

1.9 CONFUCIUS AND THE ORIGINS OF CONFUCIANISM

Textual records of systematic thought first emerge in China during the era of the Warring States. The earliest of these appear to be the records of Confucius's saying that were gradually compiled by his disciples during the fifth century, and then expanded by second and third generation disciples in subsequent years. Once the Confucians established the genre of recorded ideas, other people began to espouse different notions and their disciples emulated Confucius's in recording them. By the end of the fourth century, this process has moved a step further, and individuals had begun to record their ideas directly in writings.

The variety of philosophies developed during this period was such that they are often referred to as the "Hundred Schools." The word "schools" does not imply fixed buildings, but traditions associated with master-disciple lineages. The way in which philosophies were propagated seems generally to have been by groups of men who studied for many years with a master whose teachings they adopted and preached with energy, though over time generations of disciples would elaborate the teachings of their school in new ways, these changes sometimes leading to long-term divisions within traditions tracing back to a single master.

The interests of early Chinese philosophy were far more practical than were those of the earliest systematic Western thinkers, the Greeks. Whereas Greek thought seems to have begun with highly theoretical inquiries concerning Nature, Chinese thought begins with a social problem connected with Warring States political chaos. The central issue for Chinese thinkers was, how did China fall into this state of chaos, how can it get out of it, and what is the proper conduct for individuals in times such as these?

These are the background issues behind the thought of Confucius, who may be seen as the founder of Chinese philosophy. Confucius lived at the close of the Spring and Autumn period (551-479) and his mode of free inquiry is a model for the subsequent Warring States era. It is difficult to overstate Confucius's importance to the cultural history of China. His particular school of thought is generally seen as having dominated Chinese society for two millennia (although some interpreters would say that it became pervasive only after having been adapted beyond recognition to the contours of China's post-Classical imperial state). But even more important, Confucius made a decisive contribution in exemplifying the notion that the socio-political issues of his time were ones that needed to be resolved by thought and training rather than by diplomatic and military intrigue. Thus the path to China's future was one that could be created by men of any social class regardless of their access to political prestige – not any man could occupy a throne or command an army, but any man could think and equip himself with ethical skills. In this sense, Confucius, by making study and thought a path to social recognition and political influence, reinforced the social trends that were moving China away from the closed society of the patrician state.

CONFUCIUS

Confucius developed his ideas about the year 500 B.C. He was apparently well known to patricians in eastern China during his lifetime, but his thought initially had little influence outside his small group of immediate follows. As these men dispersed and took disciples of their own, however, Confucian thought became increasingly widespread. Not only did significant numbers of young men become trained in the ritual arts taught by Confucian masters, but the idealistic political rhetoric of Confucians, which drew heavily from early Zhou political traditions, took on a type of independent legitimacy. Somewhat as much of today's rhetoric of "political correctness" is now routinely employed by people who have no firm political commitment, the rhetoric of Confucianism became important to political discourse despite the fact that virtually no Confucians seem to have been significant political actors during the Classical period.

After Confucius's death, two other great thinkers enlarged upon the Master's ideas in significant ways. Mencius, who lived two centuries after Confucius, made major adjustments in Confucian philosophy, better equipping it to respond to assaults launched against it by newer styles of thought. He also stands as the only major Confucian ever to occupy high political position in a major state – albeit his days in power were few and unfortunate. Xunzi was the most brilliant of all ancient Confucian theoreticians. He lived a generation after Mencius, and wrote perhaps the most carefully conceived and argued set of essays in the Classical period. In this section, we will focus solely on the ideas of Confucius as reported by his later followers. We will consider Mencius and Xunzi later, in the context of Warring States intellectual trends.

Confucius was a native of the state of Lu, the patrician state founded by the Duke of Zhou on the Shandong peninsula in eastern China. The name by which he is known in the West is a Latinization of this family name, Kong, in combination with the suffix, *zi*, which translates as "Master": thus his title in Chinese means Master Kong, and Confucian texts often refer to him simply as "The Master."

During Confucius's lifetime, Lu was in a state of political chaos. The ducal house had gradually lost power to three cadet branches of the ruling clan, and these branches, each led by a warlord strongman in a walled city, competed in the exploitation of the population of Lu to their own ends. These internal divisions had weakened the state, which was, in fact, destined to be absorbed into its much larger neighbor to the east, Qi.

Confucius was born to low social rank. Although his forbears were patricians, probably originally from the neighboring state of Song, his branch of the family had sunk very low, and according to his own words, as reported by his disciples, when he was a young man Confucius was occupied in a succession of minor jobs.

Despite being a man of no consequence to the patrician order, Confucius seems to have attracted the attention of high ranking patricians because of his original ideas and because he developed a particular mode of training which he offered, for a fee, to any who cared to undertake it. It seems that from his youth, Confucius had been attracted to the cultural trappings of Zhou Dynasty social arts: court poetry and music, refined martial arts training, and the ritual codes that

were prescribed for use in clan and state temples and at court. Such forms had come to be known as the “*li*” 禮, or “rituals,” of the Zhou. He became, through self-training, a master of these, and he offered himself as a tutor for young men of promise – his instruction was, perhaps, initially comparable to that of a “finishing school,” imparting to patrician sons a polish in court behavior and etiquette that would allow them to make the most of their social and political opportunities during an era when “talent” was beginning to compete with pedigree as a criterion for social advancement.

Confucius, however, saw the training he offered as something far more than a social veneer. His interest in the ritual forms of the Zhou was based in his conviction that these were the expression of a destined human evolution towards a type of species perfection; for him, *li* were the flower of the human past and the blueprint for a future utopia. He believed that *li* offered the solution to all of China’s political problems, and he also saw in *li* the patterns which could elevate Chinese further and further above the animals (and non-Chinese “barbarians!”). *Li* were the basis of human goodness and the path towards sagely perfection.

The great subtlety of early Confucianism derives from the fact that its core, ritual, initially appears to be merely a trivial concern with social polish but turns out to be – surprisingly – the basis of all human virtues, life skills, and sentiment. This is a role that Westerners often find puzzling: ritual and etiquette have rarely been a central concern to Western thinkers, and students of texts such as Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, would not be inclined to substitute ritual for reason as the core of humanity. Nevertheless, during the late Classical period, Confucian ideas became increasingly significant in China, and Confucius is often thought of as the single most influential man in ancient China.

While prolonged study of Confucian thought leads to an appreciation of its originality, the overall framework in which that thought was expressed was explicitly conservative. Confucius’s prescription for the ailments of late Zhou China was based on a revivalist goal: Return to the ritual norms of early Zhou society; restore to the patrician lineages that were first granted patrimonial estates the actual power of rulership; revive the formulas for personal and political virtue established by the Zhou founders and expressed in the oldest Zhou texts. Actually, had all of Confucius’s conservative programs been adopted, the outcome would have been a very radical transformation of late Zhou society. Consequently, although Confucius himself seems to have claimed that all he was seeking was a readjustment of social relations to better accord with established norms, his thought actually represented a form of **radical conservatism**. This was apparently recognized by contemporary rulers, who rejected Confucius’s programs as too dangerous to their own established power.

Confucius’s later life

Having established himself as a private tutor while still a young man, Confucius managed to attract into his circle a number of young patricians with considerable social influence in the state of Lu. At Confucius’s residence, these men were thrown together with others of far more modest backgrounds, and during the last decade of the sixth century, this mix seems to have produced a certain shade of political radicalism in the Confucian group. Although our records are scanty, it

appears that Confucius and some of his disciples developed a specific plan for restoring political power to the duke of Lu, and that about the year 500 they put their plan into action. Whatever the specific plan may have been, it did not work, and the result was that Confucius and a number of his disciples were obliged to leave the state of Lu.

During the period 500-485, Confucius wandered in exile among the states of eastern China, searching for a ruler who would adopt Confucius's principles and, presumably, appoint Confucius to a position of significance at court. As he wandered, he continued to attract disciples, though as it became increasingly apparent that his political mission would not succeed, more of these seem to have directed their interests to the purely aesthetic and literary aspects of Confucius's course in training. Gradually, the political activism of the group became a type of settled rhetorical stance, and the goals of disciples increasingly became the mastery of cultural forms that would earn them non-political jobs at court as tutors, ritualists, or scribes.

When Confucius was about 65 years-old, one of his disciples, who had remained in Lu and performed great military services for a leading warlord family, arranged for Confucius to return to Lu as an honorary member of the duke's entourage and as a private teacher. In this way, disappointed politically but surrounded by many disciples, Confucius lived the rest of his days.

The Confucian *Analects*

The principal source for the thought of Confucius is a text known as "The Analects of Confucius" ("analects" means brief sayings or literary fragments – the original Chinese title merely means "collated sayings"). The text is in twenty chapters, each composed of a series of sayings in an order which sometimes seems cogent, but more often seems random. The text is clearly a conjoining of several smaller texts that were put together over several centuries by Confucius's disciples and subsequent followers. It is extremely difficult to ascertain which portions of the text reliably report what Confucius actually said and did, and which belong instead to a body of legend that grew around the figure of Confucius after his death. The confusing form of the text and the mysteries of its origins add to its aura of sanctity and make it one of the most exciting texts in the world (it is extremely common for Westerners to find the text simplistic and dull on first reading, and profound and moving after many readings).

The convention in citing the *Analects* is to record after each selection the number of the chapter and passage within the chapter of each isolated saying or story, and we will follow that convention here. On the following pages, we will use citations from the *Analects* to illustrate the main features of Confucius's thought as it is represented in that text. These will be followed by a few pages of further passages that are well suited for reflection and discussion. It should be understood that whenever you read a phrase such as "Confucius said," or "Confucius believed," what is meant is that the Confucius we see in the *Analects* asserts these things. Whether the "historical" Confucius made precisely the same assertions is not possible to determine and, in any event, it is the Confucius of the *Analects* whose influence became so great.

Confucius's thought in the *Analects*

Confucius's portrait of history

Confucius taught his disciples that the history of China, that is, the history of the civilized world, had been guided by the benevolent force of Heaven, as it was exemplified through the actions of great sage kings of the past. These near perfect men had transformed China from a barbarous place where brute passions ruled to a community governed by patterned behavior that exemplified ethical norms and humane sentiments for others.

In the Confucian historical view, the greatest of the sages were the emperors Yao, Shun, and Yu, the last of whom founded the Xia Dynasty, followed by Tang, founder of the Shang Dynasty with his high minister Yi Yin, and then by the Zhou founding fathers, King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou. These are men who combined the acme of personal virtue with the leverage of supreme political power to advance the evolution of society towards the destiny of patterned humanity intended by Heaven.

The Master said, "How grand was the rule of the Emperor Yao! Towering is the grandeur of Heaven; only Yao could emulate it. So grand that the people could find no words to describe it. Towering were his achievements! Glimmering, they formed a paradigm of pattern." (8.19)*

"Towering were Shun and Yu! They possessed all the empire and appropriated nothing to themselves." (8.18)

"The Zhou looked upon the two dynasties preceding – how rich were its patterns! And we follow the Zhou." (3.14)

As we see in these passages, when Confucius looked to the distant past, its principal meaning for him was expressed in terms of great men who disinterestedly transformed the world into a patterned place, one governed by the norms of ritualized behavior.

Confucius viewed the chaos of the world around him as a temporary lapse from the ascent towards patterned perfection achieved by earlier sages. He linked two phenomena in contemporary society: the de facto devolution of power from the "legitimate" patrician houses to warlord families who contended for power through warfare and dishonest dealing, and what he saw as a general decay of social ethics and the norms of common etiquette. Confucius's prescription for both aspects was the re-institution of those forms of ritualized conduct which had, he believed, been fully articulated by the Zhou founders. Ritual reform was both the substance of the past and the key to the future.

* The numbers that appear after passages are keyed to a complete translation that is linked from the G380 website. The renderings in that translation will sometimes vary from those that appear in this reading, but the general point will not, and these variations may help you find the underlying point.

It was Confucius's conviction that the patterns of ritual had been destined for mankind not only by the individual sages of the past, but by Heaven itself, which, in a loose way, guided all human events. In the time of cultural darkness in which Confucius lived, the benevolent guidance of Heaven was indeed in question. For Confucius the key fact was not the chaos of the times, but the fact that the achievements of the past were still known and capable of being revived. He seems to have viewed himself as the destined agent of their revival.

“King Wen is dead, but his patterns live on here in me, do they not? If Heaven wished these patterns to perish, I would not have been able to partake of them!”
(9.5)

Ritual and humanity

The rituals and related human arts that formed the theme of Chinese history in Confucius's view were, for him, deeply pleasing forms of aesthetic living, rather than constraints on people's more “natural” inclinations. Ritual arts provided conduits to true human self-expression.

The Master said, “Arise with the *Book of Poetry*, take your stand by means of ritual *li*, and be fulfilled in music.” (8.8)

“If you do not study the *Poetry*, how will you have words to speak . . . If you do not study ritual, how will you be able to take your stand?” (16.13)

Moreover *li* was a perfected medium of social communication, and only by acting through this shared medium of ritual and etiquette could people come to appreciate one another's humanity.

The disciple Yen Yuan asked the Master about humane goodness (*ren*). The Master said, “Conquer yourself and return to *li*: that is goodness. If one could for a single day conquer oneself and return to *li*, the entire world would respond to him with goodness. . . . If it is not *li*, don't look at it; if it is not *li*, don't listen to it; if it is not *li*, don't say it; if it is not *li*, don't do it.” (12.1)

This goal of becoming “humane and good,” qualities represented in Confucianism by a single term, “*ren*” 仁, was a central pivot of Confucian ethics. Confucius valued the good man over the successful man, although he held that when things were right in the world, the good man would always be successful. The term *ren*, which Confucius was the first to use to denote ethical perfection, was a constant puzzle to the disciples. What was elusive to them was the fact that for Confucius, humane goodness is not a spontaneous expression of innate sentiment, but the product of extensive “socialization,” a reforming of the person through training in the patterns established by the sage emperors of the past. Only after we have absorbed these patterns so deeply that they feel like our own spontaneous expressions can we truly communicate with others and grasp that they are like us. Then they become as important to us as we are to ourselves.

Confucius also believed that for people to appreciate these facts, it was necessary for them to see and be moved by ritualized goodness in action. Society was, in his view, transformed through the actions of an ethical vanguard, men of moral perfection whose conduct so moved the hearts of others that they could not help but respond in kind. Thus the way to be completely good was to appeal to the goodness of others by treating them in a fully ritualized way – with supremely skilled politeness, we could say.

The disciple Zhonggong asked about *ren*. The Master said, “Whenever you go out your front gate continue to treat all you encounter as if they were great guests in your home. Whenever you direct the actions of others, do so as though you were officiating at a great sacrifice. And never act towards others in a way that you would not wish others to act towards you.” (12.2)

In making the claims that he did for the power of *li* to transform the individual into a powerful and humane social actor, Confucius accelerated the trend towards empowering the ordinary man of talent over the man of pedigree, a trend which was only beginning to be understood during his lifetime. But Confucius’s case for *li* went further. He also claimed that *li* was the only tool necessary for the success of political administration.

“When a ruler loves *li*, the people are easy to rule.” (14.41)

“Can ritual and deference be employed to rule a state? Why, there is nothing to it!” (4.13)

Confucius’s vision of reform, which does not seem particularly coherent in some respects, involved both the restoration of the original Zhou power holders and a society organized according to moral merit, wherein the most patterned and humane actors were allowed to rise to the high position that the people would spontaneously wish to accord to them.

The *junzi* (gentleman)

Confucius used various terms to describe the type of person who had internalized ritual behavior and become good. One of these terms reflects directly the social significance of Confucius’s thought for the patrician class. It is the term “*junzi*” 君子.

Originally, *junzi* denoted a patrician: the basic meaning of the term is “ruler’s son.” It was thus a term describing one’s birth. Confucius, however, endowed the term with a strictly ethical dimension.

“If one removes *ren* from a *junzi*, then wherein is he worthy of the name? The *junzi* does not deviate from *ren* for an instant. Though he may be hurried or in dire straits, he always cleaves to *ren*.” (4.5)

In this way, the criterion for qualifying as a “ruler’s son” is no longer that one be the son of a ruler, but rather that one accrue ethical accomplishments. Such a view contributed towards the

formation of a political ideal of “meritocracy,” that is, the state where political power is allocated on the basis of merit.

Confucius modeled the qualities that the *junzi* would demonstrate in social action on an ideal picture of the ultimate “family man.” Society in Confucius’s time continued to be strongly oriented around lineage groups (the small extended family for the common people, huge clan descent groups for the upper patrician class). Confucius tended to view the state as a large scale version of the family, with the ruler representing “the father and mother of the people.”

The *junzi* who could exemplify perfect political virtue then was one who was fully socialized into the domain of the family. For this reason, Confucius and his followers greatly stressed the importance of the traditional virtue of “**filiality**” (*xiao* 孝), which means obedience and service to one’s parents, particularly to one’s father.

The disciple Master You said, “The man who is filial and obedient to his elders will rarely be insubordinate to his superiors, and never has a man who was not insubordinate brought chaos to his state. The *junzi* applies himself to the roots of things, for once the roots are firm, the Way can grow. Filiality and obedience to elders are the roots of *ren*, are they not?” (1.2)

This creates something of a paradox in the political ideal of the *junzi*. The *junzi* is to be a moral exemplar, leading all people towards a more virtuous society, yet he is also a follower, obeying his parents absolutely, as well as playing the junior role to all who are older than he. For the Confucians, this was, in fact, no paradox. The absolute imperative of filial obedience was the fundamental means of broadening the self. Children are born with only self-regarding desires, born selfish. To acquire the fundamental skills that will allow one to view and treat others with as much regard as one does oneself, a long period of discipline must train the person to see the interests of others as his own. This is the function of filiality in Confucian thought. No man who was so selfish as to regard his own desires as more important than his parents’ could conceivably become a *junzi*, a man who must weigh the needs of his neighbors and even of his distant fellow countrymen as heavily as he does his own.

Social Roles and the Five Relationships

The concept of ritual *li* which was so central to early Confucianism did not imply that everyone who aspired to become a *junzi* must embark on memorization of endless action codes. Rather, *li* were thought of in terms of the responsibilities and forms that accompanied different social roles: the *li* of a filial child, the *li* of a clan elder, the *li* of a minister, and so forth. As a person moved through life, he or she would broaden control over *li* by mastering sets of responsibilities and forms that marked the assumption of emerging social roles. The individual was, in a sense, pictured almost exclusively in terms of the social roles that he or she had mastered and the characteristic style with which he or she had mastered (or failed to master) the basic structures of those roles.

Confucian texts did not speak of roles in the abstract. Instead, individuals were simply described and evaluated most regularly in terms of their roles and the state was described and

evaluated in terms of the fit between role norms and actual social behavior. For example, in a famous passage of the *Analects*, Confucius pictures the ideal state as the perfect fulfillment of all role assignments.

Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, “Let rulers be rulers, ministers ministers, fathers fathers, sons sons.” (12.11)

The notion of social roles also provided Confucians with certain ways of adjudicating between competing commitments. For example, as the following passage makes clear, in the ideal state individuals privilege the role of the filial child over the role of the loyal subject:

The Lord of She spoke to Confucius saying, “In my precincts there is an upright man. When his father stole a sheep, this man gave evidence against him.”

“In my precinct the upright are different,” Confucius replied. “Fathers cover up for their sons and sons for their fathers. Uprightness lies therein.” (13.18)

Furthermore, Confucians came to link the fulfillment of social role obligations with one’s legitimate claim to a role and its title. For example, rulers who did not act in accord with the normative (value-positive) features of the ruler’s role description were not actually entitled to the designation “ruler” at all. In extreme cases, this could license the deposing of a ruler, very much in harmony with the ethical implications of the Mandate of Heaven doctrine. This feature of Confucian role ethics came to be known as the doctrine of the “**Rectification of Names**” (a term that took on other meanings later). It is only suggested in the *Analects*, but seems to lie behind passages such as this one:

Duke Ding of Lu asked how a ruler should employ ministers and ministers should serve rulers. Confucius replied, “If the ruler employs his ministers according to *li*, the ministers will serve the ruler with loyalty.” (3.19)

The notion of making the obligations of one role contingent on the proper performance of another did not apply to “natural” roles, such as the child’s. Filial duties were absolute.

Eventually, Confucians brought together many of these ideas in a doctrine known as the “**Five Relationships**.” In it, all social roles were conceived as existing in essential polarity with some other complementary role, in the manner that the role of child is intrinsically defined as a complement to the role of parent. Confucians held that the myriad actual roles through which we live our social lives could ultimately be seen as variants on five paradigmatic polar relations, which may be listed as follows (the traditional version is on the left, a more universalized modern version on the right):

Father / Son	<i>Parent / Child</i>
Elder Brother / Younger Brother	<i>Senior / Junior</i>
Ruler / Minister	<i>Superior / Inferior</i>
Husband / Wife	<i>Spouse / Spouse</i>
Friend / Friend	<i>Friend / Friend</i>

The first three of these were viewed as intrinsically hierarchical and they are the relationships that attracted the most interest in the Confucian scheme. The last two were seen as egalitarian in theory (although the marriage relationship was clearly not so in practice).

The Five Relationships can be understood as a way to bring coherence to the ideal of a completely ritualized society, and to give individuals an important conceptual tool in allowing them to pursue self-ritualization in the context of everyday social life.

Righteousness and courage

The rituals of the Zhou, which may or may not have existed in a codified form during Confucius's lifetime, might have been extensive, but they surely did not provide rules for all of life's situations. By *li*, Confucius was referring to a body of court behavior, religious and community ceremonies, traditional forms of poetry, music, and dance, and norms of patrician etiquette equivalent to, perhaps, the modern rule that men should remove their hats when in an elevator with women present (like Zhou *li* in Confucius's time, this is a rule often unknown or ignored by people living in a feminist era when few men wear hats).

But Confucius seems to have viewed *li* not so much as a set of rules or forms that should be followed, but rather as a training ground to shape human character. Once the limited codes of *li* had been fully mastered by the individual, that person was not just someone who knew the rules, but someone who was "well bred," who had manners and style, and who could act with independent ethical self-assurance.

Thus *li* and *ren* were linked in Confucian teaching to two other virtues, righteousness and courage, which were pictured as the natural possessions of the fully trained ritual actor. The man who had mastered the Confucian syllabus was one who was not only accomplished in the human arts, but one whose ethical activism was entirely reliable. To such a man, personal rewards meant nothing other than an affirmation of his own moral worth as recognized by a moral world, and he would easily lay down his life in order to achieve a social end of greater value.

The Master said, "To eat coarse greens and drink water, to crook one's elbow for a pillow, joy also lies therein. If they are not got by righteous means, wealth and rank are to me like the floating clouds." (7.16)

"The attitude of the *junzi* towards the world is this: Have nothing you insist on doing, have nothing you refuse ever to do, simply range yourself always by what is right." (4.10)

To follow such a dictum in the midst of the amoral social chaos of the Warring States period would not be easy. Not only did righteousness frequently involve spurning personal gains that were the product of immoral conduct, but it could also mean risking the anger of warlord power holders. The ideal man needed courage as well as ethical assurance.

“To see what is right and not to do it is to lack courage.” (2.24)

“The wise are not confused; the *ren* are not anxious; the courageous are not afraid.”
(9.29)

“The man of *ren* is inevitably courageous.” (14.4)

The person who has developed his social personality so strongly as to be *ren* – who is capable of feeling the interests of others and of society as intimately as he feels his own – will appear courageous because he sees the value of his own life in terms of his service to the world of good people.

The virtues of righteousness and courage were adapted by Confucius from the prevailing patrician code of honor that pervaded the *shi* class of educated men and noble warriors. Indeed, much of the moral self-discipline that became associated with the Confucian school of ritualism can be traced to the training that patrician youths had always received to prepare them for valorous conduct in battle. (A passage from the works of the second great Confucian, Mencius, which we will analyze later, brings out this connection very clearly.) Confucius was at some pains to distinguish the type of social ideal he was promoting from the more commonplace values of the Warring States patrician elite. Thus the passage cited above (14.4) goes on to say:

“The man of *ren* is inevitably courageous, but courageous men are not inevitably *ren*.”

The Dao

Perhaps the greatest of Confucius’s social innovations was his invention of the role of professional teacher. He appears to have lived most of his life by means of the “tuition” which his students supplied. (Since some of these were prominent while others very poor, there was probably no set fee, just the expectation that the “master” would be properly honored by the sacrifice each student made.) While we may presume that patricians had long had adept men in their entourages who were expected to train the sons of the lord in the arts of their class, Confucius seems to have been the first man to offer to accept students of all classes.

“I have never refused to teach any who offered as much as a bundle of dried sausages.” (7.7)

Moreover, Confucius, not his “employer,” was in charge of the curriculum he offered. Confucius’s teaching was not simply a variety of the human arts and skills of the day, it was holistic syllabus, which he believed represented the unified cultural vision of the former sage kings.

“I have a teaching; it is not divided into subjects.” (15.39)

This unified curriculum Confucius called his “Dao,” a word that originally denoted a path or a method, and which we often translate as “Way” to include both these senses. Confucius saw his Dao as a path to personal and social perfection which had been discovered and passed down over the centuries, and which, once mastered, generated in individuals an all-encompassing form of knowing and skill.

The Master said to the disciple Zigong Si, “Si, do you take me to be one who has studied much and remembers it all?”

“Yes,” replied Zigong. “Is it not so?”

“It is not,” said the Master. “I link all upon a single thread.” (15.3)

“In the morning hear the Dao; in the evening die content.” (4.8)

The disciple Master Zeng said, “A true *shi* must be stalwart: his burden is heavy and his Way is long. To take *ren* as your personal task, is this not a heavy burden? To cease bearing it only after death, is not this Way long?” (8.7)

In the West, because of the influence of Daoist philosophy, which arose later than Confucianism and took the word “Dao” for its own, people who have encountered the term it often think of “the Dao” as something mystical or at least mysterious. Yet the evidence suggests that Confucius’s Dao was a straightforward combination of training in the arts of archery and charioteering, poetry citation and exegesis, ritual choreography, music, and dance. As his students mastered these various traditional skills, they were led to understand them both in terms of the Heaven-guided history of Chinese culture and in terms of their own destined roles as men of pattern in leading China towards a future perfection under a single sage ruler. Confucius’s vision was directed fully towards the worlds of history and society, and for him one needed to look nowhere but in the patterns of the ideal past to find the meaning of life.

The disciple Zigong said, “The insignia of pattern given to us by our Master is what we may know of him. As for what he may have said about human nature and the Dao of Heaven, that cannot be known.” (5.13)

And to disciples who believed that Confucius had some secret knowledge or action that he was withholding from them in their ordinary studies, he replied,

“Do you gentlemen believe that I have something I am concealing from you? I have concealed nothing at all from you. I do nothing that I do not share with you. That is who I am.” (7.24)

Still, there are some passages in the *Analecets* which suggest a sense of mystery about Confucius’s teachings, such as the following remark attributed to Confucius’s finest disciple:

Sighing deeply, Yan Yuan said, “The more I look up at it the higher it grows; the more I drill into it the harder it becomes – I glimpse it ahead and suddenly it is behind. How the Master lures us on step by step! He broadens me with pattern and

constrains me with ritual. I long to give up but I cannot; yet it seems that all my abilities are exhausted. Still it is as if he stands so far above me that though I wish to follow after him, there is no path that reaches there.” (9.11)

The disciples

The *Analects* was composed by Confucius’s disciples and their admiring students. Although its goal is to portray Confucius and his ideas, almost every passage pictures the Master in the context of his followers, almost as a family. Indeed, Confucius almost seems to be like a father to his best disciples. After Confucius died, the disciple Zigong lived for three years in a hut by his grave, thus fulfilling an important ritual duty that properly belonged to Confucius’s son, who had unfortunately died earlier.

In many ways, the *Analects*, which was composed to instruct later followers, is first and foremost a textbook on how to be a disciple. In the text, all the major disciples are portrayed with individual and distinct personalities and talents. It is almost as if each represents a possible character through which to approach the Confucian Dao. The *Analects* is famous for illustrating how Confucius would reply to identical questions from different disciples with different answers suited to the needs of each.

The literary structure of the text frequently alerts us to the fact that for the early followers, Confucianism was very much a matter of group loyalty and sentiment. Many passages illustrate no great point of Confucian thought, but are designed to make us feel more intimate with Confucius and his disciples, and to care more deeply for them.

Many of the original disciples came to Confucius in the hope of “polishing” themselves so as to be better able to exploit the political opportunities which, by virtue of their patrician backgrounds, they were likely to encounter. As Confucius grew older, and especially after his exile from Lu at the age of about fifty, he became more and more convinced that in the amoral world of the late Zhou China, political participation would inevitably involve unacceptable ethical compromises. His concern increasingly became to forestall his followers from leaping into the sordid world of warlord politics, and encourage them to stay within the group and cultivate their ritual skills.

The Master said, “It is hard to find students who are willing to study for three years without taking a salaried post.” (8.12)

The *Analects* is designed to illustrate for later generations the fulfillment that may be found in a life of ritual study, even if the outside world fails to offer recognition and rewards. The very first passage of the text sounds this theme.

The Master said, “To study and at due times to practice what one has studied, is this not pleasure! To have friends like oneself come from afar, is this not joy! To be unknown and remain unsoured, is this not a *junzi*!” (1.1)

As one probes deeper into the text, one increasingly comes to appreciate the dynamic that exists between the explicit content of Confucius's thought and the subtlety with which the Confucian "family" of *shi* embody these ideas and give them aesthetic shape.

The longest of all the *Analects* passages best illustrates this dynamic, and we will consider it in detail here. It represents a conversation between Confucius and four of his disciples, all of very different character. The first, the disciple Zilu (whom Confucius addresses by his personal name, Yu), only five years Confucius's junior, was known for his impetuous and blustering ways (he later died in the valiant defense of the lord of the state of Wey). Ran Qiu, a politically prominent man in Lu, was an efficient bureaucrat in the service of a warlord household; Confucius approved of him, but frequently criticized his political role. Gongxi Hua (called Chi by Confucius) was a younger disciple, studious and serious, but anxious to get ahead. The last of the disciples, Zeng Dian, is the most obscure. Little is known of him outside this passage except that his son became one of the greatest of Confucius's younger disciples – he is the only one of the four disciples who appears never to have taken a position in the service of a powerful patrician family.

This long passage (11.26) breaks clearly into two portions, and it is the first of these which illustrates the richness of the Confucian vision and the way in which the text uses the disciples to illustrate it.

Zilu, Zeng Dian, Ran Qiu, and Gongxi Hua were sitting in attendance. The Master said, "Let us put aside your awareness that I am senior to you by a little. You gentlemen are always saying that no one recognizes your talents. If one day someone were to recognize them and employ you, then what would you do, if given your choice?"

Zilu immediately responded with vigor. "Give me a state of a thousand war chariots situated between two of the great powers, and let this state be suffering frequent invasions and famines. If I had the chance to manage such a state, within three years I would engender courage in the people and give them a sense of direction!"

The Master smiled at him and went on. "Qiu, what about you?"

"Give me a small state," Ran Qiu replied, "just sixty or seventy *li* square, or even fifty or sixty. If I had the chance to manage such a state, within three years I could bring sufficiency to its people. As for rectifying its rituals and music, for that I would have to await the coming of a *junzi*."

"Chi," said the Master, "what about you?"

"I don't say that I could do this, but I would like to study towards it. I would like to stand in ritual robes and act as the master of ceremonies at the ancestral altars and at meetings of state."

"Dian," said the Master, "what about you?"

The sounds of Dian's zither died away. It rang as he laid it down and rose.

"My thoughts differ from the others'," he said.

"What is the harm in that?" replied the Master. "After all, each of you is merely speaking his own wishes."

“In late spring,” said Zeng Dian, “when the spring clothing has all been sewn, I would go out with five or six capped young men and six or seven youths. We would bathe in the River Yi and stand in the wind on the stage of the great Rain Dance. Then chanting, we would return.”

The Master sighed deeply. “I am with Dian,” he said.

The doctrine of timeliness

The reply of Zeng Dian reflects an important theme of Confucianism, one which became increasingly prominent after the death of Confucius: political withdrawal. Confucius in his lifetime had sought for many years to find a ruler who would employ him and implement his policies. If we read the accounts of Confucius’s attempts in the *Analecets*, it becomes clear that Confucius did, indeed, encounter promising opportunities in an number of states; however, in each case Confucius judged the political actors of the state to be insufficiently ethical and he left. The message that this sort of behavior conveyed was that while the *junzi* was obligated to seek out real opportunities for ethical action, in a world where even the seeds of good government had disappeared from the courts of established rulers, political opportunities were in general merely invitations to sell one’s soul in the service of predatory warlords. In such a world, the only prudent policy was to withdraw.

The disciple Xian asked about shame. The Master said, “When a state possesses the Dao, one should serve it. To serve a state that does not possess the Dao: that is shame!” (14.1)

“When the Dao prevails in the world, appear; when it does not, hide! When a state possesses the Dao, to be poor and of low station is a shame, but when it does not possess the Dao, to have wealth and high position is shameful.” (8.13)

In the end, individuals could not bring about the total transformation of China and restore it to order. That work could only be engineered by Heaven, who was ultimately guiding China’s destiny.

As we have seen, Confucius viewed himself as Heaven’s agent in the preservation of the patterns of the ancient sage kings. Confucius’s return to the state of Lu about 485, ending his futile search for a political role, represented his reconciliation with the fact that despite the ritual discipline that he had personally acquired through long study, he was not to be granted the mandate to transform the political landscape of China. Instead, he had learned to be content with his role as a teacher of the disciples, men who would carry on his work into future generations, awaiting the day when the times were ripe for a restoration of the old order in a new utopia. This awareness is reflected in Confucius’s thumbnail autobiography.

“At fifteen I set my heart on study. At thirty I took my stand. At forty I was free from confusion. At fifty I learned the decree of Heaven. At sixty I heard it with a compliant ear. At seventy I can follow the desires of my heart and never cross beyond the proper bounds.” (2.4)

Confucius became reconciled with the decree of Heaven. He came to accept his political failure and believed that through teaching he would plant the seeds for future social transformations. This belief was shared by the compilers of the *Analects*, who recorded the following tale about Confucius leaving the state of Wey after having despaired of the ruler's capacity for moral government. (To understand the passage, you need to know that a "wooden bell" was carried by town criers in ancient China, and they would sound it as an alarm to the people if danger threatened.)

The keeper of the pass at Yi requested an interview with the Master. "I have never been denied an interview with any gentleman coming to this place," he said. The disciples admitted him into the Master's presence. When he emerged, he said to them, "Gentlemen, what have you to regret in your Master's failure? The world has long been without the Dao. Heaven means to use your Master as a wooden bell."
(3.24)

When Confucius died in the hands of his disciples some years later, the message he left to his community of followers stressed the dangers rather than the opportunities of the world around them. Although Confucian ideas and rhetoric became increasingly well known and influential during the remaining two and a half centuries of the Classical era, the Confucians generally avoided direct entanglements with the political powers of their time. Instead, they passed along their ritual traditions through generations of disciples, accepted non-political positions as court tutors or ritualists, became increasingly devoted to a growing set of ancient texts (many of which they wrote themselves), entered into debate with competing philosophical schools, and made known to the world their many judgments, mostly negative, on the rulers of the late Zhou. Through it all they patiently awaited the day when Heaven would act to change the nature of the times and provide their community with real opportunities for ethical action in the political world.

Selected passages from the *Analects*

The following passages have been selected to illustrate both the main features of Confucius's thought, and the texture of the *Analects*, which was among the most influential of all Classical texts. The point of many of these passages will seem straightforward, but in some cases you may wonder why they were worthy of being included in a book that carried such moral weight. It is precisely those passages, the ones that seem most superficial, which often most richly reward reflection.

On filiality

The patrician Meng Yizi asked about filiality. The Master said, "Never disobey!"

Later, the disciple Fan Chi was driving the Master in his chariot and the Master said to him, "Meng Yizi asked me about filiality and I answered, 'Never disobey!'"

"What did you mean by that," asked Fan Chi.

The Master replied, "In life, serve parents according to *li*. In death, inter them according to *li* and sacrifice to them according to *li*." (2.5)

The patrician Meng Wubo asked about filiality. The Master said, "One's parents should need to worry only about one's health." (2.6)

The disciple Ziyou asked about filiality. The Master said, "Those who speak of filiality nowadays mean by it merely supplying food and shelter to aged parents. Even dogs and horses receive as much. Without attentive respect, where is the difference?" (2.7)

The disciple Zixia asked about filiality. The Master said, "It is the outward demeanor that it difficult to maintain! That the youngest shall bear the burden at work or that the elders shall be served first of food and drink, is this all that filiality means?" (2.8)

On *li*

The disciple Master You said, "In the action of *li* harmony is the key. In the Dao of the former kings this was principle of greatest beauty. Affairs large and small all proceeded from this. Yet there was a limit. When one knew that a course of action would yield harmony but it was not according to *li*, one would not pursue it." (1.12)

The Master heard the Shao Music while in the state of Qi and for three months the succulent taste of meat dishes meant nothing to him. "I never imagined that music could reach this!" he said. (7.14)

The Master said, "They talk of ritual, ritual: but is it just a matter of jades and silks! They talk of music, music: but is music just a matter of bells and drums!" (17.11)

“If a man is not *ren*, how can he manage *li*? If a man is not *ren*, how can he manage music?” (3.3)

Confucius referred to the use of the royal form of eight ranks of dancers by the Ji family of Lu. “If this can be tolerated, anything may be tolerated!” (3.1)

On the virtue of *ren*

The Master said, “To dwell amidst *ren* is the fairest course. If one chooses to dwell elsewhere, how can one become wise?” (4.1)

“A person’s failings fall into certain categories. If you observe a person’s failings you may determine the degree to which he is *ren*.” (4.7)

“Resoluteness and a wooden slowness of speech come close to *ren*.” (13.27)

“When one is acting from *ren*, one does not yield to one’s teacher.” (15.36)

“Is *ren* distant? If I wish to be *ren* then *ren* is at hand.” (7.30)

On the *junzi*

The Master said, “A *junzi* does not aim at stuffing himself when he eats, or at luxury in his home. He is quick about his affairs and careful in choosing his words. He cleaves to those who possess the Dao and rectifies himself by means of their example. Such a man may be said to be learned.” (1.14)

“The *junzi* associates with others with broad impartiality and does not join cliques; a small man joins cliques and is not impartial.” (2.14)

“The *junzi* values virtue; a small man values land. The *junzi* values the example men set; a small man values the favors they grant.” (4.11)

“The *junzi* understands according to righteousness; a small man understands according to profit.” (4.16)

“When a person’s plain qualities exceed his patterned behavior he is rude. When pattern exceeds plainness he is clerkish. When pattern and plainness are in perfect balance, that is a *junzi*!” (6.18)

“The *junzi* seeks for it within himself; a small man seeks for it in others.” (15.21)

On self-cultivation

The Master said, “Do not be anxious that others do not recognize your abilities, be anxious that you do not recognize others’.” (1.16)

“When I walk in a group of three, my teachers are always there. I select what is good in my companions and follow it; I select what is not good and change it within me.” (7.22)

“I have spent whole days without eating, whole nights without sleeping in order to ponder. It was useless – not like study!” (15.31)

The Master ruled out four things: Have no set ideas, no absolute demands, no stubbornness, no self. (9.4)

On government

The Master said, “Governing by means of virtue one is like the North Star: it sits in its place and the other stars do reverence to it.” (2.1)

“‘He took no action and all was ruled’; would this not describe the Emperor Shun? What action did he take? He honored himself and sat facing south, that is all.” (15.5)

“Virtue is never lonely; it always attracts neighbors.” (4.25)

The patrician Ji Kangzi asked, “How would one use persuasion to make one’s people respectful and loyal?”

The Master replied, “Approach them with seriousness and they will be respectful. Be filial towards your own parents and loving towards your children and the people will be loyal. Raise the good to positions of responsibility and instruct those who do not have abilities and they will be persuaded.” (2.20)

The Master said, “I am no better than another at passing judgment in disputes of law. What is needed is to end the need for lawsuits.” (12.13)

The patrician Ji Kangzi was troubled by banditry and asked Confucius about it. Confucius replied, “If you yourself were without desires others would not steal though you paid them to.” (12.18)

Ji Kangzi questioned Confucius about governing. “How would it be if I executed the immoral so as to push others towards the good?”

Confucius replied, “What need is there for executions in governance? If you yourself wish to be good, the people will be good. The virtue of the *junzi* is like

wind and that of the people like grass. When the wind blows over the grass, it bends.” (12.19)

The Master said, “Not to instruct the people in warfare is to throw them away.” (13.30)

On the Dao

The Master said to Zeng Shen, “Shen! My Dao links all on a single thread.” Master Zeng replied, “So it does.”

When the Master had gone, the other followers asked, “What did he mean?”

Master Zeng replied, “The Master’s Dao is simply loyalty and reciprocity.” (4.15)

The Master said, “A person can enlarge the Dao; the Dao does not enlarge a person.” (15.29)

On Heaven and the world of spirits

The disciple Zilu asked about serving ghosts and spirits. “You do not yet know how to serve people,” replied the Master. “Why ask about serving the ghosts?”

Zilu asked about death. The Master said, “When you do not yet know life, why seek to know death?” (11.12)

Offer sacrifices as though the spirits were present. The Master said, “If I do not participate in the sacrifice it is the same as not sacrificing.” (3.12)

The Master said, “I wish never to speak!”

The disciple Zigong said, “If you were never to speak, what would we have to pass on?”

The Master said, “Does Heaven speak? Yet the four seasons turn and the things of the world grow. Does Heaven speak?” (17.19)

The Master fell ill and Zilu asked leave to offer prayers. The Master said, “Is this permitted?”

“Yes,” replied Zilu. “The liturgy in one place reads, ‘You may pray to the spirits above and below.’”

The Master said, “I have been praying for a very long time.” (7.35)

Studying the classics: the *Book of Poetry*

The disciple Zigong Si said, “What would you say about the motto, ‘If poor, be not fawning; if rich, be not arrogant?’”

The Master said, “That will do. But it is not as fine as, ‘Poor but joyous; rich yet loving *li*.’”

Zigong said, “The *Poetry* says, ‘As cut, as chiseled, as carved, as polished.’ Is that what it means?”

“Si!” said the Master, “at last I can begin to discuss the *Poetry* with you. I mention what goes before, and you reply with what comes after.” (1.15)

The disciple Zixia Shang asked the Master, “What does the *Poetry* mean by, ‘The colored lips smile charming, the darkened eyes glance flashing: her whiteness reveals the highlights?’”

The Master said, “The make-up must be on a plain background.”

“Does this mean that *li* comes after?” asked Zixia.

“Ah, Shang picks up what I say!” cried the Master. “At last we can begin to talk about the *Poetry*.” (3.8)

Confucius on Guan Zhong, minister to the first hegemon, Duke Huan of Qi

The Master said, “Guan Zhong was a man of small capacities.” Someone responded, “But was he not thrifty?”

“Guan Zhong had three residences,” said the Master, “what thrift was there in that?”

“But surely Guan Zhong knew *li*.”

“The ruler of a state sets up a screen before his gate; Guan Zhong did likewise. The ruler of a state possesses a drinking stand for the ceremony of inverted cups so that he may properly entertain rulers of other states. Yet Guan Zhong also possessed such a stand. If Guan Zhong knew *li*, then who does not know *li*?” (3.22)

The disciple Zilu said, “When Duke Huan killed his brother Prince Jiu, the prince’s follower Shao Hu properly committed suicide, but Guan Zhong did not die for his lord. Surely we may say that he was not *ren*.”

The Master said, “Duke Huan convened the patrician lords nine times without using military force, and this was all due to the efforts of Guan Zhong. How *ren* he was! How *ren* he was!” (14.16)

The disciple Zigong said, “Guan Zhong was not *ren*, surely! When Duke Huan killed Prince Jiu he was unable to die for his lord and even went on to serve his murderer!”

The Master said, “When Guan Zhong served Duke Huan, the duke rose to hegemon of the lords and rectified all the empire. People have been blessed by these gifts down to this day. Were it not for Guan Zhong, we would all wear our hair

loose and button our jackets on the left as the nomads do. Should he have preserved his honor like a common man or woman and strangled himself in some ditch where none would ever know?" (14.17)

Confucius's regard for his disciple Yan Yuan (Hui)

The Master said, "I can talk to Hui all day long and he will contradict nothing I say, like a stupid fellow. Yet when I later observe his actions, they are in all respects well performed. No, Hui is not stupid." (2.9)

The Master asked Zigong, "Between you and Hui, whom would you say is superior?"

Zigong replied, "How can I compare to Hui? Hui hears one point and understands ten. I hear one and understand two."

The Master said, "Yes, you do not come up to him. Neither you nor I comes up to him!" (5.9)

"How fine Hui is! A plate of food, a ladle of water, living in a humble alley. Others could not bear the cares, but Hui never wavers from his happiness. How fine Hui is!" (6.11)

"Hui is no help to me! He delights in all I say." (11.4)

When Yan Yuan died, the Master cried, "Oh! Heaven has bereft me! Heaven has bereft me!" (11.9)

When Yan Yuan died, the Master wailed for him without proper restraint. The disciples said, "Sir, you are beyond the proper bounds."

"Am I?" said the Master. "Well, if not for this man, then for whom should I wail so?" (11.10)

When Yan Yuan died, his father asked the Master for his carriage that he might use the wood to fashion an outer as well as an inner coffin for his son. The Master said, "Able or not, each man speaks for his own son. When my son Li died he had an inner coffin but no outer one. I would not leave myself to walk on foot even on his behalf, for I must follow behind the grandees of state and may not walk without a carriage." (11.8)

When Yan Yuan died, the disciples wished to mount a lavish funeral on his behalf. The Master said, "You must not do this." The disciples did so anyway. The Master said, "Hui looked upon me as a father, but I have not been able to care for him as a son. It is not I who am to blame, gentlemen. It is you!" (11.11)

Duke Ai of Lu questioned which of the disciples loved learning. Confucius replied, "Yan Hui loved learning. He never transferred his anger to another, he never

repeated a mistake. Alas, he died young. Now there is none like him. I have yet to know another who loved learning.” (6.3)

The Master said, “Hui could go three months at a time without his heart deviating from *ren*. As for the others, they merely happened upon *ren* from time to time.” (6.7)

When he passed through the state of Kuang, the Master was in danger. Yan Yuan caught up with him after having fallen behind.

“I thought you had been killed,” said the Master.

“While you are alive,” said Yan Yuan, “how would I dare to die?” (11.23)

Confucius

The Master said, “To silently take note of things, never have my fill of studying, and teach others without tiring: what difficulties do these things present to me?” (7.2)

If on a particular day the Master had wept, he did not on that day sing. (7.10)

When the Master sang with another and approved of his companion’s song, he would ask him to repeat it, and only after would he join in harmony. (7.32)

When the Master fished he would never use a net; when shooting he would never aim at roosting birds. (7.27)

At court, when his lord requested him to escort a guest he would appear greatly startled, as if his legs were giving way. (10.3)

The Master seldom spoke of profit, or allowed that an event was destined or that a person was *ren*. (9.1)

The Master said, “I am not a man who was born with knowledge; I am one who loves what is old and is quick in pursuing it.” (7.20)

The Lord of She questioned the disciple Zilu about Confucius. Zilu did not know how to answer. The Master said, “Why didn’t you simply say that I am the type of man who forgets to eat when he becomes engrossed, who, in his happiness, has forgotten care, and who does not know that old age is approaching?” (7.19)

KEY NAMES AND TERMS

Confucius	<i>ren</i>	<i>junzi</i>
Yan Hui	<i>li</i>	filiality
Five Relationships	Dao	timeliness

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. From the passages included here, characterize in your own words the qualities of a junzi.
2. Can you give, from your experience, examples of character or behavior that you think might be ren?
3. What were the authors of the Analects trying to tell us about human excellence in their descriptions of Confucius?
4. Consider your own reaction to the four disciples and Confucius as they appear in passage 11.26 (on pp. 14-16 above) – it is often the case that where the text counts on reader response to make its point, our own responses are our best guides to understanding.
5. How does the type of study or learning valued by Confucius differ from the types of learning we value today?

Exercises

1. Assume that the consecutive passages listed on p. 17 in the section on filiality (2.5 - 2.8) were all included in the Analects because each made a slightly different point. What would you say the distinct central point of each would be.
2. Among the selections here are several in which Confucius discusses Guan Zhong. How can we make sense of Confucius's attitudes in these very different passages?

Sources and Further Readings

The presentation of Confucius's biography and ideas given here is my own, and is reflected in the translation of the *Analects* that appears on the G380 course website, accessed through the "[Supplements](#)" link. In some respects it is not typical, and as there are many English language sources about Confucius and the *Analects*, it is easy to find alternative approaches. Some of the

interpretations are consistent with the approaches of two books that contributed to substantial rethinking of Confucius and Confucianism in Western scholarship. Both remain very valuable. Herbert Fingarette's very brief essay, *Confucius – the Secular as Sacred* (NY: 1972), conveyed the cogency of treating Confucian ritualism as a legitimate category of intellectual and philosophical interest. David Hall and Roger Ames's *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: 1987) is a stimulating and insightful analysis that builds on Fingarette and attempts to reanimate the thought of the *Analects* by freeing it from interpretive constraints that may have been imposed by scholars drawing on Western philosophical traditions, and showing how Confucius's ideas may seem fresh and fruitful to contemporary inquiry by linking to – well, linking it to other Western philosophical traditions.

Concerning Confucius's biography, there is a classic account by Herrlee Creel: *Confucius, The Man and the Myth* (New York: 1949, also published as *Confucius and the Chinese Way*), and a recent book by Annping Chin, *The Authentic Confucius: A Life in thought and Politics* (New York: 2007).

Among the many translations of the *Analects*, well crafted versions by Arthur Waley (New York: 1938), D.C. Lau (Penguin Books, 1987, 1998), and Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: 2003) are among the most accessible published. The *Analects* is a terse work with an exceptionally long and varied commentarial tradition; its richness and multiple levels of meaning make it a living document that reads differently to each generation (as true in China as elsewhere). Responsible interpreters vary in specific choices and overall understanding, and no single translation can be viewed as “definitive.”