

### The Authors' Rejoinder to Petersen's Review\*

Jens Østergaard Petersen's review of our recent translation of *Xinyu* 新語 (*Journal of Chinese Studies* 74 [Jan. 2022], 257–75) culminates with a highly uncollegial assessment of our work:

The text edition they provide is faulty, the translation they offer does not demonstrate a consistent command of the basic structures of literary Chinese, they do not make the requisite study of the meanings of the words they translate, and the notes they serve do not impart the information its readers need in order to understand the text. (p. 275)

But a close reading reveals, long before the final page, that he has been operating in bad faith. His misrepresentations begin right at the start (p. 257), where he alleges that we failed to discuss the authenticity of *Xinyu*. In fact, we addressed all of his points in our introduction (p. 14f.). Maybe he is disappointed that we did not solve the problem. All we can say is that we provided cogent reasons—which *he* fails to discuss—to discount the leading objections that have been raised over the centuries.

Petersen identifies several instances (pp. 269–71) where we did not indicate that we diverged from our reference edition, namely *Xinyu jiaozhu* 新語校注, by Wang Liqi 王利器 (1986). We are grateful to him for pointing them out, although they are not as egregious as he implies, because our sources can easily be reconstructed from Wang Liqi's notes (which is how Petersen discovered them himself). We do concede that omitting such indications was not in keeping with our stated principle that our Chinese text would be furnished with editorial notes wherever we departed from Wang Liqi (p. 16).

But Petersen is not always right. On p. 271, he complains that we supplied 人事之 as an attested variant for a *lacuna* on p. 114 of our translation: “as Wang Liqi notes, these are conjectural additions (臆補) and thus only ‘attest’ to the creativity of the Ming editors.” In fact, this reading is attested in *Zhuzi pinjie* 諸子品節, a collection compiled by Chen Shen 陳深 (Ming dynasty). Wang Liqi may or may

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\* Chief Editor's note: This is the authors' response to Jens Østergaard Petersen's review of the book, *Lu Jia's New Discourses: A Political Manifesto from the Early Han Dynasty*, published in the January 2022 (no. 74) issue of this journal. With a view to facilitating the exchange of ideas between scholars in the field, the journal will accept authors' rejoinders to the book reviews published.

not have been right that it was conjectural (this is conjectural in itself), but we consider a Ming edition a real edition.

On p. 107, we translated 臣篤於信 as “ministers are committed to being trustworthy.” Petersen approves conditionally: this “would be fine, if the text had read 臣篤於信,” and he goes on to assert, mystifyingly, that our Chinese text says 臣篤於義 (p. 269). It does not—it says 臣篤於信.

We are less apologetic about our translations and interpretations; here we find Petersen’s criticisms consistently wide of the mark. Most of his suggestions are what Germans call *Verschlimmbesserungen*, or “improvements” that only make the text worse. Part of the problem is that his English proficiency is not at the level of a native speaker. Petersen’s review being long and tedious, with a litany of specimens of the same species, we restrict ourselves here to a few illustrative examples.

We strongly disagree that “close” or “affectionate” would be preferable for *qin* 親 than our “intimate,” which Petersen rejects as possessing “unsettling ramifications” (p. 266). Perhaps he is under the misapprehension that an “intimate” relationship must be a sexual one? Sceptical readers are encouraged to look up “intimate” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where they will see that definitions 1 through 3c all suit our purposes nicely. The major problem with “close” is that there are too many Chinese words with similar meanings.

Over and over, Petersen takes what we regard as an elegant English translation and replaces it with Foreignerish. Thus, he regards our “humanity is never concealed so that it be imperceptible, never sequestered so that it be unrevealed” (for 仁無隱而不著，無幽而不彰者) as a “problem” and proposes the ghastly “there is not that which is hidden which humanity does not make manifest; there is not that which is obscure which humanity does not make clear” (p. 261). (A good rule of thumb is that one should not use “which” more than once in a sentence. Here Petersen goes for *four*.) Petersen is convinced that we cannot tell the difference between *bu* 不 and *wu* 無, as though we were undergraduates. Perhaps *he* needs to learn that *wu* can negate an entire phrase, and not just an immediately following concrete noun.

One reason why we love Classical Chinese is that it permits multiple interpretations, offering ample room for translators to render a sentence defensibly yet meaningfully and—dare we say it?—beautifully. (Petersen’s suggestions are never beautiful.) He repeatedly bristles at our practice of retaining the literal meaning of a word whenever feasible. Thus, we thought long and hard about 持一概以等萬民, ultimately rendering it as “he grasps a single trowel to level the myriad people,” but Petersen cannot tolerate the literalism and insists on “something akin to ‘a rule’ one can hold onto” (p. 266) for *gai* 概 (trowel). Once again, the difficulty is that a very large number of Chinese words and phrases can mean “something akin to ‘a

rule' one can hold on to" (e.g., *gang* 綱, *ji* 紀, *zong* 宗, *fa* 法, *cheng* 程, *lü* 律, *chang* 常, *zheng* 正, *duan* 端, *gui* 規, *ju* 矩). We think it is *better*, not worse, to try to preserve the underlying metaphor in each case.

Petersen also seems to suppose that whenever two words are recognized as a *ci* 詞 in a modern dictionary, they have to be construed as a single bisyllabic compound. Sometimes—but certainly not always. Thus, we stand by our “covers them in the Six Directions like a calyx; reticulates them with guidelines (i.e. cosmic laws)” for 苞之以六合，羅之以紀綱, and do not by any means prefer Petersen’s “the Way embraces all living things with Six Dimensions and encompasses them with Cosmic Guidelines” (p. 265), which is grounded in his observation that *baoluo* 苞羅 can be a *ci* meaning “to encompass.” (For the record, it is not attested as a *ci* until several centuries after *Xinyu*.) His insipid rendition loses all the flavor of the original by abandoning the literal meanings of *bao* 苞 (calyx) and *luo* 羅 (netting). Lu Jia was a skilful author. We should strive not to simplify his diction.

Petersen also succumbs to the classic fallacy of criticizing without offering an alternative. One example: our choice of “society” for *shi* 世, in a few cases where we think it fits (p. 265f.). To be sure, this is unusual in Sinological literature (it was a considered choice), but even Petersen acknowledges that “The standard translation ‘the world, the times’ may be a little unimaginative,” and we can assure him that he will need to find options beyond “the world, the times” when he publishes his own translations. “The world” and “the times” are more than “a little unimaginative”—frequently they have the wrong connotations.

Nor do we agree that we missed a veiled allusion to the theory that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (pp. 260–61). The passage in question is the opening paragraph of Chapter 10 (pp. 100–103 in our book). Readers will have to decide for themselves, but we think overzealous commentators have read this anachronistic theory into the text. Notably, the passage does not name the *Chunqiu*—not even among the canonical titles listed at the end (《詩》、《書》、《禮》、《樂》). It does praise someone (we said “he/they”) who “displayed and fixed the Six Arts” 表定《六藝》, but we are not as cocksure as Petersen that this must refer to Confucius, because there is a preceding *lacuna* that could have introduced a new subject.

Imperial commentators were notorious for inserting the *Kongzi zuo Chunqiu* 孔子作春秋 theory where it did not belong. A famous example is the line “one lineage [i.e., Confucius] attained the Way of Zhou” 一家得周道, from Chapter 21 of *Xunzi* 荀子.<sup>1</sup> Both Yang Liang 楊倞 (fl. 818) and Hao Yixing 郝懿行

<sup>1</sup> Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1917), *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, ed. Shen Xiaohuan 沈嘯寰 and Wang Xingxian 王星賢, in *Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 15.21.393 (“Jiebi” 解蔽).

(1757–1825) interpreted it as an allusion to the theory, but the text gives no such indication, and modern scholarship considers it an error on their part.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, if Petersen doubts that *haose* 好色 means “loving sex” rather than his “penchant for good-looking women” (p. 261), we must ask how he interprets *Mencius* 1B.5, where the argument is that *haose* characterizes *everyone*, and a virtuous king would, therefore, make it possible for all his subjects, male and female, to marry and attain sexual gratification. Surely they were not all good-looking.

PAUL R. GOLDIN  
*University of Pennsylvania*

ELISA LEVI SABATTINI  
*Ruhr-Universität Bochum*

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., Hung Chun-Yin 洪春音, “Lun Kongzi suwang shuo de xingcheng yu fazhan zhuxiang” 論孔子素王說的形成與發展主向, *Xingda Zhongwen xuebao* 興大中文學報 20 (Dec. 2006): 106.