

Chapter 11

Yan Fu's Xunzian-Confucian Translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*



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Abstract The synthesis of Victorian Evolutionism, Thomas Huxley's ethics, Late-Qing Chinese nationalism (especially post-1894) and Pre-Qin Confucian thinker Xun Zi's political thought (third century BCE) in Yan Fu's interpretative translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* into *Tianyan lun* (On the Operation of Heaven) helps to unravel a puzzle in the study of Chinese Darwinism: Why did Yan Fu choose to translate Huxley's anti-Social-Darwinian writing to introduce the ideas of Darwinism to his Chinese compatriots? To answer this question, this essay explains how Yan Fu perceived Huxley's ideas of "limiting struggle for existence within society" and "the strengthening of the social bond" from the perspective of international politics rather than from Huxley's original perspective of domestic social policy. Yan Fu thereby transplanted Huxley's thought about ethics and evolution from the Victorian social context of capitalism and industrialism into the Late-Qing Chinese context of nationalism and anti-colonialism. Close attention will be paid to how Yan Fu's translation of Huxley's passages concerning the society of bees transforms Huxley's ethics into an evolutionist discourse of nationalism. I argue that Yan Fu effects this transformation by appropriating Xun Zi's argument about the fulfilling of "duty" (Fen) and the power of "community" (Qun). I also examine how Yan Fu translates Huxley's idea of "combating the cosmic process" into "overcoming Heaven" (Shengtian) in terms of Xun Zi's thought of "controlling and using Heaven" (Zhitian yongtian).

11.1 Introduction

The three Darwinian challenges that are the focus of this volume—the challenge to the teleological purpose of the cosmic operation, the problem of the amoral process of natural selection, and the challenge to the uniqueness of human beings—arise out of the Judeo-Christian tradition of theology and the Western context of philosophy

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