

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM 103)

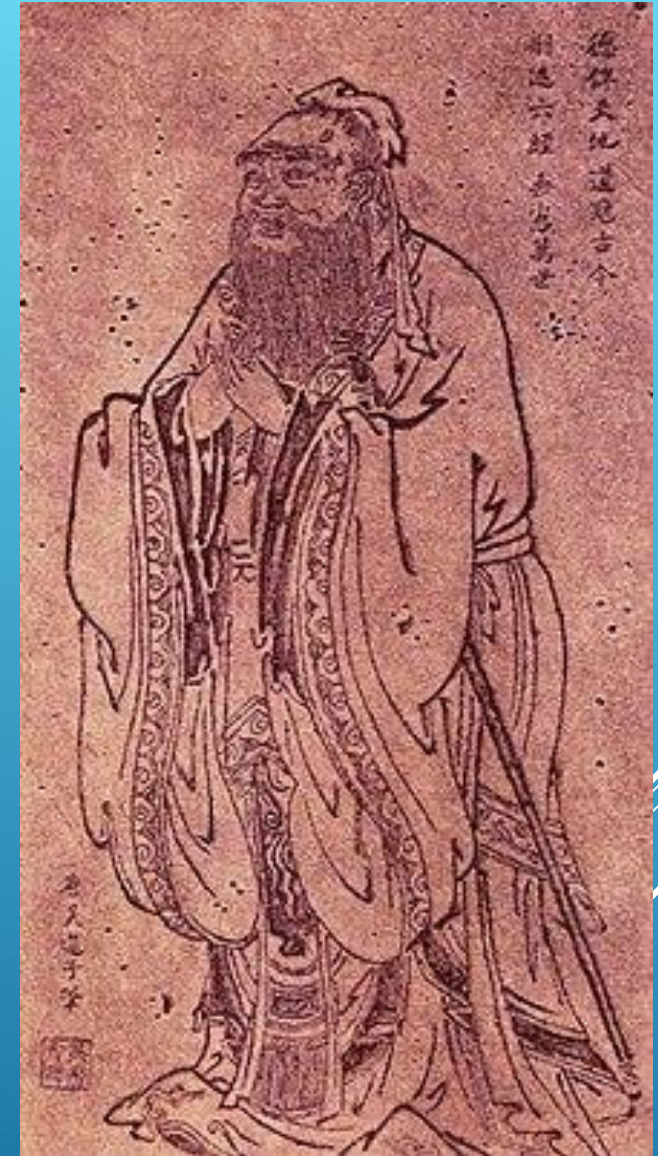
THE TEACHINGS OF CONFUCIUS

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# Confucius (551-479 BCE)

- ❖ *Kongzi (孔子) or Master Kong*
- ❖ Born in 551 BCE in the State of Lu, in present-day Shandong province.
- ❖ Spring & Autumn period
- ❖ *Ru-jia* doctrine (School of Literati)
- ❖ *The Analects of Confucius*



*The Teaching Confucius*  
by Wu Daozi (685-758)





Statues of Chinese Philosophers in the Confucian Shrine  
In Nagasaki, Japan







- How ought one to live?
- What goes into a worthwhile life?
- What are our duties to those near and distant?
- How to conduct oneself in positions of power and influence?
- How to govern ethically?



# Dimensions of Confucianism

## ❖ Confucianism and Virtue Ethics

- *De* – Virtue- kind
- *Dao* – Way-help

## ❖ Relational Ethics

- Individual and Community

## ❖ Structure of Ethical Theory

- *Ren* – Character
- *Li* – Action- ritual
- *Yi* – Decision- knowledge of right and wrong



## ❖ Practical responses

- Chinese ethics focuses on the practical problem; e.g., related to cases of piety, loyalty, relationships within the family, and in the royal court

## ❖ Pre-theoretical experience

- Chinese ethics often relies on the teachings and examples of past heroes and sage kings as guides to ethical behavior, passed down through stories, dialogues, and sayings

## ❖ Theoretical experience

- There are also multiple approaches to theorizing/reflection and their relation to pre-theoretical experiences



# Some central concepts

- ❖ *Junzi* – The Exemplary Person
- ❖ *Dao* – The Way of life
- ❖ *De* – Virtue- good actions/character
- ❖ *Ren* – Humaneness-social/communal-  
helping others to be good. Mutual  
understanding
- ❖ *Li* – good actions- Ritual  
(tradition/habit) Propriety-individual





# The Importance of *Li* (Rituals)

- ❖ The centrality of *Li* (rites, ritual performance) in ethical cultivation of character is emphasized
- ❖ The formalized aspect of *Li* is rituals and rites, but there has to be more to it than this
- ❖ The term *Li* came to cover a wide range of customs and practices of courteous, respectful behavior of many kinds
- ❖ The ancient sage kings governed through ritual propriety and customs (*Li*) and not by law and force.





# The relation between *Li* and *Ren*

- ❖ *Li* (rituals) takes on a more central role in achieving *Ren*
- ❖ Relating *Li* to *Ren*:
  - *Ren* is not reduced to *Li*
  - *Li* more than simply an instrument for acquiring/becoming *Ren*



# *Ren* and *Li* as Relational Values

- ❖ *Ren* in the broad sense means ‘Humaneness’
- ❖ *Ren* in a narrower sense denotes “caring for others”
- ❖ *Li* in a formal sense of community and family rituals and ceremonies highlight the key characteristic of Confucian ethics as relational ethics.
- ❖ *Li* in a wider sense refers to broader customs and practices of courteous, respectful behavior



# Caring with Distinction- excellence- Junzi

*The Governor of She in conversation with Confucius said, “In our village there is someone called ‘True Person.’ When his father took a sheep on the sly, he reported him to the authorities.”*

*Confucius replied, “Those who are true in my village conduct themselves differently. A father covers for his son, and a son covers for his father. And being true lies in this.”*

- ❖ For Confucius, human beings are fundamentally social in nature (family, community, State)
- ❖ One’s identity is at all times tied to the group and one’s relationships within the social order
- ❖ In this social structure one is expected to exercise mutual consideration in all human relationships.



# Confucian Ethics:

## Individual- Li, Social- Ren, and Political- Junzi

- ❖ An ideal political state is one that is governed by a ruler who has reached the ultimate goal of moral cultivation
- ❖ In Confucius' opinion, the proper role of government is not just to keep its people materialistically gratified and physically secure, but also morally to cultivate them.
- ❖ Before that, the rulers themselves must first be morally correct.







THANK YOU

