Global Literary Criticism

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China and the West

By

Hongxin Jiang

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PREFACE

I know Professor Hongxin Jiang as a scholar and a friend, not as an administrator, but my admiration for his dedication to scholarship and his multitasking abilities increases considerably when I find him constantly engaged in reading, learning, and writing a series of high-quality essays and books while being fully charged with the heavy responsibilities of a university president. For most academics working in universities today, taking on the deanship of a faculty or even assuming the responsibility of a department chair would engulf one in numerous meetings, brainstorming gatherings, document signings, interviews, visits, fund raisings and the like, so that one simply has to give up research and publication completely. It is very rare, if at all possible, to find a good and productive scholar who is also a responsible senior member of a university's governance; and yet, here he is, a brilliant scholar and a well-liked and highly efficient President of Hunan Normal University, a large and fully-fledged university in the southern part of China. It is indeed the rare combination of the dedication, perseverance, productivity and vision of a scholar and the incredible energy, enthusiasm, acumen and fair-mindedness of the man that commands respect, and it is our shared interest in literary studies and East-West comparisons that underpins our friendship.

It is of course not easy to achieve as much as Professor Hongxin Jiang has, but if one knows how well self-disciplined he is, it becomes more comprehensible. When he had the opportunity to visit universities in Hong Kong, UK or the US, he would bury himself in the library or the archives almost every day without taking a tour of the city or traveling around. That was how he studied Ezra Pound and American modernism with dedication and mental concentration for more than a decade, and when he finally produced the result of his hard work—*A Study of Ezra Pound*—in 2014, the book won high acclaim and gave him his well-deserved reward for years of assiduous and meticulous research. That book offers a detailed study of Pound's life and works, comments on his politics and poetics, provides a

survey of previous scholarship, and presents a critical evaluation of Pound's understanding or, perhaps more accurately, creative misunderstanding of the Chinese language as a medium of poetry. More importantly, though, it brings the level of Pound scholarship in China to the international standard and makes a significant contribution. As Qian Zhaoming remarks in his preface to Jiang's book, the publication of that book constitutes "a big event in Pound studies in China and also a big event in the study of foreign literatures in China." Professor Hongxin Jiang plays a leading role in the study of foreign literatures in China. His confidence in the value of humanistic studies and his open-minded embrace of both the Chinese and the Western traditions are most encouraging today for the development of literary studies and for university education in general in the Chinese academic world.

This current book, ambitiously entitled *Global Literary Criticism*: *China and the West*, brings some of Jiang's best works to readers of English for the first time. It covers a much wider scope than the study of Ezra Pound and displays a wide range of important topics in Chinese-Western comparative literature and world literature. Many readers will find these topics of great interest given their presentation in a new light. It is rather moving to read Professor Jiang's introduction that delineates his intellectual growth and traces back to a moment in his childhood, when he lived in a backwater village in Hunan with a limited perspective, which he himself compared to that of the proverbial "frog at the bottom of a well." Actually, all human beings are born in a particular language, culture, and society and necessarily adopt a limited view defined by a permanent and preexistent linguistic, cultural, and social milieu. In other words, all human beings are born in medias res and tend to be limited, narrow-minded, even terribly parochial. The wonderful thing about being human, however, is precisely our ability to transcend our own, inborn limitations to acquire a more expansive view, to become more open-minded, more cultured, and better educated—better in all the senses of the word. The Zhuangzi passage Professor Jiang quotes at the beginning of his introduction is a beautiful allegory of that process of moral and intellectual growth, an expansion of one's horizon from that of a river to the great sea and then the infinite universe. What makes Professor Jiang's writing so engaging owes, at least in part, to this personal touch from his intellectual journey, as many of the

people and things he discussed in this book have had some sort of a connection with the very place he knows so well, even with the very university of which he is now the president. Pound's "Seven Lakes Canto," for example, has a connection with the Xiao and Xiang, the two rivers running through the south of China and often used as a name for the Hunan Province. William Empson taught in Changsha during China's war against Japan, and his poem "Autumn on Nan-Yueh" is set in Hunan. So is Qian Zhongshu's great novel, *Fortress Besieged*, which partially originated from his lived experience in wartime Hunan. Thus the various chapters in this book combine together to unfold a very wide view of the scene of Chinese-Western comparative literature, just like the countless rivers all run into the great ocean in Zhuangzi's allegory mentioned above, but there is always a feeling of charm and even warmth when one touches the water in the river that runs by one's home. That feeling of charm and warmth is indeed a prominent feature of Professor Jiang's writing style, which makes his scholarly discussions of literary works highly readable and persuasive.

It is a great honor but also an embarrassment for me to find myself featured in this book far more prominently than I deserve, but I know Professor Jiang wanted to establish a sort of intellectual lineage for Chinese comparative literature and made me a link in that imaginary chain of ideas and critical approaches. I can only hope that his perfectly good intentions and the contributions of Chinese scholars in literary studies, as well as in other areas of scholarship, will gradually be recognized in the world for their values in global criticism.

Zhang Longxi

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a child and lived in a countryside village, I asked my grandpa, "What is the outside world like?" My grandpa answered: "Maybe just like the town nearby." Later, as I grew up, I read the passage from the great book *Zhuangzi*, and realized that understanding of the world is broadening in uplifting one's vision. The passage in *Zhuangzi* reads:

> At the time of autumn floods when hundreds of streams poured into the Yellow River, the torrents were so violent that it was impossible to distinguish an ox from a horse from the other side of the river. Then the River God was overwhelmed with joy, feeling that all the beauty under the heaven belonged to him alone. Down the river he traveled east until he reached the North Sea. Looking eastward at the boundless expanse of water, he changed his countenance and sighed to the Sea God, saying, "As the popular saying goes, 'There are men who have heard a lot about Tao but still think that no one can surpass them.' I am one of such men. Upon hearing people belittle Confucius' learning and humiliate Bo Yi's righteousness, I simply could not believe a word they said. Now that I have seen your boundless expanse, I realize that I would have been in danger if I had not come to you. I would always be sneered at by those who are well-versed in Tao."
>
> The Sea God said, "You cannot discuss the sea with a frog at the bottom of a well because it is confined to its dwelling place; you cannot discuss ice with a summer moth because it is limited to one season; you cannot discuss Tao with a bookworm because he is restrained to the book knowledge. Now that you have the riverside and seen the vast sea, you are aware of your insignificance. Thus it is possible now to discuss Tao with you. (261)

My childhood's idea of the outside world is like the idea of the frog at the bottom of a well. Zhuangzi's dialogue between the River God and the Sea God is also an enlightening instruction for the study of comparative literature. The earth is still the earth of the past, but the world has changed

immensely. We cannot look at the world as the frog at the bottom of the well. Stemming from different historical backgrounds, languages, customs, values, and even perceptions of the world, cultural differences impel some scholars to be pessimistic about cultural exchanges between the East and the West. About 120 years ago, Rudyard Kipling published a poem "The Ballad of East and West." The first and often-quoted stanza is as follows:

> Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
> Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
> But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
> When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth! (136)

Kipling made a clear division between the East and the West, thinking it beyond controversy that the two would be forever apart and should never meet until God had passed judgment on them. Those who quote this poem often miss the third and fourth lines, although Kipling here emphasized that two strong men from different ends of the earth would accept and judge each other based on each other's character and capacity instead of their ethnicity. Kipling's poem might be read as saying the cultures of the East and the West are so fundamentally different from one another that they will never be able to coexist or merge together. Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997) even posited that the post-Cold War conflict would most frequently and violently occur because of cultural rather than ideological differences. He argued that future wars would break out not between countries, but between cultures.

As we all know, today's world is not peaceful: it is continually facing new global threats and challenges. With globalization and Internet communication, people's lives have greatly changed. Different nations' contacts and cultural exchanges have progressed and been strengthened. In the new era, what do we think about literature and comparative literature? As Goethe says, "The epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach." The definition of literature has changed. Then, what is the canon of literature? What is the main focus of comparative literary study? With the fast development of high tech and artificial intelligence, what is the reality in literature? How do we human

beings deal with the problems facing this new rush of the high-tech and intelligence revolution? I totally agree with Jorge Luis Borges' idea that it is wrong to over-emphasize little differences or hatreds. If humanity is to be saved, we must attach importance to our affinities, and by all means, we must avoid accentuating our differences. Zhang Longxi insists:

> Without going beyond the limited horizon of a single literary tradition we cannot attain the broad vision of human creativity with all its diversities and endless possibilities; and when we reach such a broad vision across cultural gaps, we may then look at many literary texts and discover in them certain aspects that seem to have escaped our critical attentions before. (*Unexpected Affinities* 3-4)

Being a professor of literature, I would like to follow the views of Zhang and Borges.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), President Xi Jinping has profoundly expounded on the idea of "a community with a shared future for mankind" on many important occasions at home and abroad, proposing that "building a community with a shared future for mankind" may help deal with various problems and challenges in the world today. In the report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC, President Xi clearly pointed out that major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics should promote the building of new international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind. At the 1st Session of the 13th National People's Congress, "promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind" was put into the Constitution. On February 10, 2017, the idea of "building a community with a shared future for mankind" was put into the UN resolutions. Here, China's solution to world peace and development has gained a formal declaration of birth. At the cultural level, specifically speaking, we should respect the diversity of world civilizations, and transcend barriers through exchanges, conflicts through mutual learning, and hierarchies through coexistence. Only by seeking common ground while preserving differences and opening to the outside world can we achieve the harmonious coexistence of all types of cultures in the world. The idea of "building a community with a shared future for mankind" is not only the theoretical model for the exchanges between Chinese and Western cultures, but also

the guideline to promoting the blending of the two.

In this context, China has had many notable practices. By setting up Confucius Institutes in more than 140 countries and regions, China has been actively integrating into the world's cultural circle and spreading its culture to the rest of the world. By implementing the Belt and Road Initiative, China has been exploring a new cooperation mechanism for cultural exchanges, improving cooperation platforms for cultural communications, and creating brands for cultural exchanges, thus promoting the development of the cultural industries of partner countries. By holding the Culture Year (Month, Week) in conjunction with many countries, China has truly achieved the purpose of enhancing mutual understanding at the cultural level with partner countries. From June to August 2018, an exhibition entitled "Embracing the Orient and the Occident: When the Silk Road Meets the Renaissance" was organized by the National Museum of China. This exhibition put together exquisite Chinese and Western arts that spanned time, space, and media. The artworks were collected from dozens of Italian and Chinese museums to demonstrate the commonality between the East and the West. Qian Zhongshu stated that "there is no boundary between ancient and modern times, China and foreign countries" (Zheng 124). Setting limits for regulation and demarcation for isolation are undesirable: "Whether it is the East Sea or West Sea, the very nature is the same; whether it is the school of the south or of the north, the art of Tao is not split" (Qian 1). Therefore, we should break cultural boundaries, seek homogeneity and diversity in Eastern and Western cultures, and transform "cultural conflict" to jointly build "a community with a shared future for mankind" in the new era.

In the context of building "a community with a shared future for mankind," this book seeks the possibility of blending Chinese and Western cultures from such angles as culture, literature, poetics, philosophy, and history, and explores the path of equal dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures. Some essays in this book stem from my extensive reading; some from the ideas generated in class with my students at Hunan Normal University; and some from discussions with experts at academic conferences. I am grateful to the relevant journals that published earlier versions of some of the essays that have been wholly revised for publication in this book. The world today is undergoing profound changes.

Recognizing the rights of the Other, and respecting various cultural value systems, will become the power and trend of the new era. People of different cultures will regard each other as a part of the whole so as to achieve harmonious coexistence and the mutual understanding of civilizations. In the past, because of cultural conflicts, we paid a heavy price. "Building a community with a shared future for mankind" will be the best choice to avoid a possible post-Cold War.

So, we are on the road of mutual understanding.

The idea of world literature means that we should transcend the East-West divide and bridge its linguistic and cultural gaps. Admitting that there exist many obstacles and differences in the cultures and traditions of the West and China, this book argues not only the possibility of cross-cultural exchanges, but also the necessity of such understanding by providing excellent examples. It contains nine chapters focusing on the common theme of mutual understanding between Chinese and Western cultures.

Chapter One, entitled "Wooden Bell and Gadfly: The Story of Confucius and Socrates," compares the two great thinkers. With sketches of their life experiences, this chapter demonstrates the similar historical periods in which they lived. It reveals an important similarity. Confucius was praised as a wooden bell to warn, educate, civilize, and moralize people in his time; and Socrates described himself as the "gadfly" of the state that stung and stirred Athenians into life, as the gadfly stings the horse into action. A comparison is conducted of their philosophical ideologies. When confronted with political and social crises, they both sought moral principles as a basis for understanding those crises and mending the social fabric. The chapter's conclusion is that Confucius and Socrates are the teachers of teachers, which is why they are significant to Chinese and Western philosophy respectively.

Chapter Two, "Dreams of Butterflies: A Comparative Reading of Zhuangzi and Friedrich Nietzsche," compares Zhuangzi and Nietzsche, reviewing the past when the two philosophers lived through dramatic personal histories, which were the experiential bases of their views of human nature. The two great philosophers lived in different times, facing the challenges of their contemporaneous societies and circumstances. However, the ways in which they looked at the world share some

similarities. This commonality is manifested in the description of the ideal heroes in their works, in their assertion of the need for reconsideration of all values and renewing people's minds, and in their love of nature. Interestingly, both philosophers mentioned butterflies in their works with different connotations and associations. The two giants of philosophy did not receive the fame in their lifetimes that they deserved. But another shared characteristic of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche is that their contemporary, German philosopher Martin Heidegger, gained inspiration and instruction from these two great teachers.

Chapter Three, "Painting and Poetry: Ezra Pound's 'Seven Lakes Canto' and Eight Views of Xiao Xiang," addresses the connection between Pound's poem "Seven Lakes Canto," or "Canto 49," and the painting Eight Views of Xiao Xiang. Pound got a screen book from his parents consisting of eight poems in Chinese and another eight in Japanese, mutually representing eight classic views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers in Central South China. Based upon a Chinese Lady's interpretation of the painting and the poems, Pound created the "Seven Lakes Canto." This chapter also traces the etymological and compositional use of Chinese ideograms which had an enormous impact on Pound's thinking about poetry and cultural matters, and on the writing of *The Cantos*. Moreover, Pound engages in further exploration of the key related topics in light of political and cultural criticism. By adopting the images of China in Eight Views of Xiao Xiang, Pound finds another paradise. This chapter concludes that Chinese cultural elements enabled Pound to create a new entity in its own right: the Poundian poem.

Chapter Four, "The Study of Ezra Pound in China," reviews the past and present of Chinese research on Ezra Pound. Chronologically structured, this chapter discusses the study of Ezra Pound in China decade by decade from the 1920s to the first two decades of the 21st century. Works of Chinese scholarship on Pound that have been published outside China also are discussed. This chapter demonstrates that many Chinese masters in literature, such as Hu Shi, Liang Shiqiu, Shi Zhecun, Qian Zhongshu, Yuan Kejia, Zheng Min, and others, have conducted research on Pound's poetry, poetic theories, and translations. Achilles Fang, Angela Chih-ying Jung, Wai-lim Yip, and Qian Zhaoming are among those scholars who have produced works on Pound in the Western world. From

papers to monographs, the study of Pound by Chinese scholars has developed as a significant trend. The inevitable conclusion is that China has an interactive relationship with Pound.

Similar to Chapter Four which focuses on Chinese scholarship on Pound, Chapter Five, "A Muse of Poetry Traveling Far: T. S. Eliot and China," reviews the research by Chinese scholars on T. S. Eliot, including interactions between China and Eliot, and translations of his works into Chinese. Organized chronologically like Chapter Four, the discussion focuses on the study of T. S. Eliot in China and the translation of his works. It shows that numerous Chinese literary masters—among them Ye Gongchao, Zhao Luorui, Feng Zhi, Bian Zhilin, Mu Dan, Yuan Kejia, and Wang Zuoliang—were engaged deeply in studying Eliot's poetry and poetic theories. In recent decades, the writings and ideas of Eliot have exerted great influence on Chinese modernist poets, of whom Bian Zhilin and Mu Dan were the most prominent. A very important part of this chapter is a comparative reading between Eliot and ancient Chinese literary ideas, notably the themes of tradition and innovation, the interpretation of classics, and the concepts of empty quiescence and impersonal theory with striking similarities of the literary conceptions between Eliot and ancient China. This chapter concludes that Eliot's crystalline thinking, profound knowledge, and master's spirit of pioneering a new poetic style deserve further study and attention.

The topic of Chapter Six, "At Mount Nanyue: William Empson and His Poem 'Autumn on Nan-Yueh'" is the connection between Empson's famed poem "Autumn on Nan-Yueh" and his special experience at Mount Nanyue in Hunan, China. In the late 1930s, Empson joined the Temporary University of Changsha (later to become Southwest Associated University) and together with the faculty of the University, he journeyed to Mount Nanyue, the very site that inspired him to compose the poem. In it, the poet demonstrated the spirit of being content with poverty, tenacious struggle, and following one's heart wherever one is heading. The chapter indicates that because of this special experience Empson created this modernist poem, the longest of his literary career, to record the details of his life and his thoughts on the relationship between literature and politics. It reveals the details of Empson's two journeys to China, where he also lived for seven years, and his interactive relationship with the country.

The subject of Chapter Seven, "In and Out: Fredric Jameson and China," concerns Jameson's critical ideas and his connection with China. For decades, Jameson has made major contributions to literary scholarship, including his ideas and applications in New Marxist literary criticism, postmodern cultural criticism, and the theory of The Third World Culture. This chapter offers an original analysis of key concepts in such works as *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* and *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Jameson's experience in China provides yet another testimony of the reciprocal relationship and mutual benefits between China and the West. On the one hand, he is indebted to the Chinese culture since his works draw inspiration from the works of late Chairman Mao Zedong, Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Lao She, and others. On the other hand, nearly all of his scholarly works, including his lectures and seminars presented in China, have been translated into Chinese language, which becomes influential in China.

Chapter Eight, "On the Genesis of Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged*," addresses the connection between Qian Zhongshu's novel *Fortress Besieged* and his experiences at National Hunan Normal College (NHNC), later to become Hunan Normal University (HNNU). The chapter reveals that significant portions of Qian's classic twentieth-century novel, *Fortress Besieged*, are closely correlated with Hunan, in Central South China. More than one third of *Fortress Besieged* describes the experiences of its main character, Fang Hongjian, at the fictional Sanlü University. It argues that Qian's time at NHNC had a formative impact on *Fortress Besieged,* in which four pivotal chapters are fictionalized versions of his actual encounters in Hunan. Drawing on archival documents, this chapter analyzes the novel to determine the relative levels of historical veracity versus imaginative recreations. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate whether depictions are realistic or fantastic, and the ways in which *Fortress Besieged* and NHNC become mutually constitutive reflections of each other. The chapter concludes that if Qian had not had the relevant experiences at NHNC, *Fortress Besieged*—now considered in the West as well as in China to be one of the world's greatest novels of the twentieth century—might never have been written.

Chapter Nine, "Two Shining Examples of Learning: Qian Zhongshu and Zhang Longxi," builds on Chapter Eight by comparing the pedagogical principles and practices of Qian Zhongshu and Zhang Longxi. Although they were born at different times, their academic backgrounds laid a solid foundation for each of them to focus their learning on bridging the gap between Chinese and Western cultures and between different disciplines. Through careful reading and comparative study, this chapter demonstrates that Zhang inherited Qian's methods of academic research. They both possess academic horizons spanning the East and West, and ancient and modern times; both advocate interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research methods; both persist in meticulous and substantive styles of writing; and both develop creative Eastern and Western literary hermeneutics. Their ways of learning have set an outstanding example for us to learn from in East-West cross-cultural studies.

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CHAPTER ONE

WOODEN BELL AND GADFLY: THE STORY OF CONFUCIUS AND SOCRATES

Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.) and Socrates (469 B.C.-399 B.C.) were brilliant thinkers who emerged during the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. They both have exercised great influence over the civilizations of the East and West so deeply and widely that they have been recognized for their efforts by all later generations. Although both philosophers sprang successively from either side of the world, comparing their ideologies concerning nature and morality draws many similarities. By examining their ideas, an understanding of our own respective cultural roots might facilitate the understanding of the eastern and western civilizations, which is highly attainable in our interdependent world.

Great Thoughts Booming in the Axial Period

The great poet T. S. Eliot in his well-known essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" says:

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most

> acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. (14)

Eliot points out that tradition is very significant in our lives as it associates with the historical sense which covers the past and the present. When I read this passage, it always makes me consider which ideas about cultural traditions can best formulate the Chinese people's character. For every Chinese person, both in China and diasporic Chinese communities internationally, their every act or move is influenced by one great book: *The Analects of Confucius*, a canon formed 2400 years ago. To be Chinese, this book is a must. Coincidentally, the world civilization enjoyed its boom around 500 B.C. This is one of the so-called Axial Periods.

The Axial Period is a concept put forth by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers. As he pointed out, after the pre-history and civilization of remote antiquity, in about 500 B.C., some remarkable events occurred on the scale of the whole world. In China, Confucius and Laozi were very active; all Chinese philosophical schools including Mozi, Zhuangzi, Liezi, and the various other schools came into being. As is the case with India, where the Upanishads and Buddha appeared; people probed into the whole system of philosophical probability from skepticism, materialism, and sophism to nihilism. As for the Greek philosophers, Homer, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, and many tragedians, as well as Thucydides and Archimedes, all emerged. In these centuries, what were embodied in these names developed almost simultaneously in China, India, and the West though they were unaware of one another. Jaspers calls this period the "axis" of world history. Humankind always lives in dependence on what people thought and created in the axial period; we tend to review this period at every leap forward and are rekindled by it. After that, as is always the case, the revival of and return to the potentiality of the axial period, or its renaissance, always provides us with some new spiritual impetus.

Chinese classics have similar records, indicating that during the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. diverse philosophical schools were booming and competing with one another. According to *Han Shu* in *The History of the Former Han Dynasty:*

> Among the ten schools of thought, nine deserve appreciation. They came into being when the kingly way was tiny, the feudal princes took the power in the government and the lords held different likes and dislikes. Like the bee

> swarms, the nine schools sprung simultaneously and advocated their own preferences to persuade and cater for the feudal princes. (594-595)

In *Zhuangzi*, we find the following statements:

> Taoism will inevitably be disintegrated and disrupted. (587)

> Ideas and views of these books spread far and wide and are practiced in the states of the central plains of China. They have been frequently cited and commented on positively by scholars of various schools. When the world falls into chaos, sagacious views will be submerged, and uniform moral codes will not be possible. Most people in the world are inclined to regard themselves as infallible and parade themselves wherever possible but in reality their learning is very limited. (585)

It is noteworthy in considering such documents that historically significant and justly renowned individuals lived in approximately the same period. Shakya Muni (c. 565 B.C.-485 B.C.) was a contemporary of Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.); Socrates (469 B.C.-399 B.C.) of Mozi (about 470 B.C.-391 B.C.); Plato (427 B.C.-347 B.C.) likely of Laozi (birth year unknown); and Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.) of Mencius (c. 372 B.C.-289 B.C.) and Zhuangzi (about 369 B.C.-286 B.C.). In this golden period of cultural development, two figures are strikingly important separately in China and the West. Their thoughts were respectively read and expounded by their contemporaries and later generations. They are Confucius and Socrates.

Birth and Images of Confucius and Socrates

Confucius and Socrates were born in nearly the same epoch, although they lived far apart in distance. They both lived in historical periods marked by tremendous social changes. These changes included frequent wars, political disturbances, ideological confusion and conflict, and demoralization. Confronted with political and social crises, they both sought moral principles as a basis for understanding those crises and for mending the social fabric. Socrates reminded the Athenians of the nature and importance of civic virtue, the health of the city-state, and the welfare

of citizens.

The Spring and Autumn Period of ancient China was a time of great social change and political upheaval. It was a time of alliances and wars. States expanded or were vanquished. The rites established in the Western Zhou were no longer observed and the original social order was broken. Old beliefs collapsed and new ideas proliferated. This turbulent situation stimulated scholars of the day to devise ways to restore peace and stability. The first and most important of these scholars was Confucius.

According to *Zuo's Commentary*, Huafu, a senior official of the State of Song, met the wife of Kong Fu on the road. He gazed at her with admiration, and as she passed from his view, sighed, "What a captivating beauty!" (Ji 21). In the spring of the second year, Huafu and his men attacked Kong Fu. They murdered the unfortunate Kong Fu and Huafu carried off his wife. This angered his master, Duke Shang of Song, which prompted Huafu to murder him too, for self-preservation (Ji 22). When Kong Fu had been killed, his son fled to Lu to escape death and made his home there. Among this man's descendants was a warrior, the lowest rank of the nobility, commonly known as Shuliang He. In fact, his surname was "Kong," "Shuliang" being his courtesy name and "He" his given name. The warrior was married twice and had nine daughters and one crippled son. Custom prevented daughters from becoming heirs, and the lame son could not bring him any honor. So although already over 60, he decided to get married again, this time to a very young woman, Yan Zhengzai. After their marriage, she gave birth in 551 B.C. to a son called Kong Qiu, with Zhongni as his courtesy name. According to legend, Qiu and Ni came from Mount Niqiu, where his parents had prayed to the mountain god for a son. What is the true picture of Confucius? The people of later generations have always considered him a great Master or Saint, so he looks always so great. When you read the description by Xunzi, the student of Confucius' student, you will change your perception of Confucius' image.

Xunzi recorded:

> Contra Physiognomy, in antiquity, physiognomy did not exist, and the learned did not discuss it…hence, to physiognomize the external form is not as important as evaluating the mind, and evaluating the mind is not as important as selecting the proper methodology…Confucius' face looked like it was covered with an exorcist's mask. (47; 49)

Xunzi here told us not to judge a person according to his appearance, but the mind. He indicated that Confucius' face was like an exorcist's mask that could be frightening. This picture of Confucius is totally different from the statue presented in later years. *Records of the Grand History of China* by Sima Qian said:

> Great Family of Confucius: Confucius was born in Zouyi, Changping, in the State of Lu (now Zoucheng, Shandong Province). His ancestor, Kong Fangshu, was a citizen of the State of Song. Fangshu was the father of Bo Xia who was the father of Shu Lianghe. Confucius was the child of Shu Lianghe and a woman with the surname Yan whose marriage was against the etiquette. Before his birth, his parents prayed to God for a son on Niqiu mountain. In the 22nd year of Duke Xiang of Lu, Confucius was born. On the top his head, there was a concave in the middle, so he gained his name Qiu. Confucius was styled as Kong Zhongni. […] Confucius lived a poor life…Confucius was over 180 cm tall, so he was called a giant man uniquely. (231)

It is very clear that Sima Qian regarded Confucius as a human being at a time when many men were already coming to look upon him as a divine being.

Details about Socrates can be derived from three contemporary sources: the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon (both devotees of Socrates), and the plays of Aristophanes. According to Plato, Socrates' father was Sophroniscus and his mother was Phaenarete, a midwife. He also has been depicted by some scholars, including Eric Havelock and Walter Ong, as a champion of oral modes of communication, standing up at the dawn of writing against its haphazard diffusion. Socrates was a short man with an ugly face. His most noticeable facial feature was a broad nose above a bushy handlebar mustache and a beard. He walked barefoot, always directly connected to the humility of dirt and dust. He wore a simple, unadorned, robe-like garment wrapped about his body.

Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* portrays Socrates as a clown who teaches his students how to bamboozle their way out of debt. Most of Aristophanes' works, however, function as parodies. Thus, it is presumed this characterization was also not literal. See the dialogue in *The Clouds*:

> Strepsiades: How is that? Intellectuals draw sap into watercress? But come down, dear Socrates, down to me, and teach the things I came for.
> Socrates: What did you come for?
> Strepsiades: To learn to speak. I am wracked, ruined and dispossessed by most malignant debts and usury. (Hadas 108)

In Plato's dialogues Plato himself is never a character, and Socrates is usually the chief figure, in a dialogue which is sometimes direct and sometimes narrated by others or by Socrates himself. Plato's Socrates varies enormously between dialogues. Sometimes he is a persistent questioner of others' positions; sometimes he puts forward his own views confidently and at length; sometimes he is merely a bystander. From the above investigation, we can see the two great men, Confucius and Socrates, who were born in wartime, came from ordinary people and even looked ordinary.

Life Experiences of Confucius and Socrates

At the age of 3 and 17, Confucius' father and mother passed away respectively. He married his wife at 19 and had a baby at 20. Between the ages of 34-35, he left the State of Lu. It is said that in the year of 518 B.C., he went to the library of the Zhou Dynasty to visit Lao Tzu in Luoyang. In 517 B.C., he went to the State of Qi where he was not to be employed by Duke Jing. The Duke declined him by negotiating the salary first and confessed that he could not give Confucius as much money as Ji earned. Finally, the Duke said, as an excuse, that he was too old to accomplish anything. In the State of Qi, the greatest thing Confucius did was to appreciate the classical Shao music. He was so absorbed in the music that he could not taste the smell of meat for three months.

It is said today in Shaoyuan Village in the southeastern Linzi Ancient Town of Zibo City, Shandong Province, that an ancient monument carved with "Site of Confucius' Appreciating Shao Music" was unearthed during the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty, together with numerous stone chimes. When he was around 35-50 years of age, Confucius returned to Lu and resumed his work of revising books of poetry and music, teaching, and researching. He said, "At forty I had no more doubts" (8) and argued that one who has reached the age of forty and is disliked will be disliked to the

end (182).

In 505 B.C., Ji Huanzi took power in the government. Yang Huo visited Confucius with a piglet as a present and asked him to take a job as an official. Confucius agreed orally but did not immediately assume this position. Confucius favored *The Changes* and once said, "If I could add several years to my life, I would have studied *The Changes* from the age of fifty and become free of error" (66). He also said, "At fifty I knew the mandate of heaven" (8), perhaps due to his having read *The Changes* so as to know such a mandate. From the ages of 51 to 54, Confucius became an official in the State of Lu. In 501 B.C., he became the local Governor of Zhongdu. In 500 B.C., he became the Minister of Public Works and later the Minister of Justice. In 498 B.C., Gongshan Furao invaded Duke Ding of Lu and was defeated by Confucius. He then became the deputy prime minister and killed the official Shaozheng Mao. He was frustrated with Duke Ding of Lu and determined to leave the State of Lu together with Yan Yuan, Zilu, Ran You, Zigong, and others.

From the ages of 55 to 68, he traveled through all the kingdoms. In 497 B.C., he left Lu for Wei. In 496 B.C., he traveled westward, got trapped in Kuang and returned to Wei via Pu. He traveled to Cao, Song, Zheng, and finally arrived in Chen. He had barely survived on the way and escaped being killed by Huan Tui. That year, he was 60, and he once said, "At sixty my ear was obedient" (8), so he was obedient to all hermits' criticisms on his journey.

In 489 B.C., Confucius left Chen for Cai. He was out of food en route to Cai, and went back to Ye County on the northeastern border of Chu. Confucius lost contact with his disciples when he arrived in Zheng and stood alone at the gate of the outer city. A citizen of Zheng saw him and told Zigong:

> At the gate of the outer city stood a man whose forehead was like Yao's, neck like Gaoyao's, and shoulders like Zichan's. Below the waist, he was 9cm shorter than Yu. He looked so tired that he was like an outcast dog. Zigong told all this to Confucius. Confucius smiled and said: "The citizen's description of my appearance was not true, but I was really like an outcast dog." (Sima 233)

This shows that the traveling road for spreading Confucius' ideas was uneven.

From the ages of 69 to 73, Confucius returned to Lu. In 483 B.C., his son Kong Li died. In 482 B.C., he was 70, of which he once said, "At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing the norm" (8). In 480 B.C., Zilu died in Wei in an awful manner, which dealt a heavy blow to him. In 479 B.C., Confucius passed away. According to Zhuangzi:

> When Confucius was in the state of Chu, Jieyu, a recluse in Chu, wandered about his door, saying: Phoenix, oh! Phoenix, oh! How your virtue has declined! About the future we don't know; the past we can no longer find. When Tao prevails all o'er the world, the sage succeeds in all his strife; When Tao prevails not in the world, the sage preserves but his own life. (Zhuangzi 69)

> To live today in this wild world, he only hopes to be safe in life. Lighter than a feather is good fortune, but no one knows how to enjoy it; heavier than the earth is misfortune, but no one knows how to avoid it. (Zhuangzi 71)

In the above-quoted passages, Zhuangzi, in the disguise of Jieyu, tells how highly people spoke of Confucius and how disorderly the society was. Time and tide were not easy for Confucius. Meanwhile, hardship and tough experiences made him understand the living conditions of the lower people and he realized the significance of building a well-organized society to avoid disturbance and wars. Confucius' journey and life experience laid a good foundation for his philosophy.

Though characterized as unattractive in appearance and short in stature, Socrates married Xanthippe, who was much younger than he was. She bore him three sons, Lamprocles, Sophroniscus, and Menexenus. His friend Crito of Alopece criticized him for abandoning his sons when he refused to try to escape before his execution. An unreliable later tradition, implausibly ascribed to Aristotle, mentions a second wife Myrto.

It is unclear how Socrates earned a living. Ancient texts seem to indicate that Socrates did not work. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates is reported as saying he devotes himself only to what he regards as the most important art or occupation: discussing philosophy. In *The Clouds* Aristophanes portrays Socrates as accepting payment for teaching and

running a sophist school with Chaerephon, while in Plato's *Apology* and *Symposium* and in Xenophon's accounts, Socrates explicitly denies accepting payment for teaching. More specifically, in *Apology* Socrates cites his poverty as proof he is not a teacher. According to Timon of Phlius and later sources, Socrates took over the profession of stonemasonry from his father. There was a tradition in antiquity, not credited by modern scholarship, that Socrates crafted the statues of the Three Graces, which stood near the Acropolis until the 2nd century A.D.

At one point he had the money to serve as a heavily-armed soldier, but by the end of his life he was poor. Several of Plato's dialogues refer to Socrates' military service. Socrates says he served in the Athenian army during three campaigns: at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades describes Socrates' valor in the battles of Potidaea and Delium, recounting how Socrates saved his life in the battle at Potidaea. Socrates' exceptional service at Delium also is mentioned in the *Laches* by the General after whom the dialogue is named. In *Apology*, Socrates compares his military service to his courtroom troubles, and says anyone on the jury who thinks he ought to retreat from philosophy must also think soldiers should retreat when it seems likely that they will be killed in battle. In this sense, tough life experience is a good teacher for anyone, including great philosophers like Socrates and Confucius.

In 406 B.C. he was a member of the Boule, and his tribe the Antiochis held the Prytany on the day the Generals of the Battle of Arginusae, who abandoned the slain and the survivors of foundered ships to pursue the defeated Spartan navy, were discussed. Socrates was the epistates and resisted the unconstitutional demand for a collective trial to establish the guilt of all eight generals, proposed by Callixeinus. Eventually, Socrates refused to be cowed by threats of impeachment and imprisonment and blocked the vote until his Prytany ended the next day, whereupon the six generals who had returned to Athens were condemned to death.

In 404 B.C., the Thirty Tyrants sought to ensure the loyalty of those opposed to them by making them complicit in their activities. Socrates and four others were ordered to bring a certain Leon of Salamis from his home for unjust execution. Socrates quietly refused, his death averted only by the overthrow of the Tyrants soon afterwards.

Socrates' death is described at the end of Plato's *Phaedo*. Socrates turned down the pleas of Crito to attempt an escape from prison. After drinking poison, he was instructed to walk around until his legs felt numb. After he lay down, the man who administered the poison pinched his foot. Socrates could no longer feel his legs. The numbness slowly crept up his body until it reached his heart. Shortly before his death, Socrates told Crito that they owed a rooster to Asclepius and asked Crito not to forget to pay the debt. Asclepius was the Greek god for curing illness, and it is likely Socrates' last words meant that death is the cure and freedom of the soul from the body. Additionally, in *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*, Robin Waterfield adds another interpretation of Socrates' last words. Waterfield suggests that Socrates was a voluntary scapegoat; his death was the purifying remedy for Athens' misfortunes. In this view, the token of appreciation for Asclepius would represent a cure for the ailments of Athens.

Sometime in 400 B.C. or very early in 399 B.C. an obscure young man named Meletus (Euthyphro), son of Meletus of Pitthos, brought and swore the following indictment against Socrates, son of Sophroniscus: Socrates is a wrongdoer in not recognizing the gods which the city recognizes, and introducing other new divinities. Further, he is a wrongdoer in corrupting the young. The penalty demanded was death. According to Xenophon's "Socrates' Defense to the Jury," Socrates purposefully gave a defiant defense to the jury because "he believed he would be better off dead" (178). Xenophon goes on to describe a defense by Socrates that explains the rigors of old age, and how Socrates would be glad to circumvent them by being sentenced to death. It is also understood that Socrates also wished to die because he "actually believed the right time had come for him to die" (182).

Xenophon and Plato agreed that Socrates had an opportunity to escape, as his followers were able to bribe the prison guards. He chose to stay for several reasons. He believed such a flight would indicate a fear of death, which he believed no true philosopher has. If he fled Athens, his teaching would fare no better in another country as he would continue questioning all he met and undoubtedly incur their displeasure. Having knowingly agreed to live under the city's laws, he implicitly subjected himself to the possibility of being accused of crimes by its citizens and

judged guilty by its jury; to do otherwise would have caused him to break his social contract with the state and so harm the state, an act contrary to the Socratic principle. The full reasoning behind his refusal to flee is the main subject of Plato's "Crito." According to *Phaedo*, at his death, "Socrates alone retained his calmness: What is this strange outcry? He said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, then, and have patience" (Benton 251).

Wooden Bell and Gadfly: Confucius and Socrates

Any great writer or philosopher usually has his or her own style in using metaphor. We sometimes like to link a specific metaphor with the description of the author himself or herself. Wooden bell and gadfly respectively were mentioned by the two masters, therefore these two terms can become alternate names for them.

> When the Master Confucius was trapped in Kuang, he said.
> When King Wen perished, did that mean that culture (文) ceased to exist? If Heaven had really intended that such culture as his should disappear, a latter-day mortal would never have been able link himself to it as I have done. And if Heaven does not intend to destroy such culture, what have I to fear from the people of Kuang? (83)

Obviously, facing the threat of death, Confucius cared about the culture rather than himself. His attitude originated from his confidence. He strongly insisted that his mission was not complete and he could not die. According to *The Analects of Confucius*, the guardian of the frontier-mound at Yi asked to be presented to the Master, saying, "No gentleman arriving at this frontier has ever yet failed to accord me an interview." The Master's followers presented him. On going out the man said, "Sirs, you must not be disheartened by his failure. It is now a very long while since the Way didn't prevail in the world. I feel sure that Heaven intends to use your Master as a wooden bell" (Confucius 24-25). Confucius was praised as a wooden bell to warn, educate, civilize, and moralize the people of his time.