

Chapter 1

Hidden in Plain View

Questions, Issues, and Perspectives

We can read a text in many ways, and what we find depends in great part on the questions we bring to our reading. The richness in texts and approaches enables us as contemporary readers gain a better understanding of the complexities of the thought and world of the ancient philosophers. While the text of Mencius has been the subject of numerous studies, contemporary developments in scholarship invite its further examination. These developments are of various kinds, with some the result of recent archeological discoveries, while others related to a greater awareness of the assumptions that shape our investigations.

Inspired by the latter kind of advance, I offer here an examination of Mencian thought and argumentation from the perspective of gender.¹ Studies of *Mencius* to date have generally not been concerned with gender or have seen the Mencian position as largely favorable to women because of its inclusion of values typically associated with women. Both approaches have thus assumed, whether implicitly or explicitly, that Mencian moral and political concepts were gender neutral, theoretically applying to both men and women. I claim here that such gender neutrality was not the case and that Mencian teachings applied specifically to men, especially those in privileged positions. In addition, gender was not an extraneous component of Mencian moral and political concepts. It was embedded in philosophical discourse at all levels, from the assumptions and words themselves, to the content and contexts of argumentation.

Recognizing the gender specificity of Mencian ideas is important because it affects our interpretation of central Mencian claims. If we read through a gender lens, we will be able to understand the behavioral dynamics of how a man was to become a great man (*daren* 大人), the Mencian ideal of the moral person, and how the process related to cultural

understandings of men and women. By not attending to the gender dimension of Mencius' views, we miss both how radical and conservative his position was, and we forego gaining certain insights into the Confucian-Mencian tradition and its relation to Chinese society and culture.

I begin this study with several observations, which will be supported here briefly and more extensively in the course of the following discussion. First, viewed in terms of gender, Chinese philosophy is a story about competing forms of masculinity. Recorded in texts dating from the earliest times to the present, philosophical conflicts and activities have been carried out primarily in reference to the male sphere of society and government. The thinkers, ideas, texts, and actions belonged to a masculine realm of political power and culture from ancient to contemporary China. As an ongoing conversation on how to behave, Chinese philosophy was an affair of elite men, for they were the ones who both developed the ideas and established the perspectives for their understanding. Their concerns, not those of women and nonelite men, filled the pages of the texts. Nonetheless, women and their behavior were relevant to the philosophical conversation.

A second observation is that various kinds of forgetting have occurred within the Chinese philosophical tradition. The most obvious kind is that revealed by recent archeological discoveries, which have brought to light ancient texts and ideas lost for two millennia.² Another type of forgetting has happened with the burying of ideas in the received texts themselves. That is, some ideas were embedded but remained unrecognized in the known texts, contained subversively in the texture of the texts' explicit arguments. While certainly elusive, suppressed arguments appearing in fragmented form within the texts have kept open the possibility for some of the forgotten ideas to re-emerge. Such fragments hint at the existence of issues or conflicts whose losers had to record their ideas, and perhaps even the conflicts, elsewhere, in sites other than the philosophical texts. Although details have long been lost, cultural memories remain, transformed and transmitted in narratives, images, symbols, and words.

By reconstructing parts of these forgotten conversations, we can see how Mencius argued for his views. His arguments were fraught with potential difficulties, of course, for they entailed the inclusion of values derived from female gendered behavior while excluding actual women. An early pre-Mencius textual illustration of the process of exclusion occurs, for instance, in the response of Confucius (Kongzi 孔子, 551 BCE–479 BCE) to King Wu's comment about having ten capable officials. Half a millennium after King Wu, a founder of the Zhou dynasty (1027? BCE–

256 BCE), Confucius said that there were only nine, for one was a woman.³ In other words, serving as an official was male gendered behavior, even if one was an actual woman.

Told in many cultural forms, not only in texts, the philosophical argument that I reconstruct here is about how female gendered behavior was central to Confucian-Mencian thinking, even as the teachings concerned the actions of men. My thesis is not that women were central in the sense of *yinyang* 陰陽 thinking, however, which offers the framework of an all-encompassing and complementary binary system. Rather, women were central in a more fundamental, nonbinary, and pre-*yinyang* sense, in which women embodied the seemingly unknowable and indestructible creative source of life.⁴ My account concerns how Mencian thinking appropriated fundamental characteristics of women as mothers and wives and, through certain processes of transformation, applied these characteristics to elite men in their social-political realms, thereby constructing philosophical concepts and views.⁵ Such processes of appropriation and transformation remained characteristic of this classical tradition as it developed over time, although specific cultural and ideological meanings of these processes changed with the contexts. Current scholarship suggests, moreover, that such gendering processes are continuing in the present, well beyond the boundaries of the former Confucian (*ru* 儒) or classical imperial order.⁶

The textual range of my analysis is intentionally limited, for it is the particulars in the claims and argumentation that reveal how ideas and concepts mean certain kinds of behavior. To provide a sufficiently detailed analysis of the processes by which female gendered behavior helps construct Confucian-Mencian thinking, I offer a close reading only of *Mencius*, a text of the Warring States period (480 BCE–221 BCE) and one of the most important works in the tradition. My focus concerns Mencian argumentation and the sociopsychological processes that enable a man to become a great man, or a gentleman (*junzi* 君子).⁷

Mencius is especially appropriate to analyze from a gender viewpoint because of its contributions to Confucian thought and its philosophical importance both historically and in our contemporary world. Although Confucian and Mencian views were widely challenged when first advocated, they eventually became critical to the moral, social, and political foundation of the Chinese imperial order, which lasted well into the nineteenth century. Mencius was the first major follower of Confucius in the received tradition, and the text that bears his name became especially important from the Song period (960–1279) on.⁸ During the Song it was accorded

classical status by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) as one of the Four Books, along with the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), and *Focusing the Familiar* or *The Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸). The Four Books together with Zhu Xi's commentaries formed the basis of the civil service examination system in the early fourteenth century, and this educational-political system remained in effect until 1905. Contemporary adherents and sympathizers of New Confucianism continue to place special value on *Mencius*, and scholars remain very much interested in it.⁹

Viewed historically, it has been (and continues to be) a text of constantly changing meanings, for thinkers have successively interpreted it in light of their own particular concerns and cultural circumstances.¹⁰ Although my reading is from a perspective of contemporary interest, I still treat *Mencius* as a text from a particular historical period. I consider its ideas to be based on specific assumptions and issues of its time, even though we know only some of the historical particulars now. I also maintain that we do not need to, and must not, decontextualize *Mencius* from its historical setting in order to make it relevant today, since many ancient issues continue to be important. The *Mencius* I discuss is not the one that Song thinkers understood from their political and ontological perspectives, or that Qing (1644–1911) thinkers understood with their concerns of evidential research, or that some contemporary thinkers understand in terms of Enlightenment-based assumptions. I address a dimension of Mencian thinking that was of no explicit interest to the thinkers and writers of traditional Chinese or Western philosophy but still pervades the text.

In addition to the history of the changes in understanding this text, there is another kind of story involving *Mencius*, namely the compilation of the text itself during the Warring States period. From the work of textual dating and compilation of E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, we know that *Mencius* like many texts was compiled over a period of time. The compilation of this text continued beyond the life of Mencius himself, who died about 303 BCE.¹¹ According to the Brooks' analysis, the text consists of a number of layers, which they identify with a Northern and a Southern school. They date the original interviews of Mencius to ca. 320–310 BCE, with additional material being added in various ways until 249 BCE, when Lu ceased to exist as a state and further textual activity also stopped.

The history of this text is relevant to many scholarly questions including a few of my concerns here, but it is outside the primary aims of my analysis. Moreover, since much of the text consists of statements not made by Mencius himself but still attributed to him, I have taken the liberty of

referring to all of the ideas as if they were actually stated by Mencius, in order to avoid numerous clumsy phrases and circumlocutions. We need to keep in mind, however, that when we examine this text from the perspective of the history of its compilation, we see a clear development in ideas. Thus, when this development is relevant to my analysis, I indicate whether a passage is from an earlier or later layer of the text.

My discussion is mostly based on what can be found within the text itself, although information from other writings helps suggest the philosophical significance of my claims. Some data illustrate, for instance, how maternal relations and female gendered behavior were historically central to Confucian-Mencian thinking. Not addressed directly as an issue and not a topic of teaching in the classical philosophical works, maternal practices are mentioned occasionally in texts in regard to other ideas, and mothers themselves were clearly recognized as important throughout Chinese society in both earlier and later periods. In the *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), for instance, the mother of the ancient sage ruler King Wen, a founder of the Zhou dynasty along with his son King Wu, was admired for teaching her son the proper virtues.¹² The mothers or maternal families of Confucius and Mencius were seen as critical to their early education and upbringing. Both thinkers were thought of as orphans, and both experienced a distancing from the paternal family.¹³ Later on, other philosophers in the tradition, the famous and not so famous, such as Zhu Xi and Li Yong 李顥 (1627–1705) respectively, were also depicted as orphans, that is, fatherless, even though they were not young children when their fathers died.¹⁴ There was, in other words, an ongoing cultural message that mothers are especially important for a man's success.

Some texts, such as the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienüzhuan* 列女傳) from the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE), relate the importance of mothers both within and beyond the Confucian tradition. Called the way of mother and son (*muzizhidao* 母子之道), the mother and son relationship from the later Han to late imperial times was recognized as having great significance among the political elite.¹⁵ By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and possibly much earlier, women's lives and the women's quarters were openly viewed as the position of genuine morality and as the moral center of society. Considered outside the political sphere of elite men with its turbulence and corruption, women's practices and places (the home) were seen as tangible embodiments of supposedly unchanging Confucian moral values.¹⁶

Such information suggests the existence of ongoing gender issues implicitly embedded within Confucian-Mencian discourse but not addressed

openly. Despite its personal, social, and philosophical importance from the classical to the late imperial period, the mother and son relationship was not one of the five recognized Confucian relations. It did not belong to the Confucian-Mencian theoretical social ontology, which for centuries characterized the social order in terms of the five relations (*renlun* 人倫) and four classes (*simin* 四民). The only relation among the five involving actual women was that of husband and wife. This relation was a theoretically recognized male relation, in contrast to that of mother and son, which was not. In other words, this social ontology described a world that was patriarchal, hierarchical, based on family and patrilineage, and fundamentally gendered. This ontology rendered women largely invisible in the philosophical texts, insofar as it applied to male relations and the texts did not address women's relationships, as it did those of men.

The theoretical exclusion of the mother and son relationship from this ontology is confirmed in many ways, both obvious and subtle. One way consists of the explicit references to the father and son relation throughout the *Analecets* and *Mencius* (and other texts, such as *Xunzi* 荀子), while simply not mentioning women's relationships. We also find that when different kinds of behavior are ranked in a moral sense, the examples focus on men and behavior that is socially and politically applicable to them.¹⁷ A further method of exclusion is the typical reference to men in terms of rank and occupation and to women in terms of their sex or marital status.¹⁸ All four of these characterizations (rank, occupation, sex, and marital status) are social-political in a contemporary sense, but only the former two are of philosophical concern within the Confucian-Mencian ontology.

While gender can be defined in various ways, here it refers to certain forms of patterned behavior within a cultural and communicational system. Evident in the earliest records in China, gender is culturally encoded in a variety of forms. It pertains not only to a person's positions and behavior in the family, state, and economic realms, but also to the more personal dimensions of one's body movements and appearance, and one's aims, expectations, and hopes in life. How gender has been thought about and its cultural meanings have changed over time.¹⁹ Although gender has been an aspect of *yinyang* correlative and metonymic thinking throughout most of Chinese history, *Mencius* was compiled prior to the extensive development of *yinyang* theory, a phenomenon of the Han period. Before the full acceptance of *yinyang* theory, texts tended to describe personal behavior in terms of particular social situations or practices of women and men, rather than categorize it in terms of abstract cosmic patterns linked to *yinyang* polarities.

The move from a particular to a more abstract level of thinking about behavior did not, however, obliterate previous forms of masculine gender fluidity, a significant characteristic linking earlier and later periods. The great male heroes of the early Zhou dynasty, men such as Kings Wen and Wu and the slightly later Zhong Shanfu, are described in the *Odes*, for instance, in terms of both masculine and feminine traits. *Tian* 天 (an important religious and philosophical term with a range of meanings and so variously translated as Heaven, conditions, circumstances, and forces) is similarly depicted; it is associated with the male and with force, and yet it also gives birth.²⁰

Although such transgending may appear to be favorable to women by the valuing of feminine traits, such a conclusion is deceptive, for the processes of appropriation and transformation entail silencing. Mencius' moral ideal may have been androgynous, but he remained a male. The concept of androgyny itself is problematic, moreover, because it implicitly affirms a binary sex and gender system, and it supports certain cultural values derived from binary patterns of the cosmos. Thus, in examining Mencian ideas about masculinities, it is helpful to consider such questions as where women are situated socially, whether the great women who also appear in the *Odes* and other ancient texts are comparably masculine and feminine, and what the philosophical implications are of the elite male's incorporating some but not all gender traits of women.

At the same time that the early Confucian-Mencian thinkers were promoting an implicitly transgendered ideal, elite men were strongly discouraged from exhibiting certain types of feminine behavior.²¹ This phenomenon suggests that, by the time of philosophical textual development, a selectivity of vision was prevalent with regard to the recognition of gendered behavior. That is, some behavior that had originally been appropriated from women was generally not recognized as such and became either accepted or tabooed, while other behavior was condemned. No philosophers, for instance, attempted to reconcile the fact that only women can give birth, a matter of female gendered behavior, with their claim that *tian* gave birth to the people and to the world, despite the depiction and correlation of *tian* with maleness as opposed to femaleness.

Although often portrayed now as universalistic and somehow neutral in its perspective, *yinyang* thinking, as it functioned for about two thousand years in Chinese society and values, was, like philosophical thinking, constructed from a male perspective and belonged to a male discourse. With this perspective built into its very concepts, it concerned questions about masculinities, not femininities.²² There was no comparable system

constructed from a female perspective and belonging to a female discourse. Women certainly participated in the *yinyang* discourse, but they did so by experiencing the world through male concepts, for the comprehensiveness of *yinyang* thinking precluded alternative conceptual assumptions. The *yinyang* cosmic dimension of gender thinking provided a theoretical way to include women and justify their actual social location by associating them with *yin*, the completing, dark, and low position, as opposed to *yang*, the initiating (birthing?), bright, and high position. Those activities for which actual women often had responsibility, such as household management, were not addressed in the philosophical texts.

Yinyang thinking offered a way not even to acknowledge those views of women's and men's activities that did not derive from the perspective of privileged men, for there was no place to locate such views theoretically. From the perspective of the Confucian-Mencian social ontology, the daily activities of some people, such as washing clothes or taking care of domestic chores, were not activities (that mattered). *Yinyang* thinking thus reinforced cultural characteristics found in the earlier records of the received tradition, namely, the maleness of the philosophical discourse and so also of the subject, and the higher social value placed on the activities of elite men. Later history illustrates this phenomenon of exclusion through a variety of practices that conceived women and other "others" as recipients of action and rendered them oppressed, often by themselves.²³

Historians note that gender fluidity in Chinese society was not accompanied historically by any significant broadening of social roles or relaxing of moral norms, and indeed the opposite was the case for elite women.²⁴ That is, the actual social conditions of women became increasingly restrictive as Confucianism developed, especially from the Song period on. This trend was furthered by various structural features of society, one of which was the flourishing of the examination system, which helped reinforce certain social values associated with binary cultural categories like inner and outer (*neiwai* 内外) and *yinyang*. Like *yinyang* thinking, *neiwai* thinking was also constructed from a male perspective and was a male discourse. For instance, in the matter of political participation (open only to males), successful examination candidates who became government officials were, theoretically speaking, outer (*wai*) and so correlated with *yang* and its male association, while those not in government and who failed the exams were inner (*nei*) and so correlated with *yin* and its female associations. At the same time, since designations of the *yin* and *yang* positions depended on the context, this binary thinking also reinforced the social classification of women and the home as inner and *yin*, and men and political affairs as outer and *yang*.

With some notable exceptions, active political participation by women ended during the Han, a time when *yinyang* correlative thinking took hold and the Confucian canon was established. Even women who were politically involved, such as Wu Zhao (625?–706?), who declared herself Emperor of the new Zhou dynasty in 690 (during the late Tang dynasty) and the Dowager Empress Ci Xi (1835–1908), who ruled behind the throne in the late Qing dynasty, entered a political-philosophical discourse in which the subject remained male gendered. Too much out of place, these women were seen as dangerous to the social-political order, although some dimensions of their (female) behavior were not.²⁵

Women were praised within the philosophical tradition for certain virtues, the very ones that made them (in varying ways and to varying degrees) invisible, silent, marginal, subordinate, or associated with things that were undesirable, feared, or considered evil. Such judgments were not self-made but were made from a position of privilege. The oppressive practice of footbinding, for instance, made beautiful feet and restricted persons. Women disciplined themselves by carrying out this practice themselves, and so they literally embodied certain values of (patriarchal) society. Footbinding was a reification of both social restrictions constructed for maintaining order and cultural judgments about that which is ugly and evil. Moreover, as we learn from the earliest texts, good and evil were culturally conceived in terms of beautiful and ugly as well as orderly and disorderly. A contemporary transformation is seen in the practice of “voluntary” leg bone stretching, designed to make a person taller and so more socially acceptable but often leaving young men and women partially crippled.²⁶ Just as Confucian-Mencian thinking in the past claimed, incorporated, and transformed pre-Confucian values and practices, such as gender fluidity, so the post-Confucian world similarly continues these processes.

Although scholars in the fields of Chinese literature, history, religion, and anthropology have provided many insightful analyses relating to gender, the story has just begun to be told in Chinese philosophy. Ellen Marie Chen took an early lead decades ago by discussing how the great mother and motherly love are at the core of early Daoism and its concept of *dao*, but her work has not been followed by a body of studies in philosophy comparable to the developments in other disciplines.²⁷ If we look across cultures to Western philosophy, however, a simple listing of the philosophical studies would fill volumes, even shelves. To cite but two of thousands of examples, Page duBois has described a process of appropriation and transformation that constructed the ideal philosopher in Platonic thinking, and Laura Inglis and Peter Steinfeld have analyzed

how women both disappeared and yet remained critical in the development of Western philosophy.²⁸

The questions motivating this study have expanded and changed over time, but they began with an interest in understanding why and how women in Chinese and other cultures have historically supported the elite's value systems despite the fact that these value systems help construct social conditions that are restrictive and oppressive to women in many ways. This is not to say that men are not also restricted in their behavior, because they certainly are. I could only begin to answer my initial questions after first understanding that, and how, Chinese philosophy historically was a discourse about masculine behavior, and secondly understanding that, and how, it constantly incorporated female gendered behavior as it developed. I have concluded that the feminine (especially, maternal) dimension of Confucian-Mencian ideas was one of the factors that enabled women to support, teach, and promote these values. It was by no means the only factor, however. Furthermore, the incorporation of feminine traits into the Confucian-Mencian ideal of masculinity, especially for elite and powerful men, has not led to the participation of women in those spheres of activity most highly valued in society because those social and political institutions remain male gendered. At best, women have been able to appropriate some forms of masculine behavior by engaging in activities similar to those of men. But they have done so in their separately gendered social realms.

Another factor in the support of patriarchal values by women is the lack of genuine alternatives to dominant social values and practices. People who are disadvantaged by social values and institutions believe in and accept them as the way things are, just as much as the privileged do. Moreover, the ways in which people personally adjust to, and learn, their culture's values contribute to how their character or "person" is shaped, and that character in turn interacts with various features of their social life which then confirm the apparent validity of these values. It is difficult to dismantle the coding that prevents the perspective of particular values from being clearly recognized, particularly when that perspective belongs to a privileged elite.

Such ideas appear to have a validity that transcends a particular time, often because they are claimed to be grounded in biological traits or cosmic processes that are assumed to be universal. Alternative interpretations and genuinely competing ideas are often impossible to imagine, and generally they are not readily available to illustrate how seemingly neutral ideas or values actually entail specific gender and class perspectives, as well as theoretical and historical assumptions. If one is to see the world differently, a

wholly different set of assumptions has to come into play, including recognition that philosophical discourse, and the social, cultural, and political realm to which the discourse applies, is gendered.

The interpretations I offer have been carefully considered and are open to textual corroboration. My account is based primarily on the text of *Mencius* itself and secondarily on a few related, relevant texts. The ideas I present are found in the texts, sometimes hidden in plain view and other times not even hidden. However, one has to look in order to see, and what I present here has not usually been looked for, as translations of *Mencius* into English indicate. Since previous translations have been done from a perspective that has much in common with that of Mencius himself, they obscure the very points that I want to bring into awareness. Although it can be made visible, the textual evidence that I cite remains invisible if most cultural rules (Chinese and Western) are followed.

In addition, my methodology of focusing on social relationships and practices, and not on abstract ideas, is a widespread form of Chinese thinking itself. The classic of *Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), for instance, is organized around sixty-four hexagrams, which represent situations that are continually changing. The poems of the *Odes* focus on situations, some political and many personal, as they express the thoughts and feelings of the writers, many of whom claimed to be women (whether true or not). The classic of *Documents* (*Shujing* 書經), the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), and many other texts also illustrate this concern with activities and practices. From a philosophical viewpoint, the use of a context or set of practices to establish a frame of reference, which then provides a set of assumptions, associations, and guidelines for thinking, is a feature of Chinese culture. It is an approach that Chinese thinkers and writers themselves used.

One result of studies that have brought out the viewpoint of an “other” has been to remind us that how we conceive and discuss the past is based on a particular, not universal, perspective, no matter what our claims may be. For instance, in the field of environmental history, Mark Elvin has shown how the story of Kua Fu’s insatiable thirst, found in the *Liezi* 列子 and *Huainanzi* 淮南子, can be interpreted as a story about environmental destruction, rather than about someone who misjudges his own abilities and so attempts to do too much (the traditional view). Francesca Bray’s anthropological study demonstrates how places, spaces, work, and the body are not somehow neutral but are encoded with (patriarchal) values and ideas. And Maram Epstein’s literary study reveals how gender is used to convey political positions of orthodoxy and protest, rather than simply functioning as an entertaining feature of some stories.²⁹

Despite many advances in knowledge and technology, it still remains that who tells the story is also who controls the memory. As the categories that structure accounts and the tellers of the stories change, however, our understandings of the past and present are transformed. Our perspectives and questions depend on many unspoken assumptions, just as the concepts and narratives of what we are studying did. Recent studies involving gender, for instance, have addressed dimensions of life that historically were hidden from recognition or treated as unimportant. This scholarship enables us to see what we, as contemporary scholars, and they, the past audience of Chinese texts, have been taught not to see. Taking a perspective outside the master narrative of Chinese philosophy, enables me to present a *Mencius* that is not entirely familiar and to uncover some of the implicit ways elite Chinese culture taught people to understand the world.

Gender is one of the most fundamental cultural ordering patterns that seem so natural people are generally not aware that they know them. Gender is still often dismissed as irrelevant. Appropriating from and transforming female gendered behavior, as well as tacitly using the feminine in argumentation, were aspects of the conflicts over changing norms of masculinity, and these aspects and conflicts were both known and unknown. In contrast, comparable conflicts over norms of femininity did not exist in philosophical writings. Although we can only speculate, appropriating from the feminine is perhaps tied to preliterate (prehistorical) changes in the power or status of some women in relation to some men. The traces of such hypothesized changes barely survive but are suggested by the ongoing worldwide traditions of female deities, such as the Chinese Queen Mother of the West, the female deities of Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Christian view of the mother of Jesus as the Mother of God.

On an explicit level, I read *Mencius* as instructing men on how to behave in new ways. If they already were behaving in these ideal ways, this kind of instruction would not have been needed and most likely would not have appeared. As Mark Edward Lewis has suggested, the teachings of this and similar texts were creating an ideal world that did not exist.³⁰ Plato's ideals have a similar significance. Although much of Mencian thought is stated in the form of descriptions of behavior, these statements are actually prescriptions of what men ought to do. We should also be cognizant that, at the same time that *Mencius* advocates new behavior that is criticized by some as not sufficiently strong and masculine, and perhaps even seen as somewhat weak and feminine, this text provides a strong defense of patriarchy.

A final issue to note briefly is the power of words and a culture's fundamental assumptions about them. When we try to assign a familiar word

to situations or practices that may not be recognized as even existing from a privileged cultural perspective, both in Chinese and English, we are immediately confronted with resistances of belief and language. It is often difficult to apply ordinary words in everyday use to activities viewed as unusual, because words are social entities and they contain within themselves specific perspectives. Whether we approve or not, words have meanings beyond our specific references and intended uses, and they belong to those other ontologies too.

For example, the words father and mother may seem to be an appropriate pair, but when viewed in terms of many social practices, they are not, for the practices called fathering and mothering in English do not function in complementary situations. A father can mother, but a mother can never father. Except for breast-feeding and giving birth, a man can feed, bathe, and otherwise take care of a child, but a woman cannot inseminate. In Chinese we find something comparable. The Chinese term *yang* 養 has various meanings, including to nourish in a broad sense or specifically to breast-feed. Similarly, *sheng* 生 entails a range of meanings, including to give birth, produce, or provide sperm. While *Mencius* exhorts a man to *yang* his parents, wife, and children, *Xunzi* points out in one passage that a father cannot *yang* (breast-feed, nourish) but can *sheng* (give birth to, beget) a child, and a mother can feed but cannot instruct.³¹ Here we see how critical interpretation and translation are. Another brief example occurring in English and Chinese, and relevant to this study, is that we can talk about the ruling that the ruler does but not about the wife-ing that the wife does, unless we change the vocabulary to words like helping, responding, and serving. Thus we see how a perspective and a social context is built into a word itself.

These examples touch on the difficulties faced in trying to take the perspective of other voices within a particular social ontology, whether that attempt involves making an outsider or non-subject (such as wife) into a subject, attempting to recover voices that have been silenced, or attempting to speak from a different social discourse.³² Cultures and their texts work against the effort to recover some types of memory but are never able to silence other positions completely, because the other is built into the discourse and the contexts. It is always there, recognized or not. My aim is to help bring these others into our awareness.