

Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: *Confucianism I*

Background and the *Analects*



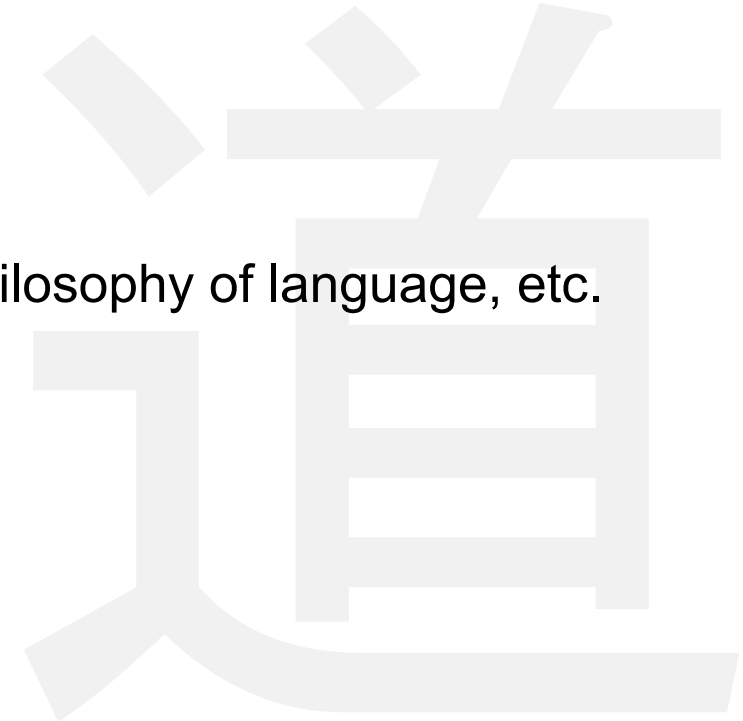
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Lee Wilson, 2020



About the Course

- Overview of the major Confucian and Daoist schools of Classical Chinese philosophy
- Warring States Period (475–221 BCE)
 - Audience of ruling class and literati
- Philosophical, thematic approach
 - Ethics, politics, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, etc.
 - Focus on human nature
- Text-heavy
 - In English translation





Philosophers & Texts

Confucianism

- Confucius
 - *The Analects*
 - <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html>
 - <https://ctext.org/analects>
- Mencius
 - *The Mencius*
 - <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/mencius.html>
 - <https://ctext.org/mengzi>
- Xunzi
 - *The Xunzi*

Daoism

- Laozi
 - *The Daodejing*
 - <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/daodejing.html>
 - <https://ctext.org/deo-de-jing>
- Zhuangzi
 - *The Zhuangzi*
 - <https://terebess.hu/english.chuangtzu.html>
 - <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>



Summary

I. General Background

- Historical Background

II. The *Analects*

- Confucius the Person
- The Text
- Concepts

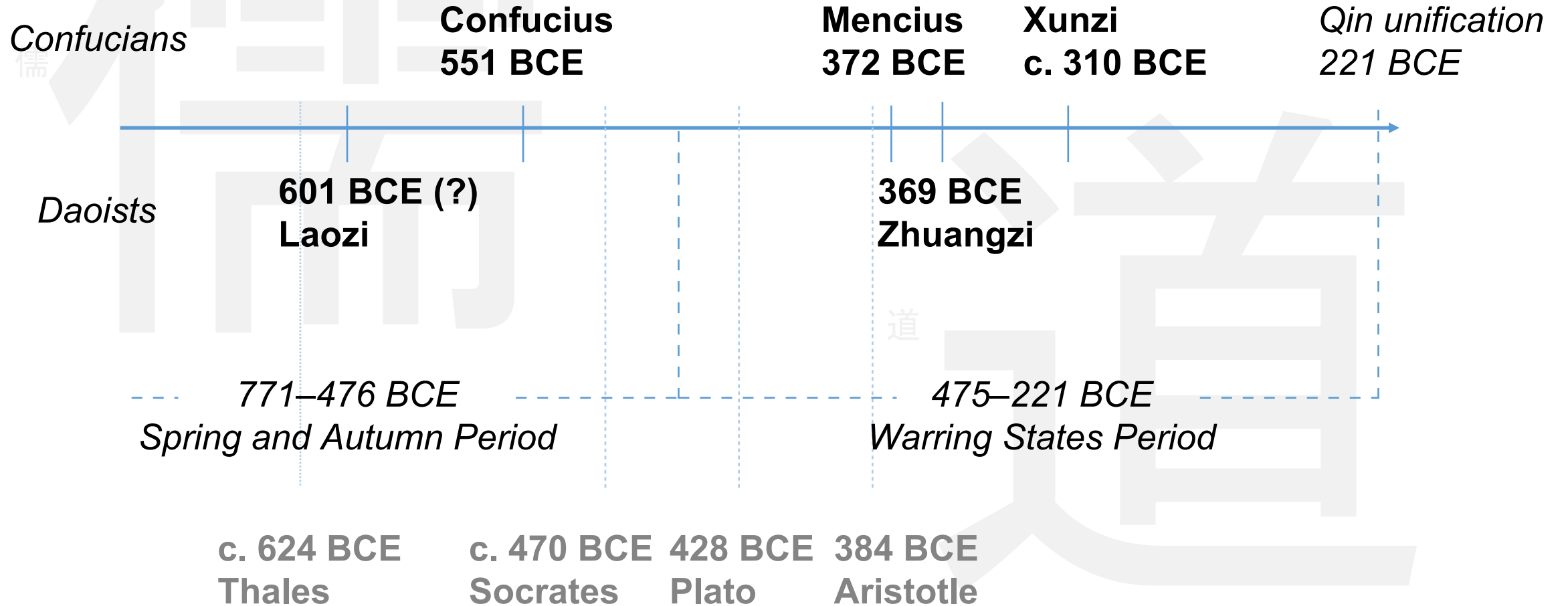
III. Discussion on Selected Extracts

- *Analects*





Timeline





Ancient China


- Xia Dynasty (c.2070–c.1600 BCE)
 - Shang Dynasty (c.1600–1045 BCE)
 - Zhou Dynasty (1045–221 BCE)
 - Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE)
 - Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE)
 - .
 - .
 - .
 - Qing Dynasty (1636–1912)
 - Republic of China (1912–1949)
 - People's Republic of China (1949–present)
- Zhou Dynasty
 - Western Zhou (c.1045–771 BCE)
 - Eastern Zhou (770–221 BCE)
 - Spring and Autumn Period (771–481 BCE)
 - **Warring States Period (481–221 BCE)**
- 



image of Early Warring States Period [cropped] by SY¹










The Warring States Period (475–221 BCE)

- Hundred schools of thought
 - Confucianism (Ruism)
 - Mohism
 - Daoism
 - Legalism
 - School of Names
 - School of Yin Yang
 - Yangism
- Jixia Academy (318–284 BCE)
 - State of Qi
 - State-sponsored
 - Mencius, Zhuangzi (?), Xunzi



Logograms

- Pictogram: 'mountain'  → 
- Ideogram: 'up'  / 'down' 
- Radicals: 'person'  + 'two' 
= 'humaneness, benevolence' 



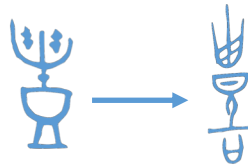


Scripts

- Oracle bone script
 - Shang Dynasty



- Bronze script
 - Zhou Dynasty/Warring States Period



- Bamboo and wood script
 - Warring States Period



- Small seal script
 - Qin Dynasty



- Clerical script/Tradition Chinese characters
 - Han Dynasty–1950s; contemporary Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau



- Simplified Chinese characters
 - People's Republic of China





Transliteration

- Jesuit latinisation
 - 'Confucius' for 'Kongzi'
 - 'Mencius' for 'Mengzi'
- Pinyin vs Wade-Giles romanisation
 - 'Kóngzǐ' vs 'Kung Tzu'
 - 'Dào' vs 'Tao'
 - Older vs newer scholarship



frontispiece by Athanasius Kircher²



Three Sovereigns, Five Emperors

Three Sovereigns

1. Sui ren
 - Fire
2. Fu Xi & Nüwa
 - Wedding ritual
3. Shennong
 - Herbal medicine

Five Emperors

1. Yellow Emperor/Shao hao
 - Cooking
2. Zhuan xu
 - Calendar
3. Emperor Ku
 - Music
4. **Emperor Yao**
 - The Palace
5. **Emperor Shun**
 - Pottery



First and Last Dynastic Kings

Xia

- **Emperor Yu**
 - Flood control
- King (Tyrant) Jie
 - Cruel and lavish lifestyle
 - Reign fraught with natural disasters

Shang

- King Tang
 - Overthrew King Jie
 - Lowered taxes and provided gold for families to buy back their children who were sold during droughts
- King (Tyrant) Zhou [紂 *zhòu*]
 - Lavish and immoral lifestyle, neglecting state affairs

Zhou [周 *zhōu*]

- King Wu
 - Overthrew King Zhou
- Duke (Wen) of Zhou
 - Regent for young nephew King Cheng
 - Credited with the *I Ching*, Book of Poetry, Zhou Rituals, and *Yayue* music



Sage Kings

- Emperor Yao
 - Paragon of virtue and exemplar to subsequent kings
 - Relinquishes the throne to Shun
- Emperor Shun
 - Responded to abusive, murderous step family with kindness
 - Impressed Yao with compassion and natural leadership
 - Relinquishes the throne to Yu
- Emperor Yu
 - Devised system of irrigation canals to control floods
 - People install his son Qi as successor



Heaven [*tian* 天]

noun (or sometimes *verb*)

- a. *The sky*
- b. *A higher power associated with the sky (and the natural order)*
- c. *The cosmic-moral order*

- Shangdi [上帝 *trans.* High God] of the Shang Dynasty vs Tian of the Zhou Dynasty
- Heaven's mandate [*tianming* 天命] as political legitimation
- The Zhou High King as the 'Son of Heaven'

**Religion or
Philosophy?**



“The Zhou had given China ... a vision: **a vision of a world, ‘all under heaven,’ united in peace and harmony and cooperation, under ‘the son of Heaven.’** The vision, of course, was of China as it had existed under the first Zhou rulers, and it rapidly became exaggerated into a dream of a Utopia. Kings were never so great, their vassals were never such heroes, there was never such uniform justice, the people were never so prosperous and happy, as they were believed to have been under Wen and Wu and Cheng and Kang. But the dream grew. Eventually, **when the philosophers took it over, they needed more scope than was afforded by an actual historical past;** after all, there was some limiting knowledge of what had actually existed in early Zhou. So **the philosophers projected this golden age back to the glorious days of remotely early legendary Emperors,** where fancy was free to invent as it would. But this did not begin until late in Spring and Autumn times. The original golden age, and the prototype for later invention, was early Western Zhou. The Zhou had given the Chinese people a goal and a vision which they would never, perhaps, completely lose.”

H. G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*

**Myth or
History?**



“Their thinking is a **response to the breakdown of the moral and political order which had claimed the authority of Heaven**; and the crucial question for all of them is not the Western philosopher’s ‘What is truth?’ but ‘Where is the Way?’, the way to order the state and conduct personal life.”

– A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*

**Way or
Truth?**



The Way [*dao* 道]

noun (or sometimes *verb*)

- a. *A physical road/path*
- b. *A mode of conducting affairs, living one's life, or organising of the state*
- c. *The appropriate mode of conducting affairs, living one's life, or organising the state*
- d. *A linguistic account of b/c*
- e. *The course of the natural or cosmic order*

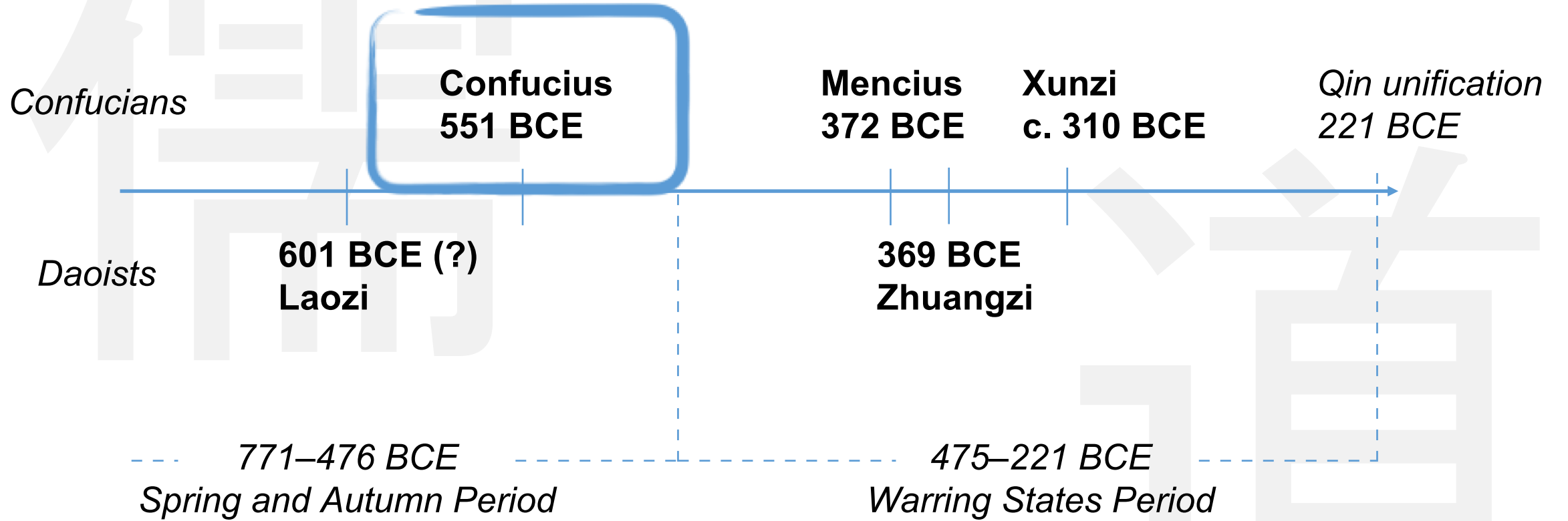
**Way or
Truth?**



“... far from finding the notion of truth inconceivable, **ancient Chinese philosophers frequently asked themselves whether some statement was true or not, although they did not show the same degree of philosophical preoccupation with factual truth as Westerners might expect [...]** their key concept was that of the Way of conducting human affairs, not of objective factual or doctrinal truth.”

– Christoph Harbsmeier, *Science and Civilisation in China Vol. 7: Language and Logic*

**Way or
Truth?**





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What Is the Way to be Human?

Confucius the Person

- Kong Qiu (孔丘), *trad.* 551–479 BCE
 - Referred to as ‘The Master’ by his disciples
 - Kongzi, Kong Fu Zi
- Born to a minor noble family in the State of Song, but orphaned early
- Family moved to the State of Lu
- Held a minor position in the Lu government
- Numerous disciples of historical note, positive or negative

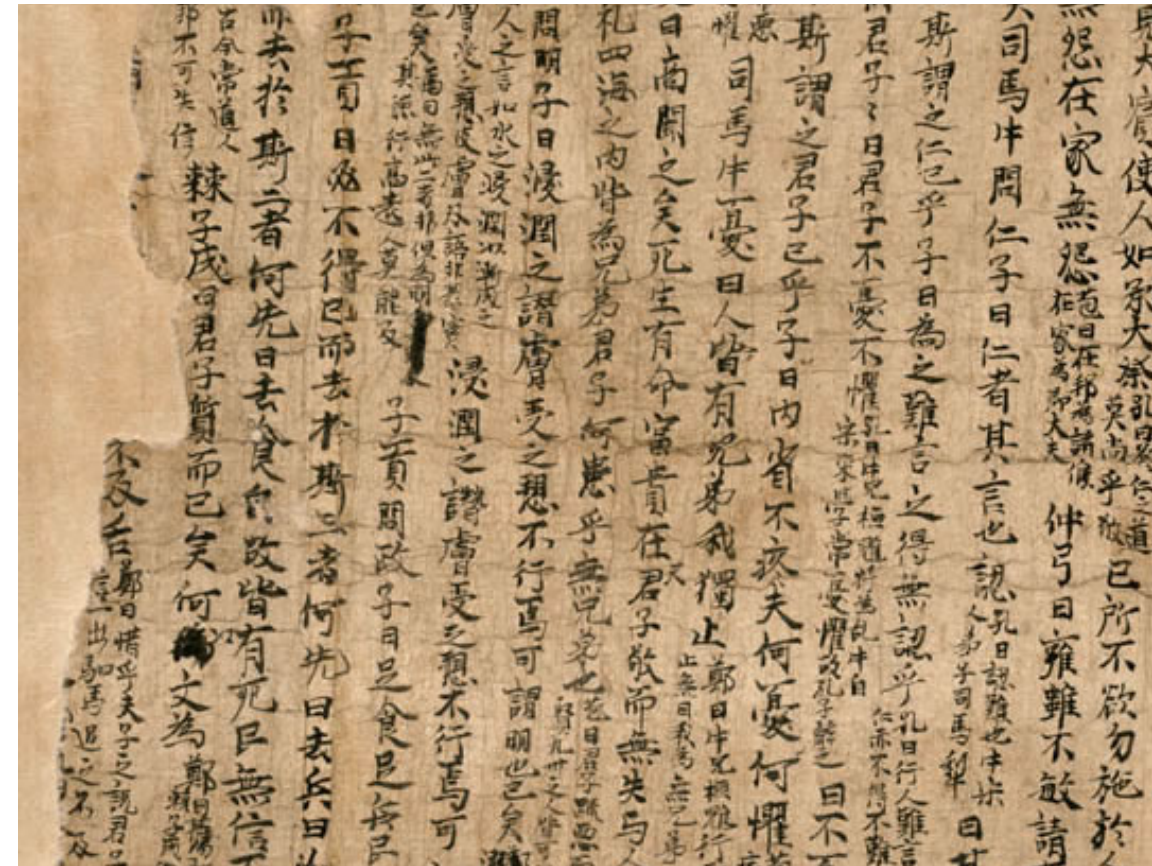
“The Master said: At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart’s desire without overstepping the line.” (*Analects* 2.4)



photograph of Confucius Statue in Chinese Garden, Singapore, by Anandajoti Bhikkhu³

The *Analects* [Lunyu 論語]

- Written during early Warring States Period after Confucius' death in 479 BCE (finalised mid-Han)
- Comprised of 20 books
- Largely written and compiled by his disciples
- Disputed composition
 - Authorship of constituent books (e.g. Daoist corruption in Book 18)
 - Three key versions from archaeological excavations
- Most important reference point for Chinese intellectual history
- Dialogues, (apparently) dogmatic assertions, behavioural observations
 - Little argumentation



photograph of *Analects of Confucius*, from the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China⁴



Human Nature in the *Analects*?

- “Zigong said, ‘One can get to learn about the Master’s accomplishments in literature and the cultural tradition **but not his views on human nature and the way of Heaven.**’” (5.13)
- “The Master said, ‘You can speak about **higher matters to those who are above the middle in intelligence** but not to those who are below the middle in intelligence.’” (6.21)
- “The Master said, ‘I wish not to speak anymore.’
Zigong said, ‘If you do not speak, what will there be for your disciples to transmit?’
The Master said, ‘What does Heaven ever say? **Yet the four seasons move in order, and the hundred things come to life.** What does Heaven ever say?’” (17.19)



Some Key Concepts in the *Analects*

- (1) Confucian Ritualism
- (2) Cultivating Virtue
- (3) The Gentleman



(1) Confucian Ritualism

- “The Master said, ‘**People in ancient times did not speak carelessly**, for they knew to feel ashamed if their action did not measure up to their words.’” (4.22)
- “The Master said, ‘**People of antiquity engaged in learning to cultivate themselves**. People today engage in learning with an eye toward others.’” (14.24)
- “The Master said, ‘Great was **Yao** as a ruler! Sublime was he! **Heaven alone was great, and only Yao took it as his model**. So vast and boundless was his virtue that the people could not give it a name. Yet sublime were his achievements, brilliant **his cultural vestiges**.’” (8.19)



(1) Confucian Ritualism

- Ruism vs Confucianism
 - *Ru* [儒] trans. ‘cultivated’, ‘scholarly’
- Zhou [周] rituals
 - Codified set of behavioural regulations found in the Book of Rites
 - e.g. Bowing at the foot of *dais* [i.e. rulers’ halls] before ascending the stairs (9.3)
- Criticism of the love of antiquity in the *Huainanzi* (Han Dynasty text, 139 BCE):
 - “People who follow the conventions of the present age mostly revere the ancient and scorn the present. [...] Muddled rulers of chaotic eras venerate what is remote and what proceeds therefrom, so they value such things. Those who study are blinded by their theories and respect [only] what they have heard.” (*Huainanzi* 19.7)?
 - Possible ways to understand the *Analects*’ position:
 - a. conservatism
 - b. traditionalism
 - c. Zhou traditionalism
 - d. Zhou-based ritualism



(2) Cultivating Virtue

- “The Master said, ‘Can [Zeng Can], **my way [*dao* 道] has a thread running through it.**’ Master Zeng replied, ‘Yes.’
After the Master left, the disciples asked, ‘What did he mean?’
Master Zeng said, ‘The Master’s way consists of ***zhongshu* [忠恕].**” (4.15)
- “The Master said, ‘I will not give a person a boost or a start if he does not know the frustration [of trying to solve a difficult problem] or the frenzy one would get into when trying [to put an idea] into words. **After I have shown a student one corner of a square, if he does not come back with the other three,** I will not repeat what I have done.’” (7.8)
- “Yan Yuan [Yan Hui] asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘**Restrain the self and return to the rituals. This is the way to be benevolent.** If for one day you are able to restrain the self and return to the rituals, this means that your capacity to be benevolent will open up to the world. Benevolence rests with the self. How could it come from others?’ (12.1)



(2) Cultivating Virtue

- Virtue [*de* 德]
 - **Benevolence** [*ren* 仁]; **moral rightness** [*yi* 義] (or righteousness); **ritual propriety** [*li* 禮]; filial piety [*xiao* 孝], wisdom [*zhi* 智], trustworthiness [*xin* 信], (love of) learning [*xue* 學], thinking [*si* 思], etc.
- Benevolence as
 - a. Humaneness, relationality:
 - Five Relations: (i) parent & child, (ii) ruler & minister, (iii) husband & wife, (iv) elder & younger siblings, (v) friend & friend
 - b. All-encompassing ideal
- Rightness [*yi* 義] cognate with homophone fittingness [*yi* 宜]
- Ritual propriety
 - Means by which benevolence and rightness are habituated and expressed



(2) Cultivating Virtue

- Learning and thinking
 - Received wisdom:
 - Teacher/model
 - Five Classics [*wujing* 五經]:
 - i. Book of Poetry [*shijing* 詩經];
 - ii. Book of Documents [*shujing* 書經];
 - iii. Book of Rites [*lijing* 禮記];
 - Key later additions: The Great Learning [*daxue* 大學]; The Doctrine of the Mean [*zhongyong* 中庸]
 - iv. Book of Changes [*yijing* 易經];
 - v. Spring and Autumn Annals [*chunqiu* 春秋];
 - vi. *Lost: Book of Music* [*yuejing* 樂經]
- Individual reflection:

“The Master said, “Si [Zigong], do you think I am the sort of person who learns many things and who retains this knowledge in his heartmind?”
Zigong replied, “Yes. Is it not so?”
“No. **I bind it together into a single thread.**” (15.3)



(2) Cultivating Virtue

- “A thread”*: *zhongshu* [忠恕]
 - Translations:
 - “doing one’s best and in using oneself as a measure to gauge others” (Lau)
 - “dutifulness tempered by understanding” (Slingerland)
- “... A humane person wishes to steady himself, and so he helps others to steady themselves. Because he wishes to reach his goal, he helps others to reach theirs. **The ability to make an analogy from what is close at hand is the method** and the way of realizing humaneness.” (6.30)

*not necessarily the *only* thread



(3) The Gentleman

- “The Master said, ‘The **gentleman understands what is morally right.** The petty man understands what is profitable.’” (4.16)
- “Ji Kangzi asked Confucius about the way of governing, saying, ‘In order to realize the moral way, how about if I were to kill those who do not live by it?’ Confucius replied, ‘As head of the government, why would you need to kill anyone to bring about moral order? **The character of those at the top [junzī] is like that of the wind.** The character of those below [xiaoren] is like that of grass. When wind blows over the grass, the grass is sure to bend.’” (12.19)
- “Confucius said, ‘**The gentleman stands in awe of three things. He is in awe of Heaven’s mandate, of great men, and of the words of sages.** The petty man is unaware of the presence of Heaven’s mandate; he belittles great men; and he regards the words of sages with mockery.’” (16.8)



(3) The Gentleman

- Gentleman vs petty/lowly man [*xiaoren* 小人]
 - “Zilu asked, ‘Does the gentleman think highly of courage?’
The Master said, ‘The gentleman [*junzi*] puts rightness at the top. If a **man of high status [*junzi*]** has courage but not a sense of rightness, he will create political upheaval. If a **lowly man [*xiaoren*]** has courage but not a sense of rightness, he will turn to banditry.’” (17.23)
 - Sociological reading: gentry vs lower classes
 - Ethico-political reading: normative vs descriptive statements about an individual agent
- Ideal socio-political order just is individual agents (especially the elite) behaving virtuously, i.e. being gentlemen
 - Assumption of hierarchical socio-political order



Discussion Questions

Referring to *Analects* 7.1, 7.20, 9.3,

1. Is Confucius necessarily committing the fallacy that the *Huainanzi* raises?

Referring to *Analects* 2.4, 2.15, 5.20, 9.3, 15.31,

2. What is the relationship between ritual propriety and rightness? What is the relationship between learning and thinking?

Referring to *Analects* 3.5, 9.14, 16.14, 17.25,

3. Who gets to be a gentleman? What sort of limits are there to the method of 'making analogies from what is close at hand'?



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Recommended Secondary Texts and Further Readings

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Image Sources

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