



Making the Past Serve the Present? Confucianism for Contemporary China



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Image: Victor Ngai for Evan Osnos, "[Confucius Comes Home](#)," *The New Yorker* (13 January 2014)



Launching Today
A 100-Page Special Report

Pakistan
OBSERVER
Eye and Ear of Pakistan

Statesman of the Year **2015**

Xi Jinping

China

• General Secretary
Communist Party

• President
People's Republic of China

• Chairman
Central Military Commission
and much more

World's Most Powerful Leader

The image shows the front cover of a magazine titled "Pakistan OBSERVER". The main title is "Launching Today" followed by "A 100-Page Special Report". Below that is "Statesman of the Year 2015". The central figure is a large portrait of Chinese President Xi Jinping in a dark suit and red tie, standing in front of a red background with yellow stars. To his right, the word "China" is written in yellow. On the left side of the cover, there is a list of three bullet points detailing his roles: "General Secretary Communist Party", "President People's Republic of China", and "Chairman Central Military Commission and much more". At the bottom, the text "World's Most Powerful Leader" is displayed in large, bold, yellow letters.

XI Jinping (习近平) [SHEE JIN PING]

7th President of People's Republic of China ≈ 1.4B people

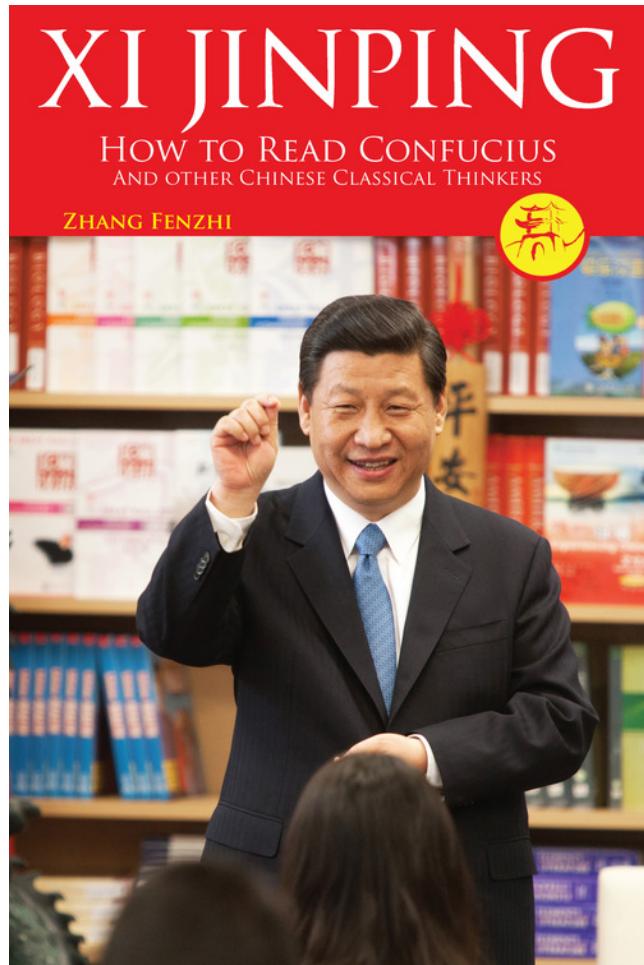
General Secretary, Chinese Communist Party ≈ 87M people

Chairman, Central Military Commission, People's Liberation Army ≈ 2.3M

Image: Xi visiting, Ireland, February 2012. For J.Page, B.Davis, and T.Orlik, "[China's New Boss](#)," *Wall Street Journal* (12 Nov 2012)

Pakistan Observer published a 100-page special report on Feb 18 [2016] after a one and a half month open-ended survey in the South Asian country. About 84.3 percent of the respondents declared Xi as the "Role Model Statesman of the Year 2015."

Commemorating Confucius' 2565th Birthday



The ideology and culture of today's China is a continuation and sublimation of traditional Chinese ideology and culture. To understand present-day China, to know the present-day Chinese, one must delve into the cultural bloodlines of China and accurately appreciate the cultural soil that nourishes the Chinese people.

Confucianism [is key to] understanding the national characteristics of the Chinese as well as the historical roots of the spiritual world of the present-day Chinese.

Quoted in N.Gardels, "[Xi Launches Cultural Counter-Revolution to Restore Confucianism as China's Ideology](#)," *TheWorldPost* (29 September 2014)
Book available at <http://www.cntimesbooks.com/shop/xi-jinping-how-to-read-confucius-and-other-chinese-classical-thinkers>

Comment 1 of 7 Oh, the irony...

Mao Zedong and CCP in 1940s
denounce Confucian ideas as harmful
ancient relics *impeding progress*



The ideology and culture of **today's China is a continuation and sublimation of traditional Chinese ideology and culture.**

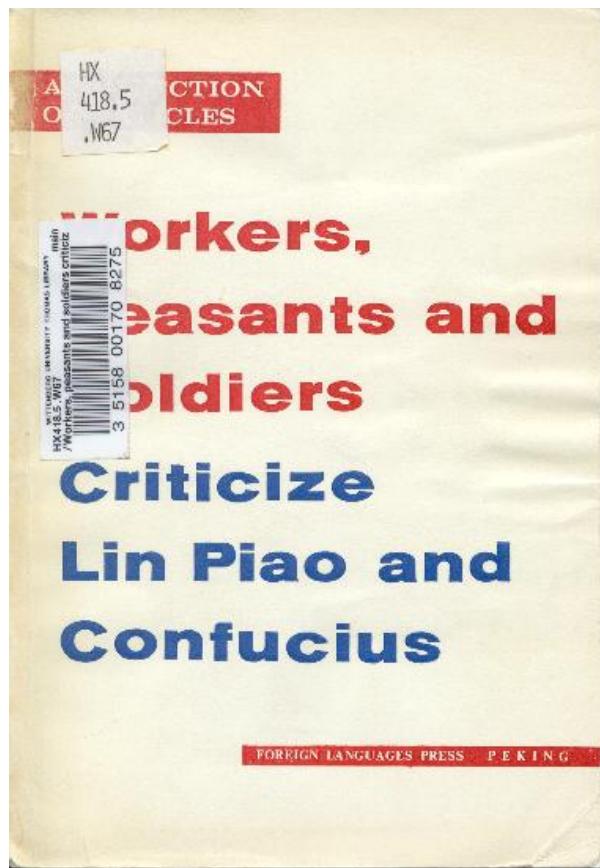
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Comment 2 of 7

...and heresy.

Mao Zedong and CCP in 1970s
*denounce Confucian ideas as tools of
oppressors*



Publisher's Note

Confucius was a reactionary who doggedly defended slavery and whose doctrines have been used by all reactionaries, whether ancient or contemporary, Chinese or foreign, throughout the more than 2,000 years since his time. The bourgeois careerist, renegade and traitor Lin Piao was a thorough devotee of Confucius and, like all the reactionaries in Chinese history when on the road to their doom, he revered Confucius, opposed the Legalist School and attacked Chih Shin Huang, the first emperor of the Chin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.). He used the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius as a reactionary ideological weapon in his plot to usurp Party leadership, seize state power and restore capitalism in China.

Comment 3 of 7

So suspicious...

Xi's approach better resembles Legalism (*Fa [Law] Jia* 法家)



- top-down autocratic rule
- strong military and police
- centralized power
- many laws and punishments to regulate behavior

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"[T]he PRC remains an authoritative state in which the permanent leadership role of the Chinese Communist Party is etched in the Constitution, while the legislative and judicial branches lack the power to check the CCP and the state." —Congressional Research Service, "Human Rights in China," 31 October 2008.

Comment 4 of 7
...and strange.

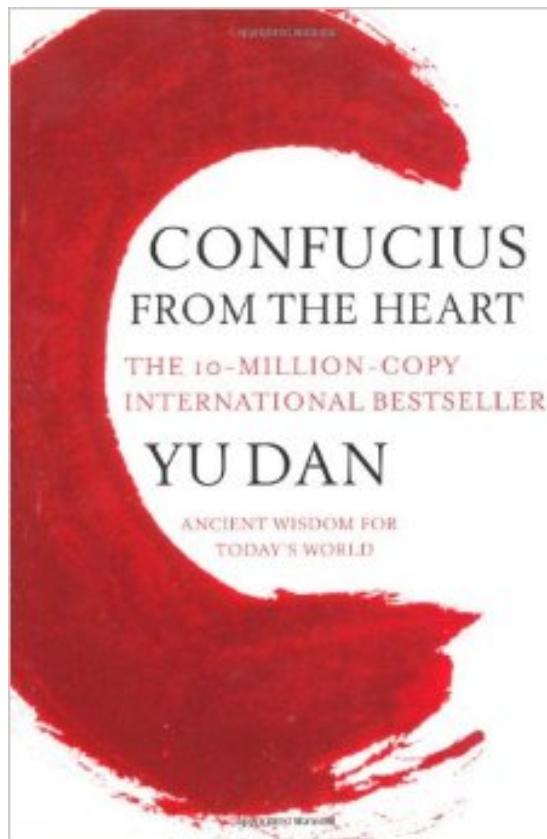


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Comment 5 of 7
But savvy...



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Comment 6 of 7 **...and innovative...**



“Chinese traditional culture, represented by Confucianism, can provide stable values to enhance social cohesion and sense of identity.”

Wang Xuetian, Executive Vice President for Advanced Institute of Confucian Studies at Shandong University

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Confucianism [is key to] understanding the national characteristics of the Chinese as well as the historical roots of the spiritual world of the present-day Chinese.

Comment 7 of 7 **...and opportune.**

Human rights are the dominant framework for political morality.



But there are cracks...

- South Africa and “corrective rape”
 - USA and torture, structural racism
- ...and so there is room for an alternative

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Commemorating Confucius' 2565th Birthday

Xi Jinping invokes a saying of Mao Zedong's for his governing methodology.



Mao Zedong, "[Make the past serve the present and the foreign serve China.](#)"

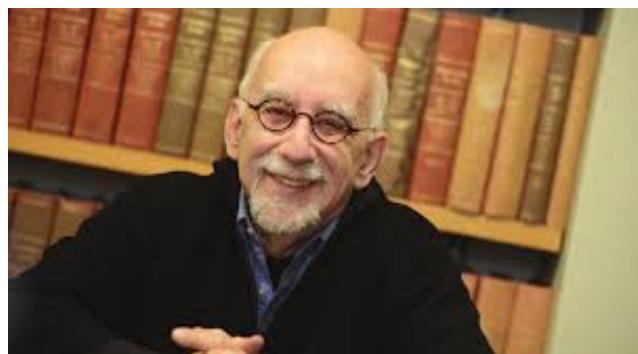


We should adhere to the principle of **making the past to serve the present** and combine excellent traditional culture with modern culture, so that we can strive to have innovative development of traditional culture.

Image: C.Huang, "[Jury still out on whether China's leader Xi Jinping is a reformer,](#)" [South China Morning Post](#), 2013.

Commemorating Confucius' 2565th Birthday

"With the exceptions of China's large-scale experiment in autocratic capitalism and the surprising surge of theocracy in parts of the Middle East and North Africa, liberal democracy based on the rule of law, government by consent, individual rights, and political representation presently has no effective normative or institutional challengers in most of the world, and no effective contenders in countries with long-standing democratic regimes."



Ira Katznelson, "[Anxieties of Democracy](#)," *Boston Review* (8 Sept 2015)



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Image: C.Huang, "
[Jury still out on whether China's leader Xi Jinping is a reformer](#),"
CHINA CHRONICLE INTERNATIONAL © 2015



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GOALS

- (1) who was Confucius, and what did he say about government?
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Kong-fu-zि (551-479 BCE) and *Analects* (*Lunyu*)

- 1CE = Supreme Teacher
- 581CE = Grand Master
- 739 CE = Prince of Culture

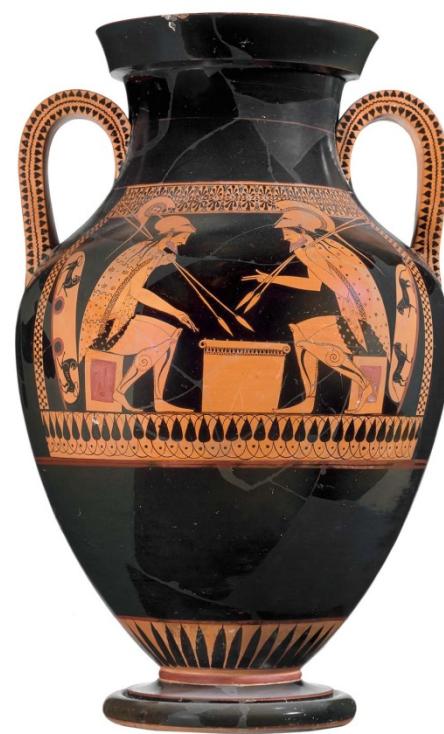
Cultural Background

Personal identity and value derives from relational role (father, son, friend) rather than individual abilities/achievements.

Eastern Chou *hu* [wine vase]
(late 6th c. BCE)



Archaic Greek amphora [wine storage]
(525-520 BCE) with Achilles and Ajax



From D.N.Keightley, "Early Civilization in China: Reflections on How it Became Chinese," in P.S.Ropp, *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* (1990), p18.

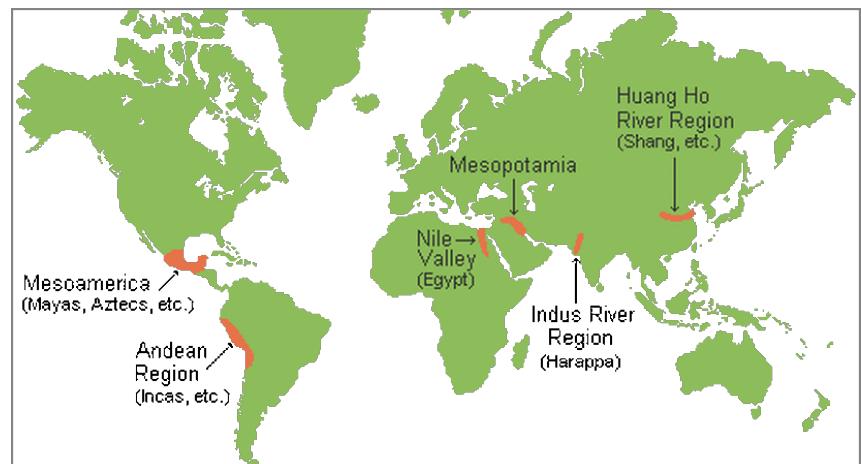
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Personal identity and value derives from relational role (father, son, friend) rather than individual abilities/achievements.

Explanation 1

Chinese river valleys support higher population density.

more people → more strangers
more strangers → roles > individuality



Cultural Background

Personal identity and value derives from relational role (father, son, friend) rather than individual abilities/achievements.

Explanation 2

Chinese agriculture is more labor-intensive.

more labor → more coordination
more coordination → roles > individuality

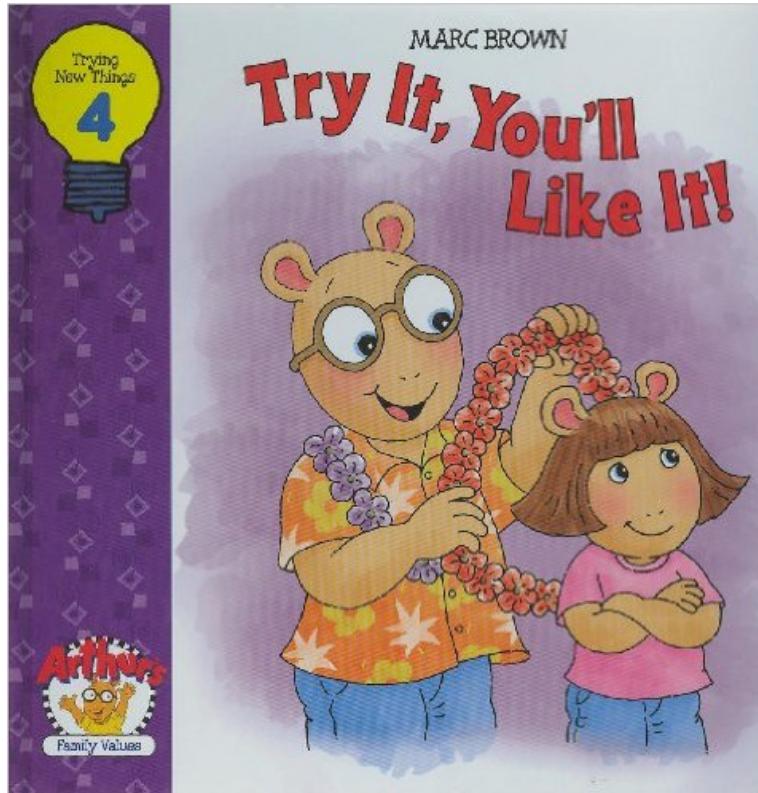


Richard Nesbitt's Experiment

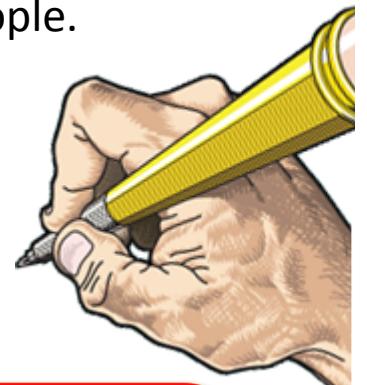
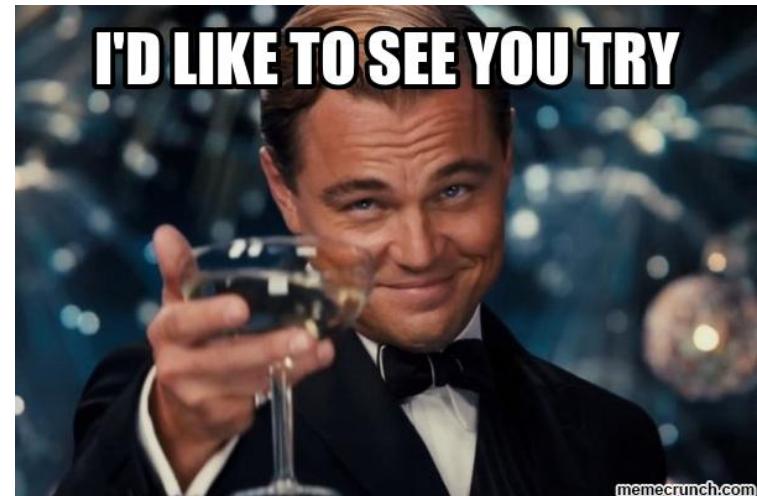
Draw your social network.

Give each person a circle. Use lines to mark social relationships among people.

Try It Risk Free Today!



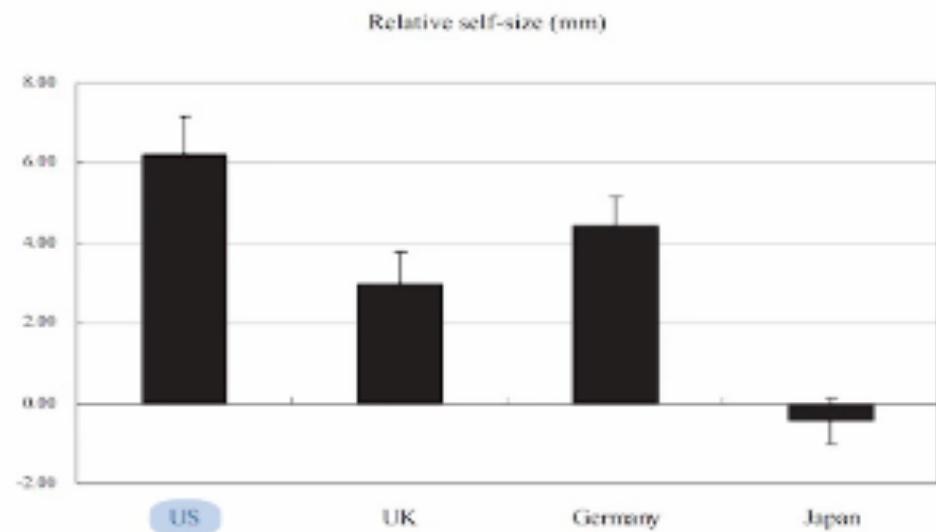
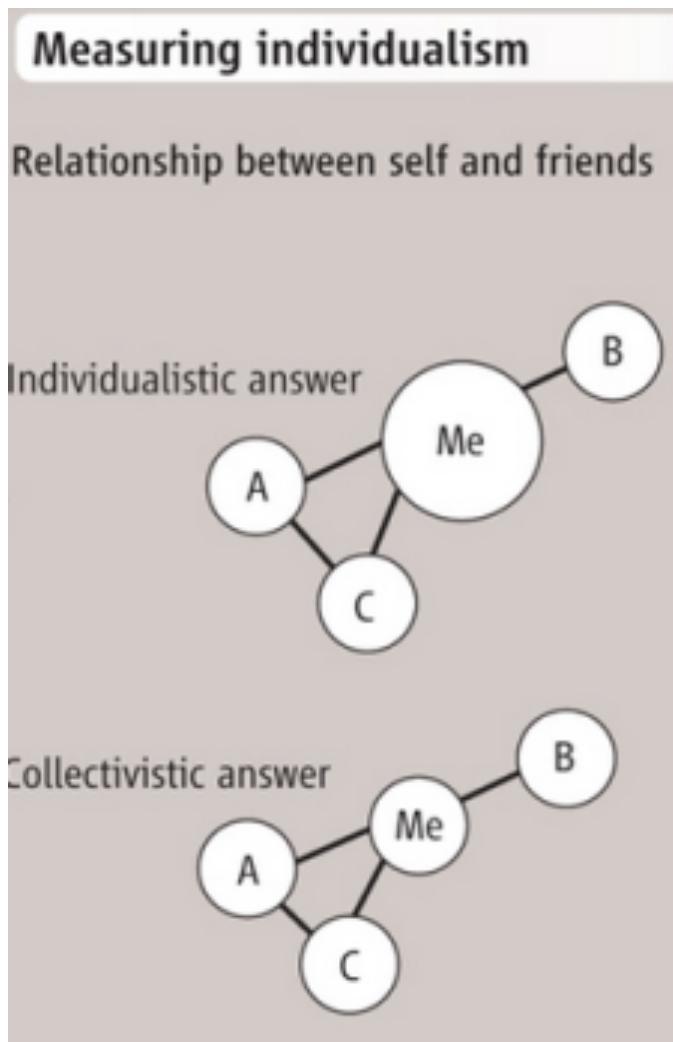
TRY IT FOR FREE
GET STARTED IN SECONDS



Richard Nesbitt's Experiment

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Confucius on Wen (Culture)



Importance

Culture makes us into mature human beings (*ren*).

Reason

Culture teaches us how to perform our social roles.

Analogy

human : culture ::
clay : sculptor

Conservatism

Only Zhou culture is correct.

Contrast with “American” View

- on cultural diversity
- on cultural allegiances
- on personal identity

3.14 The Master said, "The Zhou gazes down upon the two dynasties that preceded it [namely, the Xia and Shang dynasties]. How brilliant in culture it is! **I follow the Zhou.**"

6.17 The Master said, "Who is able to leave a room without going out through the door? How is it, then, that no one follows this Way?"



Confucius on *Xiao* (Filiality)



Example

how to be a good child

Outward Behavior

Obey parents

Inward Feelings

Revere and respect parents

Role for Culture

- how to be reverent and respectful
- meaning of obedience
- exceptions

- removes personal discretion

2.5 Meng Yizi asked about filiality. The Master said, "Do not be defiant." As Fan Chi steered the chariot, the Master told him, "[Meng Yizi] asked me about filiality. I answered him '**do not be defiant.**'" Fan Chi asked, "what does this mean?" The Master said, "**when they [parents] are alive, serve them using li, when they are dead bury them using li, and offer sacrifices to them using li.**"

2.8 Zixia asked about filial piety. The Master said, "**It is the demeanor that is difficult.** If there is work to be done, young people should shoulder the burden, and when wine and food are served, elders are given precedence, but surely filial piety consists of more than this."

4.18 The Master said, "In serving your parents **you may gently remonstrate with them.** However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment."

Confucius on *Li* (Cultural Convention)



Mechanism

"rituals" for how to *enact* culture

Importance

Conventions provide know-how—
rather than only know-that.

Impact

Easy, effortless, predictable action.

Requirements

Internalize as second-nature.

Correct conventions (= Zhou).

Preserve conventions.

8.2 The Master said, "If you are respectful but lack *li* you will become exasperating; if you are careful but lack *li* you will become timid; if you are courageous but lack *li* you will become unruly; and if you are upright but lack *li* you will become inflexible."

3.12 "Sacrifice as if [they were] present" means that, when sacrificing to the spirits, you should **comport yourself** as if the spirits were present."

Confucius on *Li* (Cultural Convention)



Mechanism

“rituals” for how to *enact* culture

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7.1 The Master said, "**I transmit rather than innovate.** I trust in and love the ancient ways..."

7.20 The Master said, "I am not the kind of person who is born with knowledge. Rather, I am the kind of person who loves antiquity, and who diligently **looks there for knowledge.**"

3.17 Zigong wanted to do away with the practice of sacrificing a lamb to announce the beginning of the month. The Master said, "Zigong! You regret the loss of the lamb, whereas **I regret the loss of the li.**"



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general advice

rectify names (*zheng ming*)

In English

good governing = having everyone fulfill obligations and enact conventions associated with their social roles

Role Hierarchy

Ruler > Minister

Minister > Subject

Father > Son

Husband > Wife

Role Pattern

superior: care and concern

subordinate: loyalty and respect

Example

xiao (father - son)

12.11 Duke Jing of Qi asked Kongzi about governing. Kongzi responded, "**Let the ruler rule, the ministers minister, the fathers father, and the sons son.**"*

The Duke replied, "Well put! If the ruler does not rule, the ministers do not minister, the fathers do not father, and the sons do not son, even if there is sufficient grain, will I ever get to eat it?"

***jun jun, chen chen, fu fu, zi zi** (君君臣臣父父子子)

rectifying names how-to guide

Advice

Promote rectifying names.

Technique

- 1- earn trust of subjects
- 2- ensure basic quality of life
- 3- command a strong military
- 4- internalize proper convention

12.7 Zigong asked about governing. The Master said, "**Make sure there is sufficient food, sufficient troops, and that you have the trust of the people—that is all there is to it.**"

Zigong said, "If sacrificing one of these three things became unavoidable, which of them would you sacrifice first?" The Master replied, "I would sacrifice the troops."

Zigong said, "If sacrificing one of the two remaining things became unavoidable, which of them would you sacrifice first?" The Master replied, "I would sacrifice the food. From ancient times there has always been death among us, but a state cannot stand once it has lost the trust of the people."

rectifying names how-to guide

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11.26 [Zilu said,] "If I were given charge of a state that could field a thousand chariots—even one hemmed in between powerful states, suffering from armed invasions, and afflicted by famine—before three years were up I would infuse it with courage and a sense of what is right." The Master smiled at him....

[Zengzi asked,] "Why did the Master smile at Zilu?" "One governs a state by means of *li*. **His words failed to express the sense of deference proper to *li*,** and this is why I smiled at him."

thank you!



thank you!

Department of Philosophy

MOR 332

uah.edu/ahs/departments/philosophy



102 Introduction to Ethics 3 hrs.

Major ethical positions in both classical and modern thought.

314 Asian Philosophy 3 hrs.

Survey of philosophical traditions from Asia,

330 Classical Political Philosophy 3 hrs.

(Formerly PHL 316) Careful analysis of the roots of political inquiry

332 Modern Political Philosophy 3 hrs.

(Formerly PHL 317) Critical examination of the philosophical foundations for modern politics





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Xi Jinping as Confucian? *evidence in favor*

Advice

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massive anti-corruption campaign

- protect citizens from corrupt officials
- condemn government excess
- address growing gap between rich and poor



Ling Jihua, former aide to retired president Hu Jintao, to face trial on corruption charges [21.07.2015](#)

Ling Jihua has been expelled from China's Communist Party and will face trial on corruption charges. China's Politburo has accused Ling of bribery and trading "power for sex."



Sieren's China: The tiger lives on [12.06.2015](#)

China's former security chief Zhou Yongkang has been sentenced to life in prison - not to death, as many observers had anticipated. There's a reason for that, writes DW columnist Frank Sieren.



China's ex-security chief Zhou charged with corruption [03.04.2015](#)

Zhou Yongkang, China's former security boss, has been charged with corruption and leaking state secrets. He is the highest-level official to be prosecuted in decades.



China's Xi steps up anti-corruption drive [27.01.2015](#)

The anti-corruption campaign in China shows no signs of fatigue. Reports about officials ensnared in graft investigations are being released on a daily basis. But the problem won't vanish without reforms, experts say.

cynical view

- consolidate power
- suppress dissent
- autocratic persecution

Xi Jinping as Confucian? *evidence in favor*

bolster economic growth

- fiscal and structural reforms
- international initiatives (New Silk Road)

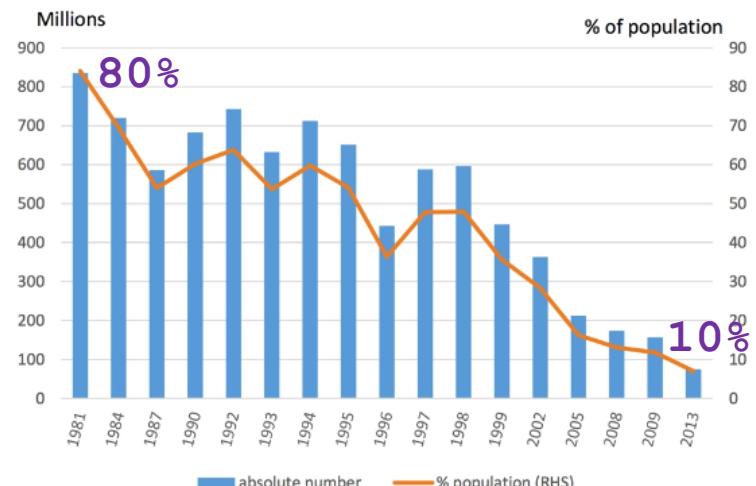
Advice

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Technique

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Percentage of Chinese living in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than USD 1.25 per capita in PPP terms²



Source: OECD 2015, p. 17

The living standards of the Chinese people are constantly improving, but we should always keep in mind those who are still living in hardships. We will **work with passion to improve their well-being, with efforts focusing on poverty alleviation and guaranteeing basic living conditions**. We will provide assistance to all those in need of help, including poverty-stricken farmers and urban residents with difficulties, so that their basic living conditions are guaranteed and their hearts are filled with warmth.

Xi Jinping as Confucian? *evidence in favor*

Advice

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modernize military equipment



Roderick MacFarquhar on the WW2 Parade (for *The Guardian* 3 Sept 2015)

"[T]his is a way Xi Jinping is attempting to consolidate his hold [on power] so that it will be difficult for people to get rid of him because he is seen as the great nationalist leader.... Short of having a presidential election vote it is a way of consolidating his position with the people."

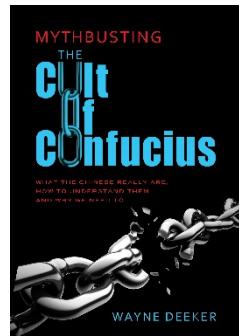
Xi Jinping as Confucian? *evidence in favor*

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cynical view
mask for
autocracy

honor Confucius

- visit to Qufu (birthplace) in 2013
 - 1st CCP leader in 20 years
- attend birthday celebration in 2015
 - 1st CCP leader ever
- promote Confucian ideas

Confucius says, Xi does

The Economist

The Communist Party turns to ancient philosophy for support

Jul 25th 2015 | QUFU | From the print edition

Timekeeper

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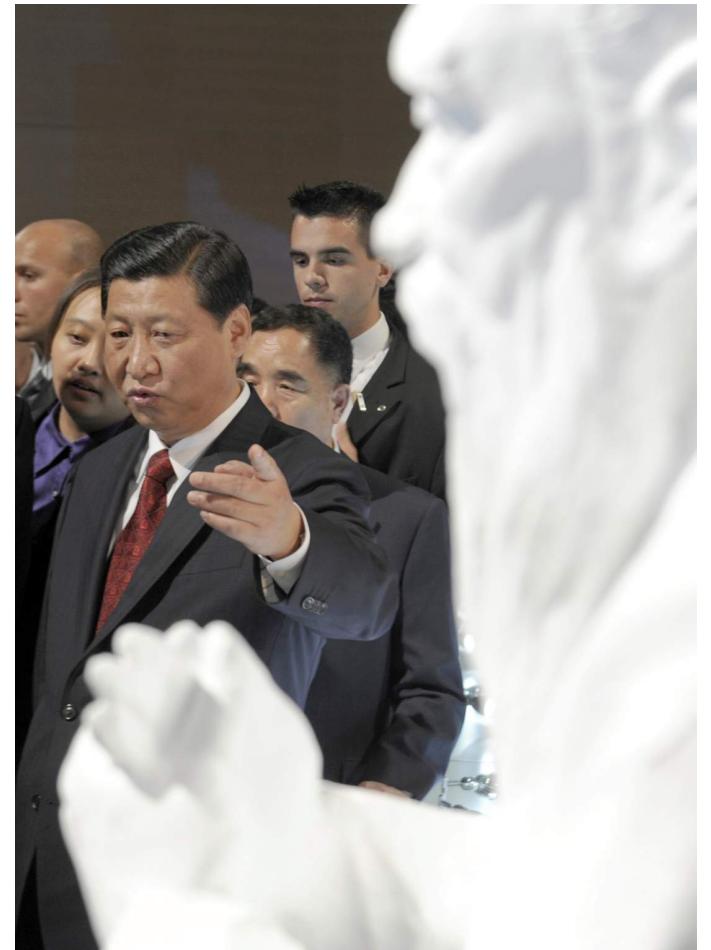
Reuters

Concluding Summation

Confucian Advice

Promote rectifying names.

Technique	Evidence of Conformity	Cynical View
Earn trust of subjects	anti-corruption campaign	Consolidate power Suppress dissent
Ensure basic quality of life	fiscal reforms international initiatives	n/a
Command strong military	modernize military equipment	n/a
Internalize proper conventions	visit Qufu attend birthday celebration promote ideas	Mask for autocracy



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