# INTRODUCTION

## *HISTORICAL AND TEXTUAL BACKGROUND*

### *Master Kong* 孔子 (*Confucius*)

Confucius (551–479 BCE) is probably the most influential thinker in human history, if influence is determined by the sheer number of people who have lived their lives, and died, in accordance with the thinker's vision of how people ought to live, and die. Like many other epochal figures of the ancient world—Socrates, Buddha, Jesus—Confucius does not seem to have written anything that is clearly attributable to him; all that we know of his vision directly must be pieced together from the several accounts of his teachings, and his life, found in the present text, the *Analects*, and other collateral but perhaps less reliable sources such as the *Mencius* and the *Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals*.[1]

Recognized as China's first great teacher both chronologically and in importance, Confucius' ideas have been the fertile soil in which the Chinese cultural tradition has been cultivated and has flourished. In fact, whatever we might mean by "Chineseness" today, some two and a half millennia after his death, is inseparable from the example of personal character that Confucius provided for posterity. And his influence did not end with China. All of the sinitic cultures—especially Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—have evolved around ways of living and thinking derived in significant measure from his ideas as set down by his

disciples and others after his death—ideas that are by no means irrelevant to contemporary social, political, moral, and religious concerns.

Confucius was born in the ancient state of Lu (in modern Shandong province) during one of the most formative periods of Chinese culture. Two centuries before his birth, scores of small city-states owing their allegiance to the imperial House of Zhou filled the Yellow River basin. This was the Zhou dynasty (traditionally, 1122–256 BCE) out of which the empire of China was later to emerge. By the time of Confucius' birth only fourteen independent states remained, with seven of the strongest contending with each other militarily for hegemony over the central plains. It was a period of escalating internecine violence, driven by the knowledge that no state was exempt, and that all comers were competing in a zero-sum game—to fail to win was to perish. The accelerating ferocity of battle was like the increasing frequency and severity of labor pains, anticipating the eventual birth of the imperial Chinese state.[2]

The landscape was diverse not only politically. Intellectually, Confucius set a pattern for the "Hundred Schools" that emerged during these centuries in their competition for doctrinal supremacy. He founded an academy in his own state of Lu and, later in his career, he began the practice of independent philosophers traveling from state to state to persuade political leaders that the particular teachings developed in their academies were a practicable formula for social and political success. In the decades that followed his death, intellectuals of every stripe—Confucians, Legalists, Mohists, Yinyang Theorists, Militarists—would take to the road, often attracted by court-sponsored academies which sprang up to host them. Within these seats of learning and at the courts themselves, the viability of their various strategies for political and social unity would be hotly debated.[3]

Confucius said of himself that "Following the proper way, I do not forge new paths" (7.1),[4] allowing that he was a transmitter rather than an innovator, a classicist rather than a philosopher. This autobiographical statement is not altogether accurate—Confucius was an



original thinker by any standard—but the statement captures a basic characteristic of what came to be called Confucianism: a deep respect and affection for the rich cultural Chinese past, what in the *Analects* is called "the love of learning (*haoxue* 好學)." Confucius saw human flourishing as definitive of the reigns of the ancient sage kings, and he advocated a reauthorization of their ways of governing that had been passed on. According to Confucius—and the other two ancient texts he cites, the *Book of Documents* and the *Book of Songs*[5]—the ancient sage kings who governed by observing ritual propriety and custom (the *li* 禮) rather than by law and force, were themselves reverent toward their past, were more concerned to insure the material and the spiritual well-being of the people than to accumulate personal wealth, and saw as their main task the maintenance of harmony between their community and the rest of the natural order. Confucius wished to reanimate this tradition, and pass it on to succeeding generations.

As a teacher, Confucius expected a high degree of commitment to learning from his students. On the one hand, he was tolerant and inclusive. He made no distinction among the economic classes in selecting his students, and would take whatever they could afford in payment for his services (7.7). His favorite student, Yan Hui, was desperately poor, a fact that simply added to Confucius' admiration for him (6.11, 6.3). On the other hand, Confucius set high standards, and if students did not approach their lessons with seriousness and enthusiasm, Confucius would not suffer them (7.8).

Over his lifetime, Confucius attracted a fairly large group of such serious followers, and provided them not only with book learning, but with a curriculum that encouraged personal articulation and refinement on several fronts. His "six arts" included observing propriety and ceremony (*li*), performing music, and developing proficiency in archery, charioteering, writing, and calculation, all of which, in sum, were directed more at cultivating the moral character of his charges than at any set of practical skills. In the Chinese tradition broadly,

proficiency in the "arts" has been seen as the medium through which one reveals the quality of one's personhood.

Although Confucius enjoyed great popularity as a teacher and many of his students found their way into political office, his enduring frustration was that he personally achieved only marginal influence in the practical politics of the day. He was a *philosophe* rather than a theoretical philosopher; he wanted to be actively involved in intellectual and social trends, and to improve the quality of life that was dependent upon them. Although there were many occasions on which important political figures sought his advice and services during his years in the state of Lu, he held only minor offices at court. When finally Confucius was appointed as police commissioner late in his career, his advice was not heeded, and he was not treated by the Lu court with appropriate courtesy. Earlier, Confucius had made several brief trips to neighboring states, but, after being mistreated in the performance of court sacrifices at home, he determined to take his message on the road again, this time more broadly.

These were troubled times, and there was great adventure and much danger in offering counsel to the competing political centers of his day. In his early fifties, he traveled widely as an itinerant counselor, and several times came under the threat of death (9.5). He was not any more successful in securing preferment abroad than he had been at home, to which he eventually returned and lived out his last few years as a counselor of the lower rank and, according to later accounts, continued his compilation of the classics. He died in 479 BCE, almost surely believing his life had been, on the whole, politically and practically worthless.

## *The Disciples*

Although, like his Western philosophical counterparts, Confucius had a "vision" of the way the world was, he did not, could not, attempt to convey that vision—unlike many of his Western counterparts—solely



in purely descriptive language (about which, more follows). His vision was not simply one to be *understood*, and then accepted, modified, or rejected on the basis of its congruence with the world "objectively" perceived by his students. On the contrary, his vision was one that had to be felt, experienced, practiced, and lived. He was interested in how to make one's way in life, not in discovering the "truth."[6]

If this is an accurate account of what Confucius was about as a teacher, and appreciating that his students differed in age, background, education, and temperament, then we can begin to understand why, in the *Analects*, Confucius occasionally speaks in generalizations, but much more often gives a specific answer to a specific question asked by one of the disciples. At times, the Master gives different answers to the same question, which may all too easily suggest that he was not a particularly consistent thinker. But when we read more closely, and see that it was different disciples who asked the same question, we might reasonably postulate that Confucius based his specific response to the question on the specific perspective—lived, learned, experienced—from which he thought the disciple asked it. (cf. 11.22).

In order, then, to read the *Analects* and get the most out of it, we must learn something about the questioners of the Master.[7]

*Yan Hui* is far and away Confucius' favorite. Living on a daily bowl of rice and a ladle of water (6.11), Yan Hui's eagerness to learn and his sincerity endear him to the Master (6.3). Of a somewhat mystical bent (9.11), Yan Hui is nevertheless seen by Confucius as highly intelligent and exceptional among his students, such that "learning one thing he will know ten" (5.9). Yan Hui is three decades younger than Confucius and heir apparent to his teachings—certainly one reason why the latter was so devastated by his young disciple's untimely death (11.7–11). In fact, as D. C. Lau speculates, classical Confucianism might have had a somewhat different style if it had been Yan Hui rather than the five disciples in the last five books who had been responsible for its earliest transmission.[8]

*Zilu* is another well-known disciple of the Master, and among his favorites, although not portrayed as uniformly exemplary as Yan Hui. Zilu is a courageous activist who is sometimes upbraided by Confucius for being too bold and impetuous (11.22). When he asks the Master whether courage is indeed the highest human excellence, Confucius replies that a bold person lacking a sense of appropriateness would be unruly, and a lesser person, a thief (17.23). At the same time, it is clear that Confucius respects Zilu's courage (5.7), and no less clear that Zilu in his own way is attempting to grasp the Confucian vision, especially when Confucius is speaking not only with him, but with Yan Hui as well (5.26).

*Zigong* excels as a statesman and as a merchant. Although Confucius twits him for being stingy (3.17), he does believe Zigong can be entrusted with an administrative position (6.8). Despite his occasional officiousness, Zigong asks the important questions (7.15, 17.19), and it is clear that Confucius is fond of him (1.15).

*Zengzi*, or "Master Zeng," is the foremost exponent of the filial virtues (*xiao* 孝) among the disciples (1.9, 8.3-7), and, as evidenced by the number of times in the *Analects* he is referred to as "Master Zeng" (8:3-7 19:16 -19), he clearly became leader of a Confucian school after the Master's death. He is not among the sharpest of the disciples (11.18), but can at least occasionally elaborate on an unusual remark by his teacher (14.26).

*Zixia* is a man of letters, and is remembered by tradition as having had an important role in establishing the early canonical texts. His name appears in the early strata of the *Analects* (6.13) as one who is capable of treading the way (*dao*), and Confucius weighs his shortcomings as no worse than another disciple, Zizhang, whom he is willing to instruct at length (2.18). The Master calls attention to Zixia's timidity (11.16), but also to his apprehending the richness of the cultural tradition (3.8).

*Zizhang* himself often asks detailed questions about the significance of past historical events (5.19), but clearly wishes to learn the answers to his questions so that he can attempt to realize the Confucian vision in practice (2.18, 2.23).



*Ranyou* has a rather curious profile in the *Analects*. On the one hand, he is a mediocre student lacking in initiative (11.22). On the other hand, Confucius has no question concerning his administrative abilities (5.8), nor qualms about recommending him for office (6.8). In many ways, Ranyou's failures are a fair demonstration of perhaps the main theme of the text: real education is the cultivation of one's character, not the accumulation of administrative skills. At the end of the day, Ranyou is not able to move the usurping Ji clan, which he serves, in the direction of appropriate conduct because, as a person, he is not worthy of deference (3.6 and 16.1).

Other disciples are either well described in the text and in our notes thereto, or their qualities made known by the kinds of questions they ask, and the answers given. At times Confucius can be seen as a harshly exacting mentor with his students (14.43), but on other occasions, depending on his audience and the circumstances, as a warm, modest, and entirely human partner on a quest. In fact, he evidences a wonderful sense of humor in his interactions with his young followers (for example, 5.7, 5.20, 11.19, 17.1, and 17.4). A generalization about his interaction with his students is found in 7.38: "The Master was always gracious yet serious, commanding yet not severe, deferential yet at ease."

## *The Text*

Beginning shortly after he died, a few of the disciples of Confucius began setting down briefly what they remembered the Master saying to them. Some disciples of the first generation of his students continued this process, so that, as the story goes, within a century of the founder's demise there were at least ten such little "books" about his life and teachings. Another dozen or more were compiled by we know-not-whom during the following century, and it was to be yet another hundred years before a number of these "books" were gathered together to

make up the volume we now know as the *Analects*—or "Sayings of Confucius."[9]

Thus the present work in twenty books was over three centuries in the making, and there were numerous difficulties in editing it into a coherent whole. In the first place, the savage civil wars plaguing China during Confucius' lifetime greatly intensified after his death: to this day, the Chinese refer to their historical times 403–221 BCE as "The Period of the Warring States." The disciples—and their disciples in turn—scattered; some were killed, some formed their own schools; undoubtedly much was written, but only a few copies of each text would be circulated, and of course, all were subject to loss or destruction.

Worse, in 213 BCE, less than a decade after the country had been unified by the First August Emperor of the Qin—he of the terra cotta army of tomb soldiers—the then Prime Minister Li Si ordered a general burning of all writings not dealing with the practical arts. Fair copies of each title destroyed were kept in an imperial library, but as the dynasty began to disintegrate after the death of the First Emperor, the imperial library was burned to the ground.[10]

From the ashes of the Qin dynasty the House of Han arose. It was one of China's longest reigning dynasties (202 BCE–220 CE), and within the first century of its rule, a syncretically fortified version of the philosophical and religious thought of what was then loosely called "Confucianism" came to dominate the intellectual life of the realm, beginning its ascendancy after Emperor Wu (140–87 BCE) took the throne. It was during this early Han period that the reconstitution of all surviving materials attributed to Confucius and his disciples took place, with one result being the text of the *Analects* as we have it today.

There are different stories told on the compilation of the *Analects*. D. C. Lau stands with traditional wisdom: this text was compiled shortly after the death of Confucius. He suggests that the first fifteen books were assembled relatively soon after the death of the Master, and



the last five books came together sometime after the original disciples had attained maturity.

More recently, John Makeham has insisted upon the fluidity of the resources that would ultimately provide the content of our received text, dating its attainment of fixed status at about 150 BCE. Bruce and Taeko Brooks have surmised that the present books 4 through 8 are the oldest strata of the text, all composed by disciples who actually studied with Confucius. Books 9 through 11 may well have been composed by the disciples of the disciples, and the remaining books follow, variously ordered temporally and topically, except that book 20 is surely the most recent, written approximately two and a quarter centuries after Confucius' death.[11]

The question of "when" will probably be answered in due course by the accelerating number of texts being uncovered in the archaeological finds. At this juncture, two points might be made. First, over the last forty years, the archaeological finds have repeatedly overruled —in favor of traditional dating—many modern scholars and their speculations. And, second, the fragmentary Dingzhou text which informs the present translation was excavated from a 55 BCE Han dynasty tomb yet differs only incidentally from the many, much later texts which have come down to us. It thus provides us with an initial date before which the process of compilation must have been completed. However this mystery plays out, the enormous influence that the received *Analects* has had on defining "Chineseness" is never in question.

For all these reasons it is not surprising that, especially to the modern Western reader who is used to a linear, sequential text, the present *Analects* seems to be something less than a coherent whole. A great many hands, spanning some several centuries, have set down, sorted, re–sorted, edited, and collated these "sayings." Little wonder, then, that they can initially give the appearance of being fragmentary, disconnected, and occasionally, in conflict with each other.

In short, the present *Analects* is not easy to read through as a philosophical text even when it is appreciated fully that Confucius seldom

speaks ex cathedra, never speaks at all on certain issues (7.21, 9.1, 9.4), and regularly leads his students on the way by giving varied answers to the same question, based upon his perception of the student's receptiveness to the "answer." But these difficulties in interpreting the *Analects* notwithstanding, it must be emphasized again that the text as we now have it was read very closely and carefully, and in fact, usually memorized, along with the names of the dramatis personae mentioned in the text, by virtually every educated Chinese for two millennia. It was quite literally set in stone with the engraving of the Xiping stone classics over the period 175–183 CE, fragments of which have been recovered since the Song[12] dynasty. The last Chinese civil service examination based on the *Analects* was administered in the twentieth century, in 1905. It thus deserves to be read as carefully and as deliberately as it was read by seventy-odd generations of Chinese, in just the form in which it has been handed down to us. There is a greater degree of coherence to the *Analects* than a first reading would suggest; many sections cluster around specific themes and subjects, and thus the architecture of the text emerges as readers make it their own.

Several other texts of the Warring States period attribute sayings to Confucius which are not found in the present *Analects*, including importantly the *Mencius* 孟子, the *Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), and the *Xunzi* 荀子. We have used these three texts extensively as sources of early commentary on the *Analects*, citing them where they are consistent with and shed light upon the always laconic record. There were also a number of other "books" about Confucius in circulation that did not escape destruction during the civil wars.

### *Other Canonical Texts*

In the *Analects*, Confucius regularly praises a number of the legendary sage kings of antiquity—Yao, Shun, Yu—who were traditionally assigned reigns in the third millennium BCE. Whether these legendary



rulers were historical figures will probably never be known (apart from the legends, we have little direct evidence for their existence), but Confucius and the tradition that followed in his footsteps surely believed that they were. We know that Chinese civilization was already highly developed by the time Confucius was born, and had been so for at least a thousand years. And Confucius devoted his life to celebrating, renewing, and recommending that development. Thus, while it would not make much sense to speak of a Buddhism before the Buddha, or a Christianity before Christ, it actually does make good sense to speak of a "Confucianism" before Confucius: he articulated clearly and championed compellingly a great many of the artistic, social, ritual, religious, and other practices that had already defined the Chinese cultural tradition for a millennium.

Two of the books descriptive of that tradition predate Confucius, and are cited by him in the *Analects*. The first of these is the *Shujing* 書經—usually translated as the *Book of History* or the *Book of Documents*.[13] It is thought by some scholars that parts of the *Book of Documents* might well be China's oldest written work, predating even the oracle bones of the late Shang (traditionally 1766–1122 BCE), while other scholars would not allow that it is earlier than the Zhou dynasty (traditionally 1122–256 BCE). It is made up of a series of short essays, memorials, and documents which record parts of the reigns of several of the sage-kings and rulers of the early three dynasties (see *Analects* 2.23): the Xia (traditionally 2205–1766 BCE), the Shang or Yin, and the early Zhou. The book is by no means a complete account of antiquity, and even the oldest parts of it are generally thought to have been written long after the events they describe.[14]

Although parts of the *Book of Documents* are simply chronicles of events, other parts of it are the charges of rulers to their successors, and to their ministers. The themes repeated consistently in these exhortations had moral, political, and religious qualities that came to be definitive of the Confucian persuasion (which is probably why many

employed seriously for expressive and communicative purposes in an ideographic one.

This point can be seen in another way by attending to a (technically) nonlinguistic feature of classical Chinese: style preference. Parallel sentence construction was prized, a sign of education, intelligence, and æsthetic sensibility on the part of the writer. There were undoubtedly cultural factors that influenced this style preference, but we must note here its significance for interpreting and translating texts: when faced with, say, four parallel sentences, some will be less syntactically (or semantically) ambiguous than others, and it is therefore a splendid heuristic device to interpret the syntactic (and/or semantic) structures of the more ambiguous sentences on the basis of the reading given to those that are much less so, where they are at all times construed relationally. Earlier we employed this system of parallel construction ourselves in the discussion of using names properly. If we translate the relevant *Analects* passages as "Let rulers rule, let ministers minister," then we may proceed—without obfuscation, we hope—to "let fathers father, let sons son."

There is a further implication of the nature of the classical written language that complicates, but certainly does not vitiate, the claim we are making for maintaining a separation between the written and the spoken language. The parallel structure, rhythm, repetition, rhyme, and other features of the written language facilitate memorization, and memorization was a major discipline in the appropriation of a tradition that had limited material resources available to it for its transmission. This factor would mean that there would be important overlaps between the expressive and more precise spoken language and the terse, poetic written language committed to memory and repeated orally as an enhancement for the spoken language. Then and now, the Chinese language is freighted with classical allusions made available by dressing the spoken (and now written) vernacular language with a shared range of phrases that have become proverbial.



Against this background, we may turn now to a brief account of a number of key philosophical terms frequently occurring in the *Analects*.

## *The Chinese Lexicon*[39]

### 道

*Dao* occurs some eighty times in the *Analects*, and is of central importance for interpreting the thinking not only of Confucius, but all other early Chinese thinkers as well; it is very probably the single most important term in the philosophical lexicon, and in significant measure, to understand what and how a thinker means when he uses *dao* is to understand that thinker's philosophy.

The character has two elements: *chuo* 辶 "to pass over," "to go over," "to lead through" (on foot), and *shou* 首, itself a compound literally meaning "head"—hair and eye together—and therefore "foremost." *Dao* is used often as a loan character for its cognate, *dao* 導, "to lead." Thus the character is significantly verbal, processional, and dynamic. The earliest appearance of *dao* in the *Book of Documents* is in the context of cutting a channel and "leading" a river to prevent the overflowing of its banks.[40] Even the *shou* "head" component has the suggestion of "to lead," or "to give a heading."

Taking the verbal *dao* as primary, its several derived meanings emerge rather naturally: to lead through, and hence, road, path, way, method, art, teachings; to explain, to tell, doctrines. At its most fundamental level, *dao* seems to denote the active project of "road building," and by extension, to connote a road that has been made, and hence can be traveled. It is by this connotation that *dao* is so often nominalized in translation ("the Way"), but we must distinguish between simply traveling on a road, and making the journey one's own. In our interpretation, to realize the *dao* is to experience, to interpret, and to influence the world in such a way as to reinforce and extend the way of life inherited from one's cultural predecessors. This way of living in the world then provides a road map and direction for one's cultural successors.

For Confucius, *dao* is primarily *rendao* 人道, that is, "a way of becoming consummately and authoritatively human." As 15.29 tells us: "It is the person who is able to broaden the way, not the way that broadens the person."

Above we have made the argument that *dao* defies Aristotle's categories, and that it has as much to do with subject as object, as much to do with the quality of understanding as the conditions of the world understood. This point might be reinforced by citing a passage in John Dewey which makes a similar point:

> If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in accomplishing this work. . . . That which guides us truly is true—demonstrated capacity for such guidance is precisely what is meant by truth. The adverb "truly" is more fundamental than either the adjective true, or the noun, truth. An adverb expresses a way, a mode of acting.[41]

In pursuing our translation of this text, we have tried wherever possible to respect the extent to which the "path" metaphor pervades the text. A sustained image that the Chinese text presents is Confucius finding his way. That is, in reading the *Analects* in the original language, a term such as *guo* 過 that is often nominalized as "faults," or if its verbal aspect is acknowledged, translated as "to err," has the specific sense of "going astray" or "going too far": not just erring, but straying from the path.

天 *Tian* is a term that we have chosen not to translate, largely because we believe its normal English rendering as "Heaven" cannot but conjure up images derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition that are not to be found in China; and "Nature" will not work either. In the first place, *tian* is often used alone to render *tiandi* 天地—"the heavens and the earth"—suggesting that *tian* is not independent of this world. The God



of the Bible, often referred to as metonymically "Heaven," *created* the world, but *tian* in classical Chinese *is* the world.

*Tian* is both *what* our world is and *how* it is. The "ten thousand things (*wanwu* 萬物)," an expression for "everything," are not the creatures of a *tian* which is independent of what is ordered; rather, they are constitutive of it. *Tian* is both the creator and the field of creatures. There is no apparent distinction between the order itself, and what orders it. This absence of superordination is a condition made familiar in related notions of the Daoist *dao* and the Buddhist *dharma* which at once reference concrete phenomena and the order that obtains among them.

On this basis, *tian* can be described as an inhering, emergent order negotiated out of the dispositioning of the particulars that are constitutive of it. But *tian* is not just "things"; it is a living culture—crafted, transmitted, and now resident in a human community. *Tian* is anthropomorphic, suggesting its intimate relationship with the process of euhemerization—historical human beings becoming gods—that grounds Chinese ancestor reverence. It is probably this common foundation in ancestor reverence that allowed for the conflation of the culturally sophisticated Shang dynasty's *di* 帝 (ancestral spirits) with the notion of *tian* associated with the Zhou tribes, militant and Romanesque, who conquered the Yellow River valley. There seems to be sufficient reason to assume that *tian* is consistent with the claim of Sarah Allan and Emily Ahern that Chinese gods are, by and large, dead people.[42] In the absence of some transcendent creator deity as the repository of truth, beauty and goodness, *tian* would seem to stand for a cumulative and continuing cultural legacy focused in the spirits of those who have come before. It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between *mythos*, *logos*, and *historia* is radically different from the Western tradition. Culturally significant human beings—persons such as the Duke of Zhou and Confucius—are "theomorphized" to become *tian*, and *tian* is itself made anthropomorphic and determinate in their persons.

Finally, *tian* does not speak, but communicates effectively although not always clearly through oracles, through perturbations in the climate, and through alterations in the natural conditions of the human world. *Tian* participates in a discourse shared by the human community—at least by the most worthy among them. Given the interrelatedness and interdependency of the orders defining the Confucian world, what affects one, affects all. A failure of order in the human world will symbiotically be reflected in the natural environment. Although *tian* is not the "personal" deity responsive to individual needs as found in the Judeo-Christian worldview, as aggregate ancestor it would seem that *tian* functions impartially on behalf of its progeny to maximize the possibilities of emergent harmony at all levels. That *tian* is not transcendental, but indeed functions on behalf of its progeny, is seen clearly in the *Book of Documents*: "*Tian* hears and sees as the people hear and see."[43]

仁 *Ren*, translated herein as "authoritative conduct," "to act authoritatively," or "authoritative person," is the foremost project.taken up by Confucius, and occurs over one hundred times in the text. It is a fairly simple graph, and according to the *Shuowen* lexicon, is made up of the elements *ren* 人 "person", and *er* 二, the number "two." This etymological analysis underscores the Confucian assumption that one cannot become a person by oneself—we are, from our inchoate beginnings, irreducibly social. Herbert Fingarette has stated the matter concisely: "For Confucius, unless there are at least two human beings, there can be no human beings."[44]

An alternative explanation of the character *ren* 仁 we might derive from oracle bone inscriptions is that what appears to be the number "two 二" is in fact an early form of "above, to ascend *shang* 上," which was also written as 二.[45] Such a reading would highlight the growing distinction one accrues in becoming *ren*, thereby setting a bearing for one's community and the world to come: "those authoritative in their



conduct enjoy mountains . . . are still . . . [and] are long-enduring (6.23; see also 2.1 and 17.3).

*Ren* is most commonly translated as "benevolence," "goodness," and "humanity," occasionally as "humanheartedness," and less occasionally by the clumsy and sexist "manhood-at-its-best."

While "benevolence" and "humanity" might be more comfortable choices for translating *ren* into English, our decision to use the less elegant "authoritative person" is a considered one. First, *ren* is one's entire person: one's cultivated cognitive, æsthetic, moral, and religious sensibilities as they are expressed in one's ritualized roles and relationships. It is one's "field of selves," the sum of significant relationships, that constitute one as a resolutely social person. *Ren* is not only mental, but physical as well: one's posture and comportment, gestures and bodily communication. Hence, translating *ren* as "benevolence" is to "psychologize" it in a tradition that does not rely upon the notion of *psyche* as a way of defining the human experience. It is to impoverish *ren* by isolating one out of many moral dispositions at the expense of so much more that comes together in the complexity of becoming human.

Again, "humanity" suggests a shared, essential condition of being human owned by all members of the species. Yet *ren* does not come so easy. It is an æsthetic project, an accomplishment, something done (12.1). The human *being* is not something we are; it is something that we do, and become. Perhaps "human *becoming*" might thus be a more appropriate term to capture the processional and emergent nature of what it means to become human. It is not an essential endowed potential, but what one is able to make of oneself given the interface between one's initial conditions and one's natural, social, and cultural environments.

Certainly the human being as a focus of constitutive relationships has an initial disposition (17.2). But *ren* is foremost the process of "growing (*sheng* 生)" these relationships into vital, robust, and healthy participation in the human community.

The fact that Confucius is asked so often what he means by the expression *ren* would suggest that he is reinventing this term for his own purposes, and that those in conversation with him are not comfortable in their understanding of it. Confucius' creative investment of new meaning in *ren* is borne out by a survey of its infrequent, and relatively unimportant usage in the earlier corpus. *Ren* does not occur in the earliest portions of the ancient classics, and only three times in the later parts. This unexceptional usage compares with 105 occurrences in the *Analects* in 58 of the 499 sections.[46]

Given that *ren* denotes the qualitative transformation of a *particular* person, it is further ambiguous because it must be understood relative to the specific concrete conditions of that person. There is no formula, no ideal. Like a work of art, it is a process of disclosure rather than closure, resisting fixed definition and replication.

Our term "authoritative person" as a translation of *ren* then, is a somewhat novel expression, as was *ren* itself, and will probably prompt a similar desire for clarification. "Authoritative" entails the "authority" that a person comes to represent in community by becoming *ren*, embodying in oneself the values and customs of one's tradition through the observance of ritual propriety (*li*). The prominence and visibility of the authoritative person is captured in the metaphor of the mountain (6.23): still, stately, spiritual, enduring, a landmark of the local culture and community.

At the same time, the way of becoming human (*dao*) is not a given; the authoritative person must be a "road builder," a participant in "authoring" the culture for one's own place and time (15.29). Observing ritual propriety (*li*) is, by definition, a process of internalization—"making the tradition one's own"—requiring personalization of the roles and relationships that locate one within community. It is this creative aspect of *ren* that is implicit in the process of becoming authoritative for one's own community.

The contrast between top-down and impositional "authoritarian" order, and the bottom-up, deferential sense of "authoritative" order is



also salutary. The authoritative person is a model that others, recognizing the achievement, gladly and without coercion, defer to and appropriate in the construction of their own personhood. Confucius is as explicit in expressing the same reservations about authoritative relations becoming authoritarian as he is about a deference-driven ritualized community surrendering this noncoercive structure for the rule of law (2.3).

禮 *Li* has been translated as "ritual," "rites," "customs," "etiquette," "propriety," "morals," "rules of proper behavior," and "worship." The compound character is an ideograph connoting the presentation of sacrifices to the spirits at an altar ( *li* 豊 ). It is defined in the *Shuowen* paronomasticahy as *lü* 履, meaning "to tread a path; hence, conduct, behavior"—that is, "how to serve the spirits to bring about good fortune." Properly contextualized, each of these English terms can render *li* on occasion, but in classical Chinese the character carries *all* of these meanings on every occasion of its use.

We have chosen to translate *li* as "observing ritual propriety." Again, this rendering is a considered choice.

*Li* are those meaning-invested roles, relationships, and institutions which facilitate communication, and which foster a sense of community. The compass is broad: all formal conduct, from table manners to patterns of greeting and leave-taking, to graduations, weddings, funerals, from gestures of deference to ancestral sacrifices—all of these, and more, are *li*. They are a social grammar that provides each member with a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity. *Li* are life forms transmitted from generation to generation as repositories of meaning, enabling the youth to appropriate persisting values and to make them appropriate to their own situations.

Full participation in a ritually-constituted community requires the personalization of prevailing customs, institutions, and values. What makes ritual profoundly different from law or rule is this process of making the tradition one's own. The Latin *proprius*, "making something

one's own" as in "property," gives us a series of cognate expressions that are useful in translating key philosophical terms to capture this sense of participation: *yi* 義 is not "righteousness" but "appropriateness"; *zheng* 正 is not "rectification" or "correct conduct," but "proper conduct"; *zheng* 政 is not "government" but "governing properly" in our translation.

For Westerners, there is ostensibly a distinction to be made between being boorish and being immoral. For Confucius, however, there are simply varying degrees of inappropriate, demeaning, and hurtful behavior along a continuum on which a failure in personal responsiveness is not just bad manners, but fully a lapse in moral responsibility.

In defining filial piety (*xiao* 孝), for example, Confucius is not concerned about providing parents with food and shelter—we do as much for our domestic animals. The substance of filial piety lies in the "face (*se* 色)" one brings to filial responsibility—the bounce in the step, the cheerful heart, the goodwill with which one conducts the otherwise rather ordinary business of caring for aging parents (2.8).

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to understanding what *li* means in the world of Confucius is thinking that "ritual" is a familiar dimension of our own world, and like "benevolence," we fully understand what it entails. "Ritual" in English is almost always pejorative, suggesting as it often does compliance with hollow and hence meaningless social conventions. A careful reading of the *Analects*, however, uncovers a way of life carefully choreographed down to appropriate facial expressions and physical gestures, a world in which a life is a performance requiring enormous attention to detail. Importantly, this *li*-constituted performance begins from the insight that personal refinement is only possible through the discipline provided by formalized roles and behaviors. Form without creative personalization is coercive and dehumanizing law; creative personal expression without form is randomness at best, and license at worst. It is only with the appropriate combination of form and personalization that community can be self-regulating and refined.



信 *Xin*, which we have translated as "making good on one's word," has been described by Ezra Pound, following his teacher Ernest Fenollosa, as a picture of "a man standing by his word."[47] No small number of scholars have excoriated Pound for his philological flights of fancy, but every sinologist must analyze this particular character in the same way: the character for "person" 人 stands to the left of the character for "speaking" or "words" 言. When it is now remembered just how many characters in the classical Confucian lexicon were pictographic or ideographic in nature, we should be willing to allow Pound and Fenollosa their rendering. Modern research has shown that the *Shuowen* is mistaken in classifying *xin* under the *huiyi* 會意 "ideographic compound" category of Chinese graphs; *ren* 人 is almost surely the phonetic in *xin*. But the excellence of the philological detective work on this graph in no way invalidates the importance of the fact that every reader of the *Analects* confronts visually "person" standing by "words" or "speech." *Xin* is often translated as "trustworthy." However, being simply well intended in what one says and does is not good enough; one must have the resources to follow through and make good on what one proposes to do. Interestingly, as with most classical Chinese terms, in understanding *xin* we must appreciate the priority of situation over agency. That is, *xin* in describing the situation of persons making good on their word goes in both directions, meaning both the commitment of the benefactor and the confidence of the beneficiary. *Xin*, then, is the consummation of fiduciary relationships.

義 *Yi*. In his translation of the *Analects*, the distinguished scholar D. C. Lau translates *yi* sometimes as "right," other times as "duty," and on occasion as "moral" or "morality" more generally. If one is committed, as Lau is, to portraying Confucius as a "moral philosopher" in more or less the Western sense, then *yi* is probably the best candidate as a Chinese lexical equivalent for "morals" or "morality." But the term "morality" in contemporary English, and particularly in post-Kantian ethics, is linked intimately with a number of other terms: "freedom,"

43. Legge III:292.

44. Fingarette (1983):217.

45. Karlgren (1950c):191.

46. Takeuchi (1965) and Wing-tsit Chan (1969).

47. Pound (1951):22.

48. Munro (1969):75–76.

49. See the endnotes to 13.23 for an extensive discussion of the culinary associations that have been used to gloss this term.

50. Boodberg (1953):320–22.

51. *Mencius* 4B32 and 6B2.

52. *Xunzi* 75/19/121. A fuller account of this path of spiritual progress is in Rosemont (1999) and Ames (1999).



# 學而篇第一

## BOOK 1

1.1 子曰：「學而時習之，不亦說乎？有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎？人不知而不慍，不亦君子乎？」

The Master said: "Having studied,[1] to then repeatedly apply what you have learned—is this not a source of pleasure? To have friends come from distant quarters[2]—is this not a source of enjoyment? To go unacknowledged by others without harboring frustration—is this not the mark of an exemplary person (*junzi* 君子)?

1.2 有子曰：「其爲人也孝弟，而好犯上者，鮮矣；不好犯上，而好作亂者，未之有也。君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其爲人（仁）之本與！」

Master You[3] said: "It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility (*xiaodi* 孝弟) to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on initiating rebellion. Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way (*dao* 道) will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁)."[4]

1.3 子曰：「巧言令色，鮮矣仁！」

The Master said: "It is a rare thing for glib speech and an insinuating appearance to accompany authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁)."[5]

1.4 曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身：爲人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？」

Master Zeng said: "Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost (*zhong* 忠)? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word (*xin* 信)? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?"

1.5 子曰：「道千乘之國，敬事而信，節用而愛人，使民以時。」

The Master said: "The way (*dao* 道) to lead a thousand-chariot state effectively is to carry out your official duties respectfully and make good on your word (*xin* 信); be frugal in your expenditures and love your peers; and put the common people to work only at the proper time of year."[6]

1.6 子曰：「弟子入則孝，出則悌，謹而信，汎愛衆，而親人（仁）。行有餘力，則以學文。」

The Master said: "As a younger brother and son, be filial (*xiao* 孝) at home and deferential (*di* 弟) in the community; be cautious in what you say and then make good on your word (*xin* 信); love the multitude broadly and be intimate with those who are authoritative in their conduct (*ren* 仁).[7] If in so behaving you still have energy left, use it to improve yourself through study."

1.7 子夏曰：「賢賢易色；事父母，能竭其力；事君，能致其身；與朋友交，言而有信。雖曰未學，吾必謂之學矣。」

Zixia[8] said: "As for persons who care for character much more than beauty, who in serving their parents are able to exert



themselves utterly, who give their whole person in the service of their ruler, and who, in interactions with colleagues and friends, make good on their word (*xin* 信)—even if it were said of such persons that they are unschooled, I would insist that they are well educated indeed."

1.8 子曰：「君子不重則不威；學則不固。主忠信。無友不如己者。過則勿憚改。」

The Master said: "Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) lacking in gravity would have no dignity. Yet in their studies they are not inflexible.[9] Take doing your utmost and making good on your word (*xin* 信) as your mainstay. Do not have as a friend anyone who is not as good as you are.[10] And where you have erred, do not hesitate to mend your ways."

1.9 曾子曰：「慎終追遠，民德歸厚矣。」

Master Zeng said: "Be circumspect in funerary services and continue sacrifices to the distant ancestors, and the virtue (*de* 德) of the common people will thrive."[11]

1.10 子禽問於子貢曰：「夫子至於是邦也，必聞其政，求之與？抑與之與？」子貢曰：「夫子溫、良、恭、儉、讓以得之。夫子之求之也，其諸異乎人之求之與？」

Ziqin asked Zigong:[12] "When the Master arrives in a particular state and needs to learn how it is being governed, does he seek out this information or is it offered to him?" Zigong replied: "The Master gets all he needs by being cordial, proper, deferential, frugal, and unassuming. Perhaps this way of seeking information is somewhat different from how others go about it."

1.11 子曰：「父在，觀其志；父沒，觀其行；三年無改於父之道，可謂孝矣。」

The Master said: "While a person's father is still alive, observe what he intends; when his father dies, observe what he does.[13] A person who for three years refrains from reforming[14] the ways (*dao* 道) of his late father can be called a filial son (*xiao* 孝)."[15]

1.12 有子曰：「禮之用，和爲貴。先王之道，斯爲美；小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以禮節之，亦不可行也。」

Master You said: "Achieving harmony (*he* 和) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮). In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work."[16]

1.13 有子曰：「信近於義，言可復也。恭近於禮，遠恥辱也。因不失其親，亦可宗也。」

Master You said: "That making good on one's word (*xin* 信) gets one close to being appropriate (*yi* 義) is because then what one says will bear repeating. That being deferential gets one close to observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) is because it keeps disgrace and insult at a distance. Those who are accommodating and do not lose those with whom they are close are deserving of esteem."

1.14 子曰：「君子食無求飽，居無求安，敏於事而慎於言，就有道而正焉，可謂好學也已。」

The Master said: "In eating, exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) do not look for a full stomach, nor in their lodgings for comfort and contentment. They are persons of action yet cautious



in what they say. They repair to those who know the way (*dao* 道), and find improvement in their company. Such persons can indeed be said to have a love of learning (*haoxue* 好學)."[17]

1.15 子貢曰：「貧而無諂，富而無驕，何如？」子曰：「可也；未若貧而樂道，富而好禮者也。」

子貢曰：「《詩》云：『如切如磋，如琢如磨。』其斯之謂與？」子曰：「賜也，始可與言《詩》已矣，告諸往而知來者。」

Zigong said: "What do you think of the saying: 'Poor but not inferior; rich but not superior'?" The Master replied: "Not bad, but not as good as: 'Poor but enjoying the way (*dao* 道);[18] rich but loving ritual propriety (*li* 禮).'"

Zigong said: "The *Book of Songs* states:

Like bone carved and polished,
Like jade cut and ground.[19]

Is this not what you have in mind?"

The Master said: "Zigong, it is only with the likes of you then that I can discuss the *Songs*! On the basis of what has been said, you know what is yet to come."

1.16 子曰：「不患人之不己知，患不知人也。」

The Master said: "Don't worry about not being acknowledged by others; worry about failing to acknowledge them."

2.1 子曰：「爲政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而衆星共之。」

The Master said: "Governing[20] with excellence (*de* 德) can be compared to being the North Star: the North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay it tribute."[21]

2.2 子曰：「《詩》三百，一言以蔽之，曰：『思無邪。』」

The Master said: "Although the *Songs* are three hundred in number, they can be covered in one expression: 'Go vigorously without swerving.'"[22]

2.3 子曰：「道之以政，齊之以刑，民免而無恥；道之以德，齊之以禮，有恥且格。」

The Master said: "Lead the people with administrative injunctions (*zheng* 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (*xing* 刑), and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves."[23]

2.4 子曰：「吾十有五而志于學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」

The Master said: "From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of *tian* (*tianming* 天命); from sixty my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries."[24]



2.5 孟懿子問孝。子曰：「無違。」

樊遲御，子告之曰：「孟孫問孝於我，我對曰，『無違。』」樊遲曰：「何謂也？」子曰：「生，事之以禮；死，葬之以禮，祭之以禮。」

Meng Yizi[25] asked about filial conduct (*xiao* 孝). The Master replied: "Do not act contrary." Fan Chi[26] was driving the Master's chariot, and the Master informed him further: "Meng Yizi asked me about filial conduct, and I replied: 'Do not act contrary.'" Fan Chi asked, "What did you mean by that?" The Master replied: "While they are living, serve them according to the observances of ritual propriety (*li* 禮); when they are dead, bury them and sacrifice to them according to the observances of ritual propriety."

2.6 孟武伯問孝。子曰：「父母唯其疾之憂。」

Meng Wubo[27] asked about filial conduct (*xiao* 孝). The Master replied: "Give your mother and father nothing to worry about beyond your physical well-being."[28]

2.7 子游問孝。子曰：「今之孝者，是謂能養。至於犬馬，皆能有養；不敬，何以別乎？」

Ziyou[29] asked about filial conduct (*xiao* 孝). The Master replied: "Those today who are filial are considered so because they are able to provide for their parents. But even dogs and horses are given that much care. If you do not respect your parents, what is the difference?"

2.8 子夏問孝。子曰：「色難。有事，弟子服其勞；有酒食，先生饌，曾是以爲孝乎？」

Zixia asked about filial conduct (*xiao* 孝). The Master replied: "It all lies in showing the proper countenance. As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, and deferring to their elders when there is wine and food to be had—how can merely doing this be considered being filial?"

2.9 子曰：「吾與回言終日，不違，如愚。退而省其私，亦足以發，回也不愚。」

The Master said: "I can speak with Yan Hui for an entire day without his raising an objection, as though he were slow. But when he has withdrawn and I examine what he says and does on his own, it illustrates perfectly what I have been saying. Indeed, there is nothing slow about Yan Hui!"

2.10 子曰：「視其所以，觀其所由，察其所安。人焉廋哉？人焉廋哉？」

The Master said: "Watch their actions, observe their motives, examine wherein they dwell content; won't you know what kind of person they are? Won't you know what kind of person they are?"

2.11 子曰：「溫故而知新，可以爲師矣。」

The Master said: "Reviewing the old as a means of realizing the new—such a person can be considered a teacher."[30]

2.12 子曰：「君子不器。」

The Master said: "Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) are not mere vessels."[31]

2.13 子貢問君子。子曰：「先行其言而後從之。」



Zigong asked about exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子). The Master replied: "They first accomplish what they are going to say, and only then say it."[32]

2.14 子曰：「君子周而不比，小人比而不周。」

The Master said: "Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) associating openly with others are not partisan; petty persons being partisan do not associate openly with others."

2.15 子曰：「學而不思則罔，思而不學則殆。」

The Master said: "Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances."[33]

2.16 子曰：「攻乎異端，斯害也已。」

The Master said: "To become accomplished in some heterodox doctrine will bring nothing but harm."[34]

2.17 子曰：「由！誨女知之乎！知之爲知之，不知爲不知，是知也。」

The Master said: "Zilu,[35] shall I teach you what wisdom (*zhi* 知) means?" To know (*zhi* 知) what you know and know what you do not know—this then is wisdom."[36]

2.18 子張學干祿。子曰：「多聞闕疑，愼言其餘，則寡尤；多見闕殆，愼行其餘，則寡悔。言寡尤，行寡悔，祿在其中矣。」

Zizhang[37] was studying in order to take office. The Master said: "If you listen broadly, set aside what you are unsure of, and speak cautiously on the rest, you will make few errors; if you look broadly, set aside what is perilous, and act cautiously on the rest, you will have few regrets. To speak with

few errors and to act with few regrets is the substance of taking office."

2.19 哀公問曰：「何爲則民服？」孔子對曰：「舉直錯諸枉，則民服；舉枉錯諸直，則民不服。」

Duke Ai of Lu inquired of Confucius, asking: "What does one do to gain the allegiance of the people?" Confucius replied: "Raise up the true and place them over the crooked, and the allegiance of the people will be yours; raise up the crooked and place them over the true, and the people will not be yours."

2.20 季康子問：「使民敬、忠以勤，如之何？」子曰：「臨之以莊，則敬；孝慈，則忠；舉善而教不能，則勤。」

Ji Kangzi[38] asked: "How do you get the people to be respectful, to do their utmost for you (*zhong* 忠), and to be eager?" The Master replied: "Oversee them with dignity and the people will be respectful; be filial to your elders (*xiao* 孝) and kind to your juniors, and the people will do their utmost for you; raise up those who are adept (*shan* 善) and instruct those who are not and the people will be eager."[39]

2.21 或謂孔子曰：「子奚不爲政？」子曰：「《書》云：『孝乎惟孝，友于兄弟，施於有政。』是亦爲政，奚其爲爲政？」

Someone asked Confucius, "Why are you not employed in governing?" The Master replied, "The *Book of Documents* says:

> It is all in filial conduct (*xiao* 孝)! Just being filial to your parents and befriending your brothers is carrying out the work of government.



In doing this I am employed in governing. Why must I be 'employed in governing'?"

2.22 子曰：「人而無信，不知其可也。大車無輗，小車無軏，其何以行之哉？」

The Master said, "I am not sure that anyone who does not make good on their word (*xin* 信) is viable as a person. If a large carriage does not have the pin for its yoke, or a small carriage does not have the pin for its crossbar, how can you drive them anywhere?"[40]

2.23 子張問：「十世可知也？」子曰：「殷因於夏禮，所損益，可知也；周因於殷禮，所損益，可知也。其或繼周者，雖百世可知也。」

Zizhang asked, "Can we know what ten generations hence will be like?"

The Master replied, "The Yin dynasty adapted the observances of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) of the Xia dynasty, and how they altered them can be known. The Zhou adapted the observances of ritual propriety of the Yin, and how they altered them can be known. If there is a dynasty that succeeds the Zhou, even if it happens a hundred generations from now, the continuities and changes can be known."[41]

2.24 子曰：「非其鬼而祭之，諂也。見義不爲，無勇也。」

The Master said, "Sacrificing to ancestral spirits other than one's own is being unctuous. Failing to act on what is seen as appropriate (*yi* 義) is a want of courage."