



Review

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- 4 – Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B. Carol (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 60.
- 5 – Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen* (Baden-Baden: Surkamp Verlag, 1955); the English version is *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).
- 6 – Both the original and the translation of Derrida’s “Des Tours de Babel” are printed in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). See the original, pp. 209–248, and the translation, pp. 165–208.
- 7 – Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel,” p. 232.
- 8 – The argument for the objective value of such a realm is of course beyond the scope of this review, and contingent on conceptions of the human being. Such a conception would rest on abstracting elements from the human condition and articulating the type of life people should be able to live. For example, a primary concept that is invoked in defense of the notion of civil society is that people should have the ability to have some say about the conditions that govern their lives. Civil society provides a sphere in which people can voice their concerns about such issues.
- 9 – Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

I and Tao: Martin Buber’s Encounter with Chuang Tzu. By Jonathan R. Herman. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. Pp. 278.

Jonathan R. Herman’s *I and Tao*, subtitled *Martin Buber’s Encounter with Chuang Tzu*, is a true example of comparative philosophy: the subject of the work is the philosophy of a Chinese Taoist sage viewed from the tradition of a Hasidic Jewish sage. This is well captured by the pun in the title.

The book consists of two parts. The first is Herman’s English translation of Buber’s German rendition of selected chapters of the *Chuang Tzu*, originally titled *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tschuang-tse* (Talks and parables of Chuang Tzu), followed by Herman’s English translation of Buber’s unpublished German commentary on these chapters. The second part consists of a discussion of hermeneutic issues raised by Herman. The English translations occupy one hundred pages of the volume, and the hermeneutic discussions approximately one hundred additional pages, with Herman’s notes extending another sixty pages (the notes are proportionally prolix).

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It is doubly rewarding to learn that Martin Buber was so well acquainted with Chinese philosophy (he also translated Chinese folk tales and wrote an unpublished commentary on the *Tao Te Ching*) and to be treated to an English translation of Buber's German version and his previously unpublished German commentary. These are valuable additions to the limited number of translations of and literature on this subject now available. Herman's book is thus a notable contribution to the scholarship of East-West comparative philosophy.

While Herman points out that Buber's sinological skills were minimal and that he based his own translation chiefly on other English translations, which he compared to the original with the help of Chinese collaborators (p. 5), that a figure of such stature in philosophy and religion as Buber would embark on this project at all and actually make use of Chinese-language materials, even to a limited degree, is noteworthy in itself. Herman is raising a basic methodological issue: does a philological approach possess an a priori claim to validity over a method grounded in aesthetic attunement and mystic insight? (pp. 108–109). (He could well have added "philosophic affinity" to the latter.)

Herman's discussion of the Chinese historian Irene Eber reflects the problem. For example, he quotes Eber on the one hand as saying "From the perspective of Chinese philosophy, Buber's work on the *Chuang Tzu* text, whether in the translated portions or as commentary, is not sufficiently rigorous to be taken into account" (p. 106), and on the other hand as implying that "the sometimes questionable scholarship [of Buber] . . . does not negate the potential influence and heuristic value of its conclusions" (p. 129). In Buber's defense, Herman points out that the writings of the non-sinologist Herbert Fingarette "continue to make a powerful impact." And he quotes Herlee G. Creel, who wrote: "In the fifty years in which I have been studying Confucius, I cannot recall that I have found the work of another scholar more stimulating than that of Professor Fingarette" (p. 243). Herman brings out the interesting and informative point that "Buber's Hasidic studies have been widely criticized for methodology supposedly lacking in historical and philological grounding" (p. 130). It seems that Buber is a romantic exegete of *both* Chinese and Hasidic literature.

With respect to Buber's hermeneutics, Herman discusses a number of issues including Buber's concept of the oneness of the teaching of the Orient, which is inaccessible through scientific or analytical method. It is in this portion of Herman's book that the more interesting and controversial issues of his interpretation of Buber begin to emerge. Herman describes one aspect of Buber's commentary on the *Chuang Tzu* as "proto-dialogical"—a phrase that is undefined in Herman's work but implies that Buber has perceived a nascent dialogical intent in the *Chuang Tzu* that strikes a chord in his own later dialogical position (p.

112). Herman emphasizes Buber's interpretation of the use of parable in the *Chuang Tzu* as a device that mediates between oneness and multiplicity (p. 115).

In one of Herman's ongoing summaries of his own work (a useful expository device), he states that "Buber argues that an understanding of Chuang Tzu is contingent upon the recognition of its historical and spiritual place as a parable that poetically proclaims the teaching, a unique foundational power that significantly defines the creative impetus of Asian experience and identity" (p. 117)—wordy, but amply descriptive nonetheless. But Herman also puts the point powerfully and concisely elsewhere: "Buber's hermeneutic reading of the *Chuang Tzu* approaches the text as a parabolic expression of the teaching eliciting a personal transformation" (p. 128). For Buber, Chuang Tzu's parable "allows each now to discover and animate the teaching in oneself" (p. 81). The strength of Herman's understanding of Buber is Herman's emphasis that, for Buber, "every step in the transformative process is not an impersonal reconfiguring of matter and energy, but a renewal and regeneration of self" (p. 142). Herman rightly points out that, for Buber, "to embrace Tao and its transformation impetus is to affirm and regenerate the self, which is consequently to affirm and regenerate the cosmos, to facilitate and/or complete the transformation of things" (p. 144).

One sophisticated feature of Herman's hermeneutics is that he perceives Buber's later *I and Thou* in part as a work of interpretation that is useful as a heuristic tool for sinological inquiry into the text of the *Chuang Tzu* (p. 184). However, while in many places in the text Herman does point out that the later Buber of *I and Thou* diverges from the Taoist tradition, there does not seem to be a sufficient understanding of the nature of his later disaffection with Taoism. For example, Herman states that "the fundamental ingredients of the I-Thou relation—the primacy of the existential sphere, the integrity of particular entities necessarily bound through interaction and relation, and the potential presence of the absolute within each coming together—are in fact already present within Buber's encounter with Chuang Tzu" (p. 163). But what *is* present in the later Buber and *not* present in Chuang Tzu is the concern for the other. In *Hasidism and Modern Man*, Buber writes: "Here Jewish wisdom of faith meets from a wholly other side with the ancient Chinese: He who brings himself into unison with the meaning of being brings the world with him into wisdom: but here, in the Hasidic saying, stands what is lacking in all Taoist ones: One must include the other in the unity; then one has a good influence on him."

As an even more basic point of departure for hermeneutic study, it would be extremely interesting to consider whether Buber's early studies of Hasidism, which preceded his work on the *Chuang Tzu*, influenced his reading of Chuang Tzu and Chinese philosophy in general. One

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might raise the question whether Buber was not prompted to discover many of the resonances between Chinese and Hasidic Jewish philosophy because of his earlier immersion in Hasidic Jewish philosophy. This would seem to be a prior consideration to Herman's reflection above that "the fundamental ingredients of the I-Thou relation ... are in fact already present within Buber's encounter with Chuang Tzu"—if these ingredients were already present in Buber before his encounter with Chuang Tzu. After all, Buber's *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* appeared in 1906 and his *Die Legend des Baal Shem* in 1908, both before his *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tschuang-tse* appeared in 1910. It is puzzling why Herman does not take up this question, and it seems an important omission from such a serious hermeneutic study—which treats *future* volumes as hermeneutic tools for studying *previous* volumes—that *previous* volumes are not utilized as tools for studying *future* volumes.

Moreover, in a work on hermeneutics, with particular attention to the hermeneutics of translation, it is surprising to find, in a footnote discussing the three-character title *Ch'i wu lun* (one of Chuang Tzu's key "Inner Chapters"), that Herman lists various English translations of the title without elucidating the fundamental differences between them or a preference for one over the others—hence missing the point of listing the different translation choices in the first place. This reviewer has argued in his *Chuang-tzu for Spiritual Transformation: An Analysis of the Inner Chapters* that even taking into account that the titles were added by a later editor, Watson's choice of "Discussion on Making All Things Equal," for example, is better than others, such as Graham's "The Sorting Which Evens Things Out," since it does not semantically prejudice the reader into thinking that the chapter is intended to show that all things are equal, but is rather only a discussion of such a theme. To notice the impact of a translation choice as important as this one is important to the issue of the place and influence of hermeneutics in translation, and not to notice it is surprising in a book of and about hermeneutics, and particularly the hermeneutics of translation (p. 253).

And what about substantive comparative issues? In note 22 of his book, Herman points out that for both Buber and Chuang Tzu the answer to the problem of evil is not simply a reversal of the undesirable ethic, but a movement to a new way of being in the world. Ontological or existential transformation, rather than following a moral principle, will bring in its wake a goodness that will replace evil. Is this an insight independently arrived at, or is it the influence of Taoism on Buber? This is not to say that good and evil are treated by Chuang Tzu and Buber in the same way (Buber would not go as far as Chuang Tzu in his critique of the "moral way"), but more discussion of a possible influence of Chuang Tzu on Buber in his existentializing a holistic or organic solution to life

as a way of bringing about the good (rather than attempting to plow the moral path) would be an illuminating point of focus.

It also must be said that in a book that so persuasively argues for the commonalities between the Taoist and the Hasidic traditions, a bit more attention might have been given to the differences. Certainly, there is a strong correlation between the two traditions as far as their ultimate goals of spiritual understanding and their rich use of storytelling and humor (including earthy humor) are concerned, but, as alluded to above, there is also a difference between Buber's emphasis on dialogue and Chuang Tzu's more solitary path. There is also a difference in tone. In the end, Chuang Tzu's wry descriptions do not embody the same intense emotionality or religiosity as those of Buber's Hasidic world.

Stylistically, this is not an easy book to read. For one thing, its readability would have been enhanced if the chapters had been numbered in addition to being titled (they are numbered only in the Notes). The accessibility of the text would have been improved if, throughout, there had been less in the way of copious notation, double notation, and forbidding phraseology. In a text freely sprinkled with German and romanized Chinese, and heavily burdened with complex notation, less arcane English would have been desirable. For example, words like the following appear: "redactor," "doxographers," "liminality," "unicity," "salvific," and "distanciation" (the latter eludes the second and third editions of *Webster's Unabridged*). The prose could have been less dense; for example: "Still, it could be noted that it is never anything less than a oneness that is maintained in such a state of relation; it is clearly appropriate to characterize this as a 'proto-dialogical unity,' where the voice of relation is in dialectical tension with the voice of monism" (p. 162).

Herman does not always adhere to his own conventions. While he states that the page number in parentheses next to a passage refers to its location in this book, at times page numbers actually refer to previously cited books. His reading instructions also are not always clear. (That a text requires reading instructions already tells us something about it.) Consider this passage: "For the translation of the commentary, all citations from Chuang Tzu within the body of the afterword are referenced to the standard concordance, identified by Graham's theoretical sources, and when applicable, cross-referenced to the text translation (the page number in parentheses next to the passage refers to its location in this book)" (p. 9). Which book does "this book" refer to?

A more careful editing of the text would have improved it. For example, the word "experience" is hyphenated improperly at the end of a sentence (p. 196). In a reference to the present reviewer, Herman writes: "Robert E. Allinson . . . reminds that the text's parabolic nature is the crucial ingredient in its transformative powers"—omitting the word "us" (p. 125). It is only through an act of readerly hermeneutics that one

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may divine that “parabolic” for Herman is not a geometrical term but a neologism signifying “parable-like.” In another reference to this reviewer, in Herman’s list of the classification of relativisms from my *Chuang-tzu for Spiritual Transformation*, Herman misquotes the description of “asymmetrical relativism (either relativism or non-relativism)” (p. 250). It should read, counterintuitively, “either relativism and non-relativism.”

In summary, the scholarly world should indeed be grateful to Herman for bringing to our attention the preoccupation of such an important figure as Martin Buber with the great tradition of Chinese Taoism, coming as Buber did from a rich tradition of his own. Herman is to be commended for his creative and painstaking labor and for his familiarity with two such disparate linguistic and cultural traditions. It is this level of familiarity that makes a genuinely comparative philosophical work possible in the first place.

A Korean Confucian Encounter with the Modern World: Yi Hang-no and the West. By Chai-sik Chung. Korea Research Monograph 20. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1995. Pp. ix + 268.

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Every once in a while a book comes along that challenges the boundaries of and the approaches to accepted scholarship on a broad and important subject. Such a book, at least in many of its most important aspects, is *A Korean Confucian Encounter with the Modern World*, by Chai-sik Chung. However, in perhaps its most important aspect, this book is an attempt to recover, in the aftermath of Thomas Metzger’s critique, the Weberian problem of “Confucian China and its Modern Fate”—the impact of the West on Asia and why non-Western societies are often said to have failed to make the transition to modernity.

On the positive side, and unlike so many other works on “Neo-Confucianism,” the author balances a close and penetrating analysis of the “ideas” so central to Korean Neo-Confucianism (his discussion of the major debates, particularly the Four-Seven Debate, is masterful) with a recognition of the societal context of these debates. I say “societal,” as opposed to political, purposely. The problem with the word “political” is that it tends to be construed as positing a form of “false consciousness”: this particular thinker made the claims he made, and did so in the fashion he did, for purely political reasons. “Societal” recognizes simply that even the most abstruse or fecund form of philosophizing is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather takes place in relation to some (at least perceived) societal problem.

In Chung’s book, nowhere is this made more obvious than in his wonderful treatment of the significant shift Yi Hang-no made away from

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