthy introductions, specific papers, and commentary, to correct this situation." Something more than piecemeal redress, however, would be necessary to move the field beyond its nineteenth-century inheritance—indeed, beyond a prevailing philosophical idiom that traced back directly to eighteenth-century debates in Christian Europe. The entire classical tradition needed to be conceptually reconsidered, and in order to do this the "uncommon assumptions" that we as Western readers were bringing to our interpretations of Chinese philosophy needed to be intelligently reconstructed. The task was too ambitious for Ames or Hall to take on individually, but as collaborators they marshaled the intellectual resources and the raw nerve to make the attempt.

The significance of their ensuing trilogy of interpretative studies, *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narra-*

tive of Chinese and Western Culture (1995), and *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (1998), is difficult to overstate. These works completely changed the conversation in Chinese and comparative philosophy. Since Hall and Ames were doing something not previously done—i.e., attempting to *justify* their particular readings and translations historically and philosophically—these works were difficult to ignore. Motivated by agreement, by disagreement, or by some qualification of either reaction, these works impacted nearly every research trajectory in the field.

Now that the dust has settled, it is clear that the Hall and Ames collaboration succeeded in alerting comparative philosophers to their own assumptions as historically situated inquirers, and that it helped to foreground the variability of cultural contexts in which philosophies operate—outcomes to which their postulation of “uncommon assumptions” was pursuant. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine Chinese-Western comparative philosophy ever going back to a *pre*-Hall and Ames mindset. Even those who reserve criticisms of their work display a methodological conscientiousness practically unheard of prior to the Hall and Ames collaboration. In terms of their broader argument—that classical American and Process-oriented traditions offer the most promising resources for approaching early Chinese philosophies—Hall and Ames have largely succeeded in changing attitudes in the field. Today, Brook Ziporyn represents the majority in holding that, “[the notion] that process orientations are closer to what Chinese thinkers tend to have in mind than substance ontologies and vocabularies . . . [is] by now rather uncontroversial.”⁸

By the time of David Hall’s death in 2001, Hall and Ames had branched out from collaborating on scholarly monographs to producing “philosophical translations” of the Chinese classics. The results, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (2001) and *A Philosophical Translation of Daodejing: “Making this Life Significant”* (2003), realized in another form the breakthroughs made in *Thinking Through Confucius*. Through substantive introductions and detailed glossaries, Hall and Ames sought to lay bare their own assumptions and to argue for their translation choices based on broader sets of patterns operative in Chinese thinking. Each text, then, was treated as a focal instance around which the entire field of early Chinese thinking could be, and needed to be, understood. Ames had, in fact, already been producing such translations with other collaborators. He worked alongside his teacher and mentor, D. C. Lau, in producing translations of *Sun Pin: The Art of Warfare* (1996) and the *Huainanzi* chapter, “Tracing Dao to its Source” (1998). Also, together with Henry Rosemont Jr., Ames completed perhaps his signature work, *The Confucian Analects: A Philosophical Translation* (1998), the most exquisite English translation of Confucius ever produced. Being so fruitful, the Ames-Rosemont collaboration would

continue, resulting in another philosophical translation, *The Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing* (2009), thus initiating another phase of Ames's collaborative career.

In addition to producing scholarship, Ames remained tremendously active in his service to his institution and to the broader field of Chinese and comparative philosophy while in Hawai'i. When Ames first arrived in 1978, the University of Hawai'i was already the uncontested center of the growing but still marginalized fields of non-Western and comparative philosophy. Under the leadership of Eliot Deutsch, its Philosophy program sustained a rich history that traced back to the first East-West Philosophers' Conferences in 1939 and 1949. As a result of the latter meeting, Charles A. Moore established the journal *Philosophy East and West*, passing editorial responsibilities on to Deutsch in 1967. Deutsch appointed Ames to be assistant editor upon his arrival in 1978, and over the next decade Ames assisted with the enormous growth that *Philosophy East and West* enjoyed under Deutsch's leadership. Deutsch passed all editorial responsibilities on to Ames in 1987, and the journal's readership continued to grow. Stronger than ever, Ames brought *Philosophy East and West* into the digital age in 2001, and in the twenty-first century it remains the flagship journal in non-Western and comparative philosophy. The conferences with which the journal is associated also flourished under Ames's tenure as director or co-director, with meetings of the East-West Philosophers' Conferences held in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2011, and 2016—each one making history in the growing field of comparative philosophy.

Ames's contributions extend well beyond such high-profile activities, creating a legacy of service seemingly impossible but for its achievement. He served as Editor for *China Review International* from 1992 to 2016, and for nearly a decade as the Director of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Hawai'i. He served as Co-Director and Senior Advisor for the Asian Studies Development Program (ASDP) from 1990 to 2012, during which time he worked alongside Betty Buck and Peter Hershock at the East-West Center in promoting the inclusion of Asian-related content into undergraduate curriculums. Through the ASDP, Ames was principal in securing multiple grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities, Fulbright-Hayes, Freeman, Luce, and other foundations to support this initiative. Also, with the publication of *Thinking Through Confucius*, Hall and Ames inaugurated the "Chinese Philosophy and Culture" series with SUNY Press, under which Ames served as the editor or co-editor of over 160 academic titles in Chinese philosophy—galvanizing the field with an abundance of original research while boosting the careers of dozens of upcoming scholars. Also included in this series are a number of edited volumes that Ames initiated in collaboration with scholars such as Thomas P. Kasulis, Wimal Dissanayake, J. Baird Callicott,

Joel Marks, Peter Hershock, Tsao Hsingyuan, and Carine Defoort. In addition to his long-standing collaboration with SUNY Press, Ames also served as the editor or co-editor of several volumes of papers with the University of Hawai'i Press. At the time of writing, Ames still has three co-edited volumes in Chinese philosophy forthcoming.

On a less quantifiable level, Ames's advocacy of Chinese philosophy has been carried on with door-to-door persistence for decades. He has travelled the four seas delivering talks, lectures, and workshops, encouraging and inspiring institutions to create lines for non-Western philosophers in their programs. Committed to "job creation" in Asian philosophy, Ames consistently leveraged whatever respect he earned to create opportunities for the next generation. Indeed, such generosity has been at the very heart of Ames's career and it will remain his enduring hallmark—a generosity that every student and every colleague knows as incomparable. Not surprisingly, Ames attracted PhD students from all over the world, sustaining in his era the most active doctoral program in Chinese philosophy in the United States by far. Having supervised over forty dissertations at the University of Hawai'i and serving on the committees of several dozen others, his teaching now leaves an indelible mark on the field. Also, having been a Visiting Professor at National University of Singapore and Chinese University of Hong Kong, as well as a Fulbright Professor at Wuhan University and Peking University, his influence extends well into the Chinese world. Currently residing in the Department of Philosophy at Peking University as Humanities Chair Professor, Ames's body of students continues to grow, expanding the numbers of those who already enjoy fruitful careers in Asia, Europe, and the United States.

Given such a prolific career as teacher, editor, director, chair, co-author, and advisor—not to mention colleague, mentor, friend, father, and husband—it is perhaps not surprising that Ames's later-period writings center on the importance of "roles" in achieving a meaningful human life. Following their 2009 translation of *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*, Ames and Rosemont each trained their energies on the development of what they labeled a "role ethics," a novel stance inspired by the Confucian tradition that regards family relations as the entry point for the cultivation of moral competence, an approach that differs markedly from both principle- and virtue-based ethical theories in the west. Its philosophical roots are foreshadowed in Ames's collaboration with Hall, with whom the publication of *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (1999) marked a distinct shift into the fields of social and political philosophy. That particular work, which focused on the status of rights-based liberalism and democratic theory in the Chinese and Western traditions, required a more

complete treatment of the status of the “individual” in these traditions. Hall and Ames would establish in greater detail the difference between the bare, autonomous “individual” residing in Western ethical and political theories and the fuller, more relational “person” described in early Confucian writings.

Ames and Rosemont had also developed this theme in their Introduction to *The Confucian Analects*, i.e., that “we express our unique personhood—not individualism—by the creative ways we interact with others, as children, parents, lovers, friends, and so forth, within the constraints denoted by what is meant by ‘parent,’ ‘lover,’ ‘friend,’ and ‘neighbor.’”⁹ Ten years later, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence* would provide a focal text around which these larger assumptions were arrayed—assumptions about what it means to be a “person” in the Confucian world. The Ames-Rosemont collaboration, while less voluminous than the Hall-Ames collaboration, has been equally impactful given the sharpness of its focus. Confucian role ethics is a compelling and provocative new entry in contemporary social and political discourse. As evinced in the present volume, scholars are currently engaged in thinking through its contemporary implications. The several papers that Ames and Rosemont have produced on role ethics have recently been collected in their *Confucian Role Ethics: A Moral Vision for the 21st Century?* (2016). Moreover, each has written his own substantive monograph on the topic: Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (2011) and Rosemont, *Against Individualism: A Confucian Rethinking of the Foundations of Morality, Politics, Family and Religion* (2015). As exchanges in the present volume indicate, Ames remains committed to building upon the project that he initiated together with his friend and collaborator, Henry Rosemont.

The career of Roger Ames has been such that honors, naturally, have been forthcoming. He received the Regent’s Medal for Excellence in Research from the University of Hawai’i in 2012. In 2013, he was given the Confucius Culture Award by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the Shandong 山東 government. In 2016, he received the Huilin Culture Award (*huilinwenhuajiang* 会林文化奖) from Beijing Normal University. During that same year, he was designated a “Confucian Exemplar” (*ruxuedajia* 儒学大家) by the Shandong Provincial Government. The current volume, likewise, is presented in honor of Ames’s career achievements and in appreciation of his colossal service to Chinese philosophy. Brought together here are peers and colleagues with whom Roger has shared his path—not an exhaustive group, because no volume can contain such a crowd. Plus, there are no students featured in the present volume. Given the quantity and quality of those numbers, the decision was made to initiate a separate volume, *One Corner of the Square: Essays by the Students of Roger T. Ames*, which is currently in preparation. Essays in the present collection touch on several aspects of Ames’s career, with the latter contributions focusing primarily on Ames’s current work in Confucian role

ethics. Ames's replies to these essays are forward-looking and substantive, reminding us that we pause to celebrate a career that remains very much on the active track—continuing to explore and to articulate the distinguishing features of the Chinese tradition.

History makes strange bedfellows, and Ames, ironically, sides with the most conservative Victorian-era missionaries—those who believed that Rev. Legge was being presumptuous, even heretical, in identifying parallels between Christianity and Chinese thought. For Legge had the audacity to suggest that, “Confucius—not to specify others—was raised up by God for the instruction of the Chinese people.” Legge's assumption was that Confucian teachings had prepared the way for the reception of the New Testament gospels, and to his critics this was to “pull down the Old Testament to the level of Confucianism.”¹⁰ Legge had falsely regarded Confucianism as China's divinely guided prelude to its culminating encounter with Christianity, which would be its *defining moment*. In his defense of role ethics, Ames calls out the same tendency among his contemporaries. It is more than anachronistic to regard our gods as those before which the Chinese have been preparing themselves to kneel—it is completely presumptuous to read the tradition this way. Legge's conservative critics did not see in Mencius any Bishop-Butler-in-waiting; and likewise, Ames does not see in Confucius a Virtue-ethics-in-waiting, or in Mozi a Propositional-logic-in-waiting, or in Zhuangzi a Sextus-Empiricus-in-waiting. The Chinese tradition waits not for its own deliverance—not to the Christian God, and not to the gods of Occidental philosophy. We should rather hope to deliver ourselves from whatever parochial horizons prevent us from appreciating ways of thinking and living that differ from our own. Securing such deliverance is Roger Ames's mission. Professional stature and silver hair aside, that youthful glint in his eye is a curious 18-year-old beholding China for the first time and still appreciating the difference.

Notes

1. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1998), vol. 1, pg. 1.
2. *Confucius Institute Magazine* 39.4 July, 2015, pg. 6/10.
3. *The Whole Works of Joseph Butler* (London: Willian Tegg and Co., 1850), pg. 145.
4. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1998), vol. 2, pg. 448, note 1.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 310–311.
6. James Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pg. 64, 60; see also: 56–57.

7. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pg. xiii.

8. Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), pg. 21–22.

9. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., tr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), pg. 27.

10. Quoted from: Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 225, 231.