

Introduction

Historical Background

Confucius (551–479 BCE) was born during the late period of the Zhou dynasty known as the Spring and Autumn 春秋 (770–476 BCE), when China had already had a developed civilization for over two thousand years. Knowledge about China's remote antiquity was passed down in legends and songs, which contained rich moral and cultural messages. Confucius and many others quoted stories about ancient sage-kings, Yao 尧, Shun 舜, and Yu 禹, as if there were no question about their reliability. The sage-kings were believed to be morally exemplary and to have produced a harmonious society. Both Yao and Shun selected their successors according to moral integrity and wisdom. Succession of power by kinship (direct descendants) began after Yu passed away and his son Qi 启 took the throne, which marked the beginning of the Xia 夏 dynasty (ca. twenty-first to seventeenth century BCE). While the existence of Xia is still questionable, the history of the succeeding Shang 商 dynasty (ca. seventeenth to eleventh century BCE, also known as Yin) has been confirmed by abundant archeological evidence. Written records show that during the Shang, China had a sophisticated written language, ritual customs, along with techniques of agriculture and pottery, bronze, and silk production.

The Shang dynasty lasted for six hundred years until it was overthrown by the revolt of the Zhou 周 people in the Wei River valley in today's Shaanxi Province. In contrast to the last king of the Shang, who was

notoriously cruel, the founders of the Zhou dynasty (founded in 1122 BCE), King Wen 文王 and his son known as the Duke of Zhou 周公, laid the foundation of a humanistic government. In emulation of the ancient sage-kings, they refined the traditional ritual system and justified their overturning of the Shang as a revolution to liberate the people from their wicked oppressors. This revolution, so they claimed, was carried out under the *tianming* 天命, mandate of heaven, and was therefore not only legitimate but also sacred. The victory of the Zhou reinforced the claim that the new rulers had a special tie with heaven, and this religious dimension played an important role in allowing subsequent rulers to control their vassals across the vast territory of central China for centuries. It added a sacred aura to their conferring limited sovereignty over portions of the land to members of the royal lineage, which made the tie between the central power and the vassals both religious and familial.

Moreover, the Zhou maintained traditional ritual services to natural and ancestral spirits and developed new forms of rituals to honor heaven and to regulate human life. The music and dances performed in ceremonies started to gain a special significance for maintaining social order, so much so that gradually the spirits themselves often became secondary in importance. The rituals themselves became exemplifications of the order of heaven. Together with the belief that heaven's mandate is reflected in proper political and moral conduct rather than in lavish offerings to deities, the emphasis on rituals began to be associated more with moral undertakings of the people than with extra-human deities. From this tradition, Confucius developed his own account of human well-being and ritual propriety, which heavily influenced Chinese culture for over two millennia.

If this profound change was still hardly perceptible during the early Zhou, by the Spring and Autumn period it became increasingly obvious.¹ During the Spring and Autumn, the sociopolitical order of the Zhou was crumbling. Since the possession of the mandate of heaven is supposed to be displayed through manifestation of virtues, it would not automatically belong to a single dynasty forever. The edicts of the kings during this period were less and less effective as they were decreasingly concerned for the good of their people. The feudal lords became increasingly disobedient to their kings and hostile to each other, swallowing up territories of weaker neighbors and thus making boundaries of states shift constantly. The kings eventually became little more than puppets manipulated by powerful vassals.

Similarly, some clans of principal ministers inside the vassal states grew stronger and in turn threatened the power of the state rulers. Confucius' home state of Lu, for instance, was largely controlled by "The Three

Houses,” Meng 孟, Shu 叔, and Ji 季—the descendants of three sons of Duke Huan of Lu 鲁桓公 (r. 711–697 BCE). They were involved in murdering two heirs of the ducal throne and setting up one of their own favor in 609 BCE, and in 562 BCE, they divided the state, leaving the Duke of Lu only a fraction of the revenues.

At a time when might equaled right, the lives of the people were often extremely unstable and miserable. The “law” was little more than the whim of the mighty. Subordinates risked their lives in remonstrating their superiors, friends and relatives became enemies, assassination was a flourishing profession, and rulers of states were frequently detained by other states. In 593 BCE, the capital of the state of Song was under siege for so long that the residents had no choice but to “exchange their children to eat,” since they could not bear to eat their own (see *Zuo Zhuan*, Duke Xuan, Year 15).

Even though there were sporadic stories of fidelity, loyalty, courage, and respect for dignity, questions arose as to how these virtues could be justified and prevail. People began to question whether in such a society these were virtues or mere stupidity. Questions about the right way of life and the search for solutions to profound social problems occupied the most reflective minds of the time.

It was during these difficult times that China started to enter its most glorious era in philosophy. In the following few hundred years, the rich cultural soil mixed with chaotic and harsh social reality stimulated many great thinkers, giving birth to a golden age of Chinese thought known as the period of the “hundred schools of thought.” Confucianism, Daoism, Moism, Legalism, and many other schools of thought emerged and competed with each other. This era remarkably coincides with the golden age of ancient Greek philosophy, the rise of Buddhism and the development of the Upanishads in India, and the work of the prophets in the Middle East. It is comparable to all of them, both in terms of their importance to their respective civilizations and in terms of their philosophical and spiritual profundity.

Among the “hundred schools” that appeared during the time, Confucianism and Daoism became the most influential. While Daoism remained an undercurrent of Chinese culture, Confucianism turned out to be mainstream for roughly two thousand years. It dominated the scene of Chinese politics, religious orientation, education, art, and life in general from the early Han dynasty until the early twentieth century. To a large degree the name of Confucius became synonymous with traditional Chinese culture, although his role in the culture should never be understood in isolation from the diverse strands of thought that he interacted with.

Life of Confucius

“Confucius” is a Latinized term for “Kong fuzi 孔夫子,” which was made popular by the early European Jesuit missionaries in China to refer to the ancient Chinese sage. In his homeland, he is more commonly known as Kong Zi 孔子, although both terms mean “Master Kong.”² Kong is his family name. His given name is Qiu 丘, and in addition, he has a style name, Zhongni 仲尼.³

In comparison to other early Chinese philosophers such as the legendary Lao Zi, we have much more information about Confucius’ life. Yet much of this information has to be taken with a grain of salt. The first biography of Confucius was written by the Han dynasty historian SIMA Qian 司马迁 (145–86? BCE). Naturally, it would not be easy to collect biographic information about someone who lived more than three hundred years ago. There are sporadic anecdotes about Confucius scattered in other texts such as the *Zuo Zhuan* 左传, a narrative history book dated around the fourth century BCE, and the *Mencius*, a book attributed to Mencius (372–289 BCE), but they are not to be trusted entirely either. It is worth remembering that the ancient Chinese had little curiosity about the reliability of ancient legends; in fact, they often freely made up new legends if it would serve a good purpose. With these warnings in mind, let us construct the Confucius of legend and reality (conceding the impossibility of separating legend from reality).

Confucius’ birthplace, Qufu (in today’s Shandong Province), belonged to the state of Lu, which was known for its preservation of early Zhou rituals and music. According to the *Zuo Zhuan*, Confucius was a descendant of a noble family from the state of Song, which, fearing political persecution, fled to Lu. It is said that his family line could be traced all the way back to the royal family of the Shang dynasty. Scholars have disputed whether the story is grounded on historical facts or on the assumption that a great man like Confucius must have had a noble ancestry. According to SIMA Qian, Confucius’ father was a low-ranking military officer named Shuliang-He 叔梁纥 (Shuliang is his style name, and He is his given name) or KONG He 孔纥. Since he had nine daughters but no son with his first wife, he obtained a concubine, who subsequently bore him a crippled son, Mengpi 孟皮. Wishing to have a healthy son, he married, again in his sixties, the youngest of the three daughters of the Yan family, YAN Zhengzai 颜徵在. After they went to Mount Ni 尼山 to pray for a son, Yan became pregnant, resulting in the birth of a boy with a forehead like a small hill. This is how Confucius received the given name Qiu and his style name Zhongni:

as *qiu* 丘 means hill, *zhong* 仲 entails that he was the second son, and *ni* 尼 for Mount Ni. Confucius' father died when Confucius was only three. He was brought up by his mother, who died when he was about seventeen. Presumably, again because a sage must have noble ancestry, his mother was also said to be a descendant of the Zhou royal family, all the way to the Duke of Zhou!

Confucius, however, never mentioned his “noble” ancestry. “I was poor when I was young, and that is why I acquired many humble skills” (9.6), says the Master. The *Mencius* tells us that “Confucius was once a minor keeper of stores, and he said, ‘All I have to do is to keep correct records.’ He also served as a minor official in charge of sheep and cattle, during which, he said, ‘All I had to do was to see to it that the sheep and cattle grew up to be strong and healthy’” (*Mencius*, 5B:5). Confucius' family ancestors may have been some sort of low-level aristocrats, because even though his family was poor, he was able to get some education and learn arts such as archery and music.

At the age of fifteen, Confucius set his heart on learning (2.4), and at around thirty, he had already attracted a group of young people to study with him. His disciples looked at him as a sage beyond comparison and followed him with loyalty and devotion. The record shows that when he was thirty-four, a senior official of Lu and a member of the powerful “Three Houses,” MENG Xizi 孟僖子, on his deathbed told his two sons to study with Confucius (*Zuo Zhuan*, Duke Zhao, Year 7). Confucius is alleged to be the first in the history of China to set up a school and offer education in an institutional way, but the word “first” is best taken to mean “foremost,” for according to the *Mencius*, there were schools long before Confucius' time (*Mencius*, 3A:3). First or not, the Master has been revered as China's foremost teacher.

According to a likely exaggerated account, Confucius had over three thousand students throughout his life, and seventy-two of them became conversant with the “Six Arts” that he taught—ritual, music, writing, arithmetic, archery, and charioting. He taught them how to be *junzi* 君子, “exemplary persons.” Some of his disciples played significant roles in politics. Among the twenty-two disciples mentioned in the *Analecets*, at least nine became officials of some importance; three of them served successively as stewards to the Ji House, which was in control of Lu. This was the highest position in the state that could be attained without relying on inheritance.

Like Socrates, Confucius himself never seemed to have written any books. His major teachings were passed on in written form by his students,

forming the basis of the *Analects*. Confucius considered himself a transmitter of a tradition rather than a creator of a new form of thought (7.1). He claimed that the wisdom he taught was already contained in the ancient traditional rituals, history, music, poetry, and the limited written works that were, though decimated through the turmoil of the ages, available at his time. Nonetheless, he is broadly recognized as an innovative thinker who creatively reconstructed and reinterpreted his tradition. He rationalized the humanitarian spirit of the early Zhou culture and its ritual tradition, brought them to a new level of significance, and succeeded in passing them on to his followers.

The Confucian tradition has long held that Confucius edited some of the most basic Chinese classics, including the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Music*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the *Book of Changes*. According to SIMA Qian, Confucius selected 305 songs from the 3,000 known at that time and organized them into the *Book of Songs* (*Shi Jing* 诗经). The extent to which Confucius edited this or the other books is questionable, but the *Analects* itself claims him to have worked on editing the *Songs* (see 9.15). From the way that Confucius quoted and interpreted the *Songs*, as the *Analects* informs us, we can see that he sees the book to be full of moral implications.

Similarly, though the *Spring and Autumn Annals* apparently contains nothing but brief records of individual events, it is believed that Confucius artistically embedded praises and condemnations in the book through his use of words, arrangement of sentences, and selection of details to subtly convey moral messages. The book is therefore more of an ethics primer than a book of history. The *Mencius* tells us that “Confucius completed the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and rebellious subjects and undutiful sons were struck in fear” (*Mencius*, 3B:9). Whether it was written by Confucius as a covert ethics primer, or whether it is a poorly composed historical record, the very oddity and the poor quality of it as an apparent history book served as evidence that it was not primarily a history book!

Even though Confucius was temperamentally more suited to be a scholar and teacher, he took political reform as his lifelong pursuit. With a strong sense of mission and ambition to bring the world into harmonious order, the Master spent a considerable amount of his time trying to implement his visions in the political sphere.

It was said Confucius was once appointed as the Magistrate of Zhongdu, and that he managed to bring the area to peace within one year. Subsequently, he was promoted to be Minister of Justice at Lu, during which he successfully defeated Duke Jing of Qi’s attempt to coerce Duke Ding of

Lu with an armed force in a summit meeting. Scholars have questioned the reliability of these records since the *Analects* is entirely silent regarding these events.

Analects 18.4 implies that he did hold an office, but he despised the Three Houses for their usurping power from the Duke. When the state of Qi sent as a present a group of female entertainers to Lu, the head of the Ji House accepted, and for three days no state court was held. Confucius left Lu. For Confucius, “When the Way is in the state, one receives a stipend of grain. But when the Way is lost in the state and one still receives a stipend of grain, this is shameful” (14.1).

At the age of fifty-five, Confucius decided to leave Lu to embark on travels from one state to another, seeking a place that would allow him to implement his humanitarian ideas. His disciple, Zigong, once asked him, “Here is a beautiful gem—Should it be wrapped up and stored in a cabinet? Or should one seek for a good price and sell it?” The Master said, “Sell it! Sell it! I am one waiting for the right offer!” (9.13). He visited many states, including Qi, Wei, Song, Chen, and Cai, and met with numerous rulers and their ministers. However, none of the rulers made him “the right offer.”

Traveling during that time was neither easy nor safe. More than once he and his accompanying disciples were straitened in life-threatening situations (cf. 7.23, 9.5, 11.23, 15.2). After fourteen years of persistent pursuit with no avail, Confucius returned to Lu at the age of sixty-eight. During his remaining years, his son KONG Li 孔鯉 (also known by his style name Boyu 伯鱼) and his favorite disciple YAN Hui 颜回 died, one shortly after the other. Upon YAN Hui’s death, the Master cried, “Alas! Heaven ruins me! Heaven ruins me!” (11.9) The Master himself died in 479 BCE at the age of seventy-three with no anticipation of the later fortunes and misfortunes of his teachings.

Confucius was neither the flawless sage that he was subsequently venerated as, nor was he an impractical conservative, though his critics derided him as such. He was a man of his time with rich sentiments, human desires, and a good sense of humor. He enjoyed good company, music, fine food, and, if certain analects are authentic, he had some eccentric life habits (see book 10 of the *Analects*). He was frank in saying, “If wealth can be pursued, I don’t mind doing it even if it means that I should serve as a man who holds a whip,” but then he added, “If it cannot be pursued, I will follow my own preferences” (7.12). Although he would not be resentful if he were unrecognized (1.1), he could be frustrated when he could not get a chance to implement his ideals (e.g., 17.7). He loved his disciple YAN

Hui so much that when YAN Hui died, he cried heartbreakingly (11.10), and he could get very upset when his disciples made him ashamed (11.17). He was not afraid of admitting his mistakes and correcting himself (17.4, 7.31). When he was suspected to have had an inappropriate interview with a notorious woman, he swore like a child (6.28), but most times when he was unfairly criticized, he responded in good humor (9.2, 5.22).

Confucianism before and after Confucius

Since Confucius did not invent his teachings out of the blue but rather to a significant degree synthesized the ancient wisdom and practice passed down to him, Confucianism curiously predates Confucius.⁴ In fact, the term “Confucianism” is a Western invention. In China, it is known as *rujia* 儒家, the school of *ru*, where *ru*, a term originally meaning “soft” or “gentle,” refers not to Confucius but to the tradition Confucius aligned himself with and transmitted. This is the tradition that was first associated with a social class that performed various kinds of ritual ceremonies, and then to those who taught the relevant arts including rites, music, and writing, which naturally extends to those learned scholars familiar with the classics that existed prior to but were later edited by Confucius. If in the study of Greek philosophy people have difficulty separating Socrates’ ideas from Plato’s because they were presented by Plato, we have a comparable situation here: It is sometimes hard to say whether Confucius’ teachings were inherited from the ruist practices and texts or that the ruist practices and texts known to us were recreated by Confucius. Indeed, it is difficult to decide whether we should continue to use the somewhat misleading term “Confucianism” or rather to switch to *rujia*, “Ruism.” My choice of staying with the former is simply because it has been the accepted convention for long at a global scale, and using the old term with a warning note about its limitations would probably cause less confusion than switching to a totally new one.

After the death of the Master, his teachings were both carried on and developed by the persistent effort of his followers. During the Warring States 战国 period (403–221 BCE), Confucius was already widely influential. The *Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei* 吕氏春秋, a book composed during the late Warring State period, quoted Confucius over fifty times, more than any other thinker quoted in the book. The book of *Zhuang Zi* 庄子, a Daoist work also composed during the Warring State period, used Confucius’ name frequently to convey the author’s own Daoist ideas, sometimes with sarcasm against Confucius, and other times simply as a mouthpiece for the author’s own ideas. The founder of another contending

school of thought, Mo Zi 墨子 (Master Mo, ca. 470–391 BCE) included a whole chapter “Against Confucians” in his major work, the book of *Mo Zi*.

At the same time, his teachings also started to be interpreted in different ways. The *Historical Records* states that the school of *ru* had developed into eight branches. One of them was carried on from Confucius’ disciple Zeng Zi 曾子 (Master Zeng), who is said to have taught Confucius’ grandson Zisi 子思, and through Zisi, reached its peak with Mencius (Latinized name for Meng Zi 孟子, Master Meng, 372–289 BCE), who was later called “the Second Sage” (second only to Confucius in the Confucian tradition). Under the shadow of the Si-Meng (Zisi and Mencius) influence, other branches gradually faded away and most of them left no trace.

During Mencius’ time, the teachings of Mo Zi were well known and influential. His most distinctive view is called “love without discrimination.” This view was attractive, but in opposition to the Confucian idea of graded love, which basically claims that love should start with and find its most profound expression in one’s immediate family and then expand outward. At the other extreme was, according to the *Mencius*, the egoistic philosophy of Yang Zi 杨子, who allegedly claimed to be unwilling to lose a single hair in order to benefit the whole world.⁵ Mencius vehemently defended Confucius against these rivals and, in doing so, contributed significantly to the development of Confucianism. His best-known contribution is his idealistic account of human nature, which holds that humans are all born with incipient good tendencies: the heart of compassion, of shame, of courtesy and modesty, and of right and wrong. These four tendencies are the roots of human-heartedness, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom (*Mencius*, 2A:6). A person full of moral integrity will have a strong *qi* 气 or “vital energy” that can fill the space between the earth and heaven. He also contrasted the sage-king who unifies people by moral influence with the militant lord who reigns through physical force and terror. He argued that the former is not only morally superior but also serves his own best interest. Mencius is the first in the Confucian tradition to state that people are justified to stage a revolution if the ruler is morally corrupt. Killing a bad ruler is not a crime of regicide, because by failing the people, the ruler has disqualified himself and became a “mere fellow.” His famous claim that “the people are the most important, the spirits of the land and the grain are secondary, and the sovereign is the least” (*Mencius*, 7B:14) is now often quoted as a source from which Confucianism might develop its account of democracy.

Another influential Confucian during the formative epoch of Confucianism is Xun Zi 荀子 (ca. 312–238 BCE). He emphasized publicly

observable rituals in contrast to Mencius' emphasis on the internal moral heart-mind. Contra Mencius, Xun Zi argued that humans are by nature bad, although through learning everyone can become a sage. Because humans are naturally inclined toward being bad, the ancient sage-kings created ritual propriety and offered moral teachings to regulate people's behaviors and let them reform themselves.

Ironically, Xun Zi's two most famous students, HAN Fei 韩非 and Li Si 李斯, turned into Legalists, whose ideas served as the intellectual foundation for the most totalitarian regime in Chinese history: the Qin 秦. The state of Qin was located in the far west of ancient China, where a harsh environment was fertile ground for militarism. Constant wars with neighboring states made the Qin people both more disciplined and submissive to authorities. Xun Zi's theory that humans are by nature evil fitted the need for the justification of using external force. His Legalist disciple HAN Fei argued that only an unchallenged supreme authority could bring the world back into order.

The founder of the Qin dynasty (later known as Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, "the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty") embraced Legalist ideas. He consolidated his power over the people by setting up strict laws, breaking up unities of powerful clans, offering rewards to informers, and recruiting talent everywhere. The state of Qin quickly became a military giant and conquered all the other states through bloody wars. By 221 BCE, the Qin succeeded in bringing all seven rival states under its control and "unified China." The Qin emperor applied Legalist ideas to everything: laws and regulations were made uniform, and measures of weights, sizes, written characters, and even the space between cartwheels were all standardized. Following the advice of his Legalist minister, Li Si, he also tried to unify his people's minds by force so that no one would threaten his claim to power. He ordered Confucian scholars to be buried alive and all books in the hands of the people burned, except those on medicine, divination, and agriculture.

Largely due to the overuse of force, the Qin lasted for only fourteen years and was brought down quickly by uprisings. Rulers of the subsequent Han dynasty learned many lessons from the short-lived Qin. During the reign of Han emperor Wu 汉武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), the imperial court established *boshi* 博士 (Scholar of Broad Learning) positions for each of the Five Confucian Classics⁶ and provided funding for fifty disciples to study with each of the scholars. Later, the court established an Imperial Academy, *Taixue* 太学, from which government officials would be selected.

One of the *boshi*, DONG Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), played a key role in turning Confucianism into China's official state ideology. He advised Emperor Wu to "Denounce all other schools and uphold Confucianism only." Through combining Confucianism with the "yin-yang and five-agents theory," he created a cosmology in which individual human beings and the cosmos are seen as similar in structure and capable of mutually affecting each other. Natural forces such as *yin* and *yang* were attributed moral significance, on the basis of which norms of human relationships were justified, and natural calamities would be interpreted as warnings sent by heaven to show its displeasure with the ruler.

The early Han was both a great triumph and the beginning of a series of misfortunes for Confucianism. Along with the official endorsement of Confucianism, being a Confucian became a way to gain position and wealth. Differing views were denounced as heresies, and Confucius was deified, though not to the degree of making him literally a god. His teachings increasingly became doctrines to be accepted without question and followed rigidly.

Alongside Confucianism, which as we've noted is not a single, unified view, many strands of thought influenced China, and they have encountered and interpenetrated each other so much that sometimes the labels of "-ism" seem somewhat arbitrary. Among them, the two most prevalent strands of thought or religion in traditional China were Daoism and Buddhism. Daoism emerged at roughly the same time as Confucianism. The legendary author of the *Dao De Jing* 道德经 (the *Book of the Way and Its Power*), called Lao Zi, is commonly acknowledged as its founder. Daoists have typically been seen as hermits living invisibly in remote mountains and forests, enjoying a simple, natural, and spontaneous lifestyle, and reluctant to come forward to public service (although in reality not all Daoists were hermits). Daoist-like hermits are found in the *Analects* a number of times (e.g., 14.38–39, 18.5–7). Around the fourth century BCE emerged another great Daoist known as Zhuang Zi, to whom the landmark book, the *Zhuang Zi*, is attributed. Though Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi differed from each other in many subtle ways, they together shaped the philosophical Daoism that paralleled Confucianism in its influence in China.

Buddhism was introduced into China from South Asia during the first century CE, after Confucianism had already become China's state ideology. It offered sophisticated metaphysical theories about the self, the world, and causation, as well as elaborate ideas about reincarnation and afterlife, which the Chinese intellectual tradition fell short of in comparison.⁷

The rapid spread of Buddhism and the renewed interest in Daoism during the Wei-Jin period drastically weakened the dominant position of Confucianism. Facing these challenges, the need for reappropriating the spirit of classic Confucianism on a new level of philosophical sophistication began to rise. After centuries of encounters with its rivals, Confucian scholars initiated another upsurge of Confucianism during the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties.

While it is impossible to capture the richness of this “second epoch” of Confucianism in broad strokes, it is fair to say that its most influential figures were the Cheng brothers, CHENG Hao 程颢 (1032–1085) and CHENG Yi 程颐 (1033–1107), and ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). Their creative interpretation of Confucianism is known as *Lixue* 理学, commonly translated as “the School of Principle.” Two other well-known figures were LU Xiangshan 陆象山 (1139–1193) and WANG Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1529), whose names are associated with *Xinxue* 心学, “the School of Heart-mind.”⁸ Both schools left an enormous amount of literature and sophisticated theories.

The Cheng-Zhu School of Principle developed a metaphysical theory according to which *li* 理, the inherent principle, pattern, or as some scholars put it, “coherence,” “creativity,” is the heavenly endowed nature reflected in everything as the moon is reflected in all the waters.⁹ By cultivating and manifesting one’s nature, humans can achieve unity with heaven and become co-creators of the universe. It was mainly due to ZHU Xi’s effort that the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, *Da Xue* 大学 (the Great learning), and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Hitting the mark constantly) established their authority as the canonical “Four Books” of the Confucian tradition, replacing the supreme position held by “the Five Classics” (the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*)¹⁰ for centuries. Both the *Da Xue* and *Zhongyong* were chapters from the *Book of Rites*, believed to be authored by Confucius’ grandson Zisi. The former talks about the connection between personal cultivation and bringing order to the public realm, while the latter considers the metaphysical ground upon which the Confucian project unfolds. Through a careful reinterpretation of these texts around the doctrine of *li*, Zhu completed a philosophical system with enough metaphysical sophistication to rival Buddhism and Daoism.

The Lu-Wang School of Heart-mind significantly differed from the Cheng-Zhu School of Principle. Pointing out the danger of making principle (*li*) an abstract metaphysical entity external to human subjectivity, Lu and Wang emphasized the point that *li* is nothing but the concrete human

heart-mind itself. Their emphasis on the primacy of immediate experience was in turn accused of being Buddhism and Daoism in disguise.

The centuries-long dialogue internally between these different interpretations of Confucianism and externally with Buddhism and Daoism brought Confucianism fresh energy. With renewed sociopolitical prominence, Confucian influence during the time stretched over the entire East and Southeast Asia.

When Western missionaries came to China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and introduced the “Eastern wise man” (Confucius) to Europe, Enlightenment thinkers such as G. W. Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and Voltaire were fascinated with the humanitarian ideals of the Master, which they used as weapons in their attack on the European hereditary aristocracy.¹¹ Ironically, in its homeland, dogmatization of Confucianism developed to its extremity during the late Ming and the Qing, when the emperors adopted the Cheng-Zhu School of Principle as their state ideology. Formalized rituals became not only mere pedantry but also a hindrance to creativity and anything new. The idea that the Middle Kingdom (*Zhongguo* 中国—what the Chinese call China) is the only civilized world made the imperial court unable to realize the revolutionary changes taking place in Europe. Even though “enlightenment-minded” Confucians such as WANG Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) and HUANG Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–1695) tried to break the overly rigid accretions and bring Confucianism back to its human-friendly core, which was a spectacular new climax of thought comparable in many ways to the European Enlightenment movement, their efforts remained largely inconsequential in affecting social reality.¹²

It was not until the continuous military assaults from foreign powers during the nineteenth century that the Chinese began to feel the impact of the West and to consider the West a rival to their Confucian tradition. Seeing the impractical nature of the conservatives’ position, a group of Confucian officials launched a “self-strengthening” movement to retain the Chinese tradition as *ti* 体, “substance,” with Western culture as *yong* 用, “function or utility.” This slogan was little more than a face-saving self-deception, as the separation of substance and function seemed to be a fallacy to begin with.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals of the “New Culture Movement” launched the largest anti-Confucianism movement since the time of the First Emperor of Qin. Confucianism was criticized as the root of all the problems in China, such as political corruption and repression, the suppression of women, suffocation of new ideas and innovations, and rigid social hierarchy. “Down with the ‘Kong family

store!’” “Welcome ‘Mr. De’ (democracy) and ‘Mr. Sai’ (science)!” were famous slogans of the movement.

Among the new Western ideas and theories introduced into China during the movement, Marxism was the most consequential. In 1949, the Communists took over mainland China and Marxism became the official ideology of the country. During the “Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976), Chinese Communist Party leader MAO Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976) launched waves of campaigns against Confucianism, which he used to remove many of his rivals, including LIU Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898–1969), the chairman of the People’s Republic of China from 1959 to 1968, who authored a small but influential book that portrayed a very Confucian style of being a communist.

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 shortly after Mao’s death. Having experienced the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people began to reevaluate Mao’s ideas and to modernize the country. Outside of mainland China, a new trend of reappropriating Confucianism developed, called by its leading scholars MOU Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) and others “third epoch Confucianism,” and it had gained some momentum long before even the communists took over China. In contrast to the success of the four “small dragons” in Asia where Confucianism retained its stronghold—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—the ever-deepening problems of the modernized Western world triggered critical reflection on Western intellectual traditions.¹³ Interest in Confucianism revived, as many contemporary Confucian scholars became increasingly convinced that Confucianism provided valuable philosophical resources for addressing issues in the postmodern world. Fearing a “moral vacuum” after the Mao era and a total acceptance of the “Trojan horse” of Western ideas, the Chinese government also started to reevaluate and appreciate the distinctly Chinese philosophy of Confucianism.¹⁴

A strong revival of Confucianism is on the rise. How “third epoch” Confucianism is going to unfold, that is, how it can contribute to the dialogues of civilizations and avoid being co-opted by repressive political forces, as happened during the Han and Song-Ming periods, will depend on how people read and reread the Confucian texts, among which the *Analects* is primary.

The Formation of the *Analects*

The book known as the *Analects* is called *Lunyu* 论语 in Chinese. Early in the Han dynasty, however, the book was often referred to as *Kong Zi* 孔

子 (Master Kong, or Confucius), like the books of *Zhuang Zi*, *Meng Zi* (the *Mencius*), *Xun Zi*, *Lie Zi*, and so on. It contains Confucius' sayings, short descriptions of his encounters and his personality, conversations between him and his disciples, and the sayings of these disciples.

As John Makeham (1996) and Brooks and Brooks (1998) remind us, the *Analects* is not a unitary book written by a single author. It took shape through the hands of many people, over a long period that may stretch as far as about three hundred years.¹⁵ Among those who have likely contributed to the recording and editing of the *Analects* include Confucius' disciples ZENG Shen,¹⁶ YOU Ruo, Zhonggong,¹⁷ Ziyou, Zixia, YUAN Xian, Zizhang, Zigong, and the followers of these disciples, such as CHEN Kang. Section 15.6 of the *Analects* describes how Zizhang, one of Confucius' major disciples, wrote down the Master's teaching on his sash right after he heard it. There are many unnamed sources that likely wished their views attributed to and attached to the work of the Master.

By the time of Confucius' death, he was already a well-known "Master." It is alleged that the head of the state, Duke Ai of Lu, personally attended the funeral and read his eulogy, saying, "The compassionate heaven grants me no comfort, not willing to leave me the aged man, and leaving the Lonely Me, on my seat, with long-lasting sorrow. Alas! Oh, Ni Fu (Confucius)! No one can be a rule for me now!"¹⁸ It is said that after the Master passed away, many of his disciples mourned him for three years, a ritual that was typically reserved for one's parents. One of them, Zigong 子贡, spent six years of his life mourning the Master by living in a hut next to the Master's grave! It is likely that, with such respect for the death of the Master, the disciples gathered together to share their notes about the Master's teachings, which started the formation of the *Analects*.

During the early Han dynasty, there were two main versions of the book—the "Qi *Analects*" 齐论 and the "Lu *Analects*" 鲁论. Around 154 BCE, another version known as the "Old *Analects*" 古论 was discovered, along with some other texts, in a wall of the home of a descendant of Confucius' family. They were believed to be hidden there by Kong Fu 孔鲋, a ninth-generation descendant of Confucius, to escape the notorious "book burning" of the First Emperor of Qin (213 BCE). These three versions vary in number of chapters (or "books," as they are typically called) and slightly in content. Scholars generally agree that the commonly received version that we have today emerged mainly through the editing hands of Zhang Yu 张禹 (?–5 BCE), and to a lesser degree Zheng Xuan 郑玄 (127–200), and finally synthesized by He Yan 何晏 (190–249). It has since become the

authoritative version, so authoritative that even when scholars found errors in it they would point them out in their commentaries but refrained from correcting the text. Indeed, since the received version exercised such great influence over Chinese history, its value is no longer simply a representation of the “original” *Analects*. Without discounting the importance of historical research about the compilation of the *Analects*, this translation treats the received version as a relatively stabilized unity as it has been handed down for the past two millennia.

Despite its subsequent elevation to canonical status, the *Analects* was not initially conceived as the most canonical Confucian text. When Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BCE) promoted Confucian studies, only the “Five Classics” were considered canonical. While Confucius was assumed to have edited or partially written the Five Classics, which lent to them the authority of the Master, his own words were initially treated more as supplementary to the Classics than worthy of being classic in their own right. After ZHANG Yu served as the tutor of the Han prince (who later became Emperor Cheng, r. 33–7 BCE) responsible solely for teaching him the *Analects*, the importance of the book began to rise. It became one of the Seven Classics (the Five Classics plus the *Analects* and the *Xiao Jing* 孝经, the *Book of Filial Piety*) during the later Han, but it did not become the most principal text of Confucianism until the Song dynasty, when ZHU Xi placed it as one of the most primary “Four Books” of Confucian thought.

With the rise in status of the *Analects*, interpreting and commenting on the work became a widespread scholarly practice. During the late Han to the subsequent Wei-Jin Period (third to sixth century), there were already more than eighty commentaries of the *Analects*. Among them, HE Yan’s *Collected Explications of the Analects* (*Lunyu Jijie* 论语集解) and HUANG Kan 皇侃 (488–545)’s *Subcommentaries to the Meaning of the Analects* (*Lunyu Yishu* 论语义疏) were the most influential. The ten-volume combination of these two works was treated as the standard text until the Song dynasty, when ZHU Xi’s *Collected Commentaries of the Analects* (*Lunyu Jizhu* 论语集注) replaced it as the authoritative interpretation.

Through this commentarial tradition the *Analects* is constantly being reinterpreted. As CHENG Shude 程树德 (1877–1944) says,

Han Confucian scholars and Song Confucian scholars differ in their ways of studying the *Analects*. Han scholars’ focus was on textual examination of names and the things they refer to and the similarities and differences of the words used. Song

scholars are different. They focused on revealing *dayi weiyan* 大意微言—the profound meanings behind the apparently trivial words. (CHENG Shude, 5)

Zhu's influential commentaries, however, sometimes reveal more about his own ideas than what is contained in or entailed by the *Analects*, though his ideas are valuable in their own right. For this reason, his *Jizhu* became an important source for studying Song-Ming Li Xue 理学, the School of Principle, of which Zhu was a major leader.

Up to modern times, thousands of commentaries of the *Analects* have been composed. A rough estimate shows that the total number exceeds three thousand. ZHU Xi alone contributed six. Among the others, LIU Baonan 刘宝楠 (1791–1855) and his son LIU Gongmian 刘恭冕 (1821–1880)'s *Rectification of Meaning of the Analects* (*Lunyu Zhengyi* 论语正义) was a landmark classic. It collected the best interpretations and corrected mistakes found in previous commentaries. A more recent landmark work is CHENG Shude's *Collective Commentaries of the Analects* (*Lunyu Jishi* 论语集释) originally published in 1943. Quoting from 680 commentaries, it offers a handy reference to a rich variety of interpretations of the Confucian classic from the Han dynasty to his time.¹⁹

The study of the *Analects* has long been of interest to scholars in other East Asian countries such as Korea and Japan as well, and they have contributed many valuable commentaries. In Korea alone, there have been more than 130 commentaries on the *Analects*. Japanese scholar ITO Jinsai 伊藤仁斋 (1627–1705)'s *Ancient Meaning of the "Analects"* (*Lunyu Guyi* 论语古义) and Korean scholar JEONG Yakyong 丁若镛 (1762–1836)'s *Ancient and Modern Commentaries of the "Analects"* (*Lunyu Gujin Zhu* 论语古今注), for instance, are notable ones. They contain many insightful observations, some of which inform the annotations of the current English translation.

Although the *Analects* has long been considered a principal text of the Confucian tradition, controversies regarding the proper order and the authenticity of various passages within the book have never stopped. Alongside the *Analects*, there are sayings and anecdotal records of Confucius' life scattered throughout various other books, such as the *Zuo Zhuan* (the *Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals*), the *Mencius*, the *Xun Zi*, *Shuoyuan*, *Li Ji* (the *Book of Rites*), the *Zhongyong*, and the *Kong Zi Jiayu* (*Confucius' Family Discourse*), among others. They are generally considered less reliable, and indeed, though their reliability is usually judged according to how consistent they are with the sayings in the *Analects*,²⁰ they

nonetheless provide valuable references. The study of the *Analects* often leads to these texts, and in turn, informs the study of them. In addition, important archeological discoveries in the last few decades have shed new light on our understanding of the *Analects*. Among them, the silk script dated around 150 BCE discovered in Mawangdui 马王堆 (in Changsha, Hunan Province, China) in 1972, the bamboo scripts of some Confucian texts dated around the third to fourth centuries BCE found in Guodian 郭店 (in Jingmen, Hubei Province, China) in 1993, and two fragmented versions of the *Analects* written on bamboo strips dated around 50 BCE, known as the Dingzhou 定州 *Analects* (discovered in Dingzhou, Hebei Province, China, in 1973) and Pyongyang *Analects* (discovered near Pyongyang, North Korea, in 1992) have led to new waves of interest in reexamining the formation and interpretation of the *Analects*. All these are but parts of what the study of the *Analects* has to consider. Indeed, the whole study of the *Analects* is broad and complicated enough to warrant the term “Lunyuology,” an interdisciplinary academic field of study of *Lunyu* that deals not only with a fixed, received text as its subject but also with a living tradition of interpretation.

English Translations of the *Analects*

Lunyuology today can no longer confine itself to the study of the *Analects* in the Chinese language. While Lunyuologists, Chinese or otherwise, are expected to read the original text, non-Chinese readers, including scholars who are not specialists in this field, depend on translations of the text for understanding Confucius. For them, the reliability of a translation is a basic expectation. Yet translation is by its very nature a double-layered filter—it is interpretation of a text through a culturally specific person who is bound to be affected by his or her background, including education, life experience, religious orientation, and personal taste. Furthermore, one translates into a language that has different vocabularies and syntax; this inevitably brings in different connotations and assumptions. The translator has to struggle with this dilemma: The purpose of a translation is to make the text accessible to the modern, the foreign, the unfamiliar reader, yet at the same time it has to stay as close as possible to the ancient, the native, the strange, and the original text. In addition, there are different groups of readers—specialists in the field, students who are interested in the subject matter, and the general public. The approach a translator takes is often dependent upon which group is targeted. Different ways of dealing with all of these difficulties make each translation a re-creation of the *Analects*.

Since the first translation of the *Analects* into Latin by Matteo Ricci appeared in 1594, the book has been translated into many different Indo-European languages, and in the case of English, there have been about forty complete versions; among them about a dozen or so have had significant influence. If we add translations of selected passages of the *Analects*, the total number would be around fifty, and more are emerging as time goes on. Despite the fact that each translation inevitably risked misrepresentation of the text, they all contributed to the dissemination of the book to a worldwide readership.

The earliest translators of the *Analects* were mostly learned missionary scholars from Europe.²¹ The missionaries admired Confucius because the Master seemed to approximate Christian saints, and his teachings resembled Christian ethics. Their Eurocentric appropriation did not prevent the translators from treating the Confucian text with due respect. Among them, James Legge's²² version (1861), as Ames and Rosemont put it, "remains, in many respects, the benchmark for all translation work to this day" (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 17). It is philologically rigorous and commendably accurate, although Legge's religious agenda affected his choice of words, such as using "God" for *di* 帝, making his version more Christian than it should be,²³ and his overreliance on ZHU Xi's commentary also limited the scope of his understanding.

From the end of the nineteenth century to the 1970s the dominant view in Chinese studies was that traditional Chinese culture was outdated; hence, scholars were more interested in the connections between China's cultural heritage and its modern reality and less in the content of the culture itself. In the minds of most scholars, as Joseph Levenson puts it, Confucianism belongs to history (Levenson, x). Translations of the *Analects*, however, sought to counter this impression. Chinese scholar KU Hung-ming 辜鸿铭 (1857–1928)'s translation of the *Analects* (1898), for instance, was part of his effort to help Westerners to appreciate the inherent value and modern relevance of Confucius' teachings. In trying to make the text as readable to Westerners as possible, however, his version was tainted by the framework of Western vocabulary and taste as well as additional wordings that were not in the original, or obstructions of things that he thought to be unimportant for Westerners' appreciation of Confucius' thought.²⁴

For decades, Arthur Waley (1889–1966)'s translation, which was first published in 1938, stood next to Legge's as the most popular English version of the *Analects*. Less scholarly but more readable, Waley's had a wider circulation than Legge's. His literary talent presented the content in an elegant style. In trying to make it more readable, however, he was also

overly liberal in inserting words into the translation that were not in the original text, which sometimes only made the translation wordier than the original but at other times was misleading.²⁵

If Ku's and Waley's occasional insertion of their own ideas into the translation was for increased readability, Ezra Pound's "creative" translation (1951) did this deliberately to forward his own ideas. Faced with the crisis of Western industrialized societies, Pound offered Confucianism as the medicine for the ills of European civilization. For him, translation is not philology, because philology cannot provide the translation with the life that the original text had in its social environment; translation is the creation of "a new poem." For his new poem, he freely "appropriated" the text according to his own preferences.²⁶

During the 1960s and 1970s, when events such as the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal triggered critical reflection about Western civilization, scholars in Chinese studies more consciously considered alternative cultural resources for inspiration. Some advocated an "internal approach" and "empathy method" to reveal the content of the subject matter from the inside of the Chinese texts, as opposed to the external approach that retrospectively interpreted the texts according to the social reality of modern China (see Cohen, 22). Upon such a background, we find scholars in Confucian studies such as William Theodore de Bary, Thomas Metzger, Herbert Fingarette, to name just a few, who offered careful readings of Confucian classics for understanding China and "discovering Confucius' teaching by taking him at his word" (Fingarette, x).

From that time to the present day, a significant number of relatively high-quality new English translations of the *Analects* emerged, with diverse ways of handling the basic dilemmas mentioned earlier. Based on solid scholarship, D. C. Lau 刘殿爵's translation of the *Analects* has become a classic since its publication in 1979, replacing the position held by Waley's. Using an Anglo-Saxon-style English, Lau retains the color of antiquity. Though Lau adds explanatory words, which sometimes makes the text look wordy, he stayed amazingly close to the original text. Its 1992 edition included the original Chinese text, which added a corrective influence for scholars.

Lau's version, though, has little annotation, which hinders the reader's ability to see alternative ways of reading the text. In comparison, Raymond Dawson's version (1993) retains the vagueness of the original but is otherwise clear enough for the general public. It leaves room for readers to come up with their own interpretations. However, it would be better to handle the difficulty like Chi-Chung Huang 黄继忠's version (1997), which retains