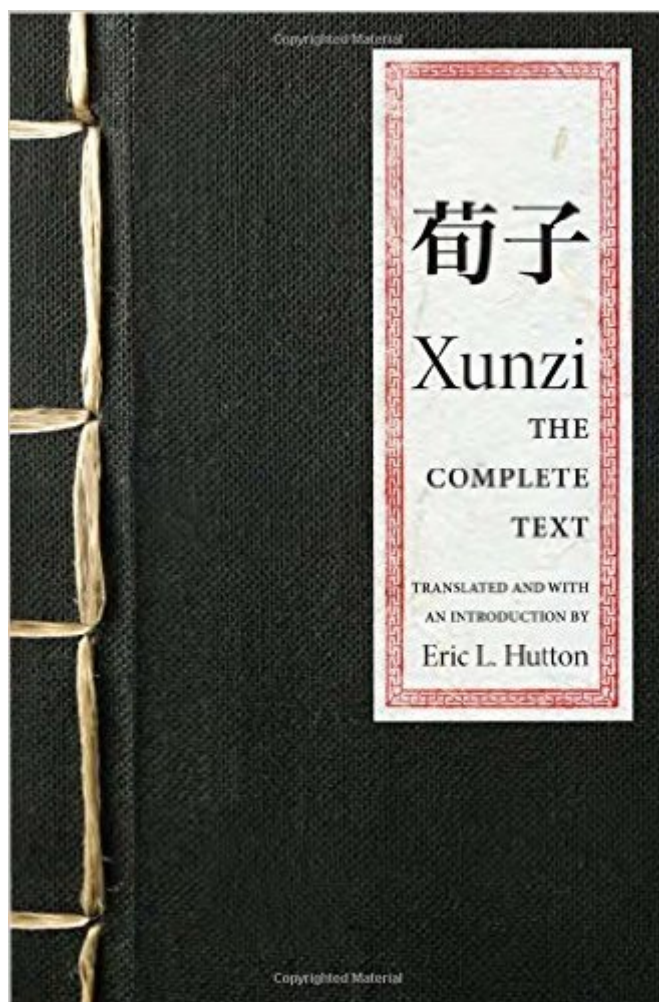


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Xunzi: The Complete Text



Synopsis

This is the first complete, one-volume English translation of the ancient Chinese text *Xunzi*, one of the most extensive, sophisticated, and elegant works in the tradition of Confucian thought. Through essays, poetry, dialogues, and anecdotes, the *Xunzi* presents a more systematic vision of the Confucian ideal than the fragmented sayings of Confucius and Mencius, articulating a Confucian perspective on ethics, politics, warfare, language, psychology, human nature, ritual, and music, among other topics. Aimed at general readers and students of Chinese thought, Eric Hutton's translation makes the full text of this important work more accessible in English than ever before. Named for its purported author, the *Xunzi* (literally, "Master Xun") has long been neglected compared to works such as the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Mencius*. Yet interest in the *Xunzi* has grown in recent decades, and the text presents a much more systematic vision of the Confucian ideal than the fragmented sayings of Confucius and Mencius. In one famous, explicit contrast to them, the *Xunzi* argues that human nature is bad. However, it also allows that people can become good through rituals and institutions established by earlier sages. Indeed, the main purpose of the *Xunzi* is to urge people to become as good as possible, both for their own sakes and for the sake of peace and order in the world. In this edition, key terms are consistently translated to aid understanding and line numbers are provided for easy reference. Other features include a concise introduction, a timeline of early Chinese history, a list of important names and terms, cross-references, brief explanatory notes, a bibliography, and an index.

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Customer Reviews

This is not just any translation of the Xunzi; it is an edition accessible to the general public, closely imitating the poetry of the original text, and correcting the errors of past editions. It hits all the right notes and is bound to become the standard edition of the text for decades to come. If you are interested in Confucianism, you will find this book quite valuable and you will most likely wish that other Chinese classics received this amount of attention and talent. The translation quality makes this one of those few foreign classics that really is worth owning for yourself rather than borrowing from a library. There is no better way to show the improvements Hutton has made to the Xunzi translation than by comparing it to previous efforts. Here is a section of chapter 1 in a previous translation by John Knoblock: “There must be some beginning for every kind of phenomenon that occurs. The coming of honor and disgrace must be a reflection of inner power.” (The brackets indicate a half-blockquote in the original text, which is one of Knoblock’s ways to indicate a probable quotation.) Here is Hutton: “All the things and the kinds that come about / Surely have a point from which they start out. / Honor and disgrace that comes unto you / Surely reflects your degree of virtue. / In rotten meat bugs are generated. / In fish that’s spoiled maggots are created.” The rhyme scheme is as found in the original classical Chinese! Most translations of the Chinese philosophy classics, with the notable exception of James Legge’s Laozi, do not attempt to reproduce ancient rhymes in anything like an acceptable way, but Hutton both tries and succeeds.

This is a translation of Eric Hutton, trans., *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Eric Hutton has produced a complete translation of the Xunzi, the eponymous writings of a philosopher who is (along with Confucius himself and Mengzi) one of the three most important early Confucians. The translation is elegant, accessible, and accurate. Hutton makes some innovative editorial choices in this translation, such as rendering the poetry Xunzi cites into rhyming verse in English. Not everyone will agree with this decision, but I find that it makes the poetry much easier to read and appreciate. I also concur with Hutton’s decision to add line numbers to chapters. Those of us who encourage our students to use the technique of “close reading” will particularly appreciate this. Hutton’s rendering is better than any previous translation I know of, including those by Burton Watson and John Knoblock. The textual notes will be very useful to scholars who can read the original Chinese. Consequently, specialists in Chinese philosophy and libraries will definitely buy this translation. Furthermore, I believe that Hutton’s translation will meet a market demand currently left open by other renderings of the Xunzi (also referred to as the Hsun Tzu). Burton Watson’s selective

translation (Columbia University Press) and Hutton's own selections in Ivanhoe and Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, (Hackett Publishing) meet the needs of many undergraduate survey courses. John Knoblock's pricey three-volume *Xunzi* (Stanford University Press), republished in a two-volume translation with Chinese on facing pages (Hunan Publishing House), is useful for specialist scholars. What is needed is something in between these two extremes.

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