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A Concise Companion to Confucius

Edited by
Paul R. Goldin

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## Contents

Notes on Contributors vii

Introduction: Confucius and Confucianism 1
  *Paul R. Goldin*

### Part I  Representations of Confucius 13

1 Early Sources for Confucius 15
  *Michael Hunter*

2 Confucius in Excavated Warring States Manuscripts 35
  *Scott Cook*

3 The Unorthodox Master: The Serious and the Playful in Depictions of Confucius 52
  *Oliver Weingarten*

4 Representations of Confucius in Apocrypha of the First Century CE 75
  *Zhao Lu*

5 Visual Representations of Confucius 93
  *Julia K. Murray*

### Part II  Confucian Ideas 131

6 *Le* in the *Analects* 133
  *Kwong-loi Shun*

7 Women in the *Analects* 148
  *Anne Behnke Kinney*

8 Confucius’ Elitism: The Concepts of *junzi* and *xiaoren* Revisited 164
  *Yuri Pines*

9 Confucius and Filial Piety 185
  *Thomas Radice*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Gentleman’s Views on Warfare according to the Gongyang Commentary</td>
<td>Sarah A. Queen</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Comparisons with Western Philosophy</td>
<td>Erin M. Cline</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part III   The Legacy of Confucius in Imperial China</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>From Uncrowned King to the Sage of Profound Greatness: Confucius and the Analects in Early Medieval China</td>
<td>Alan K. L. Chan</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Reception of The Classic of Filial Piety from Medieval to Late Imperial China</td>
<td>Miaw-fen Lu</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kongzi as the Uncrowned King in some Qing Gongyang Exegeses</td>
<td>On-cho Ng</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part IV   Confucius and New Confucianisms in Modern East Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Confucianism, Capitalism, and Shibusawa Eiichi’s The Analects and the Abacus</td>
<td>John A. Tucker</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Confucius in the May Fourth Era</td>
<td>Q. Edward Wang</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New Confucianism</td>
<td>Yong Huang</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes on Contributors

Alan K. L. Chan is Professor of Humanities and Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. With research interests in both Confucianism and Daoism, he is a founding editorial board member of Oxford Bibliographies: Chinese Studies. His MOOC, “Explorations in Confucian Philosophy,” will soon be launched on Coursera.

Erin M. Cline is Associate Professor of Comparative Ethics in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University, where she teaches Chinese and Comparative Philosophy and Religion. She is the author of Confucius, Rawls, and the Sense of Justice (2013) and Families of Virtue: Confucian and Western Views on Childhood Development (2015).

Scott Cook 顧史考 is Tan Chin Tuan Professor of Chinese Studies at Yale–NUS College in Singapore. His works include The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation (2012) and Guodian Chujian xian-Qin rushe hongweiguan 郭店楚簡先秦儒書宏微觀 (2006), among others.

Paul R. Goldin is Professor of East Asian Languages & Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi (1999); The Culture of Sex in Ancient China (2002); After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy (2005); and Confucianism (2011). In addition, he has edited the revised edition of R.H. van Gulik’s classic study, Sexual Life in Ancient China (2003), and has co-edited three other books on Chinese culture and political philosophy.

Yong Huang is Professor of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is the editor of Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy and Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy (a book series). His research interests include ethics, political philosophy, and Chinese and comparative philosophy.

Michael Hunter is an Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University. He received his PhD from Princeton University’s Department of East Asian Studies.
Anne Behnke Kinney is Professor of Chinese in the Department of East Asian Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Virginia. Her publications include *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* and *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienü zhuan of Liu Xiang*.

Miaw-fen Lu is a Research Fellow in the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica. Her major research interests lie in intellectual and cultural history in late imperial China. She is the author of *The Wang Yangming School during the Ming Dynasty* and *Ruling All under Heaven with Filial Piety* (both in Chinese).

Zhao Lu is Research Fellow on the project “Fate, Freedom, and Prognostication: Strategies for Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe” at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities, Friedrich-Alexander-University, Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany. His research focuses on the images of Confucius and classicism in early imperial China.

Julia K. Murray is Professor Emerita of Art History, East Asian Studies, and Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin and is affiliated with the Fairbank Center at Harvard University. She has published extensively on visual and material culture associated with the worship of Confucius and on Chinese narrative illustration.

On-cho Ng is Professor of History, Asian Studies, and Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University, where he also heads the Department of Asian Studies. His many publications address a variety of topics, including late imperial Chinese intellectual history, and Confucian historiography, hermeneutics, religiousness, and ethics.


Sarah A. Queen is Professor of History at Connecticut College. She is the author of *From Chronicle to Canon*, co-translator with John S. Major, of *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, and co-editor with Paul van Els, of *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China*.

Thomas Radice is Associate Professor of History at Southern Connecticut State University, specializing in early Chinese intellectual history. He has published articles and book reviews in *Asian Philosophy*, *Dao*, and *Sino-Platonic Papers*, and is currently working on a book manuscript about ritual performance in early Chinese thought.

Kwong-loi Shun teaches philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. His main research interests are moral psychology and Confucian thought. He has been working on a multivolume work on Confucian thought, and the first volume, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, was published in 1997. He has been Professor of Philosophy and a university administrator at the University of California Berkeley, University of Toronto, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

John A. Tucker is Professor of History at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. His research focuses on Tokugawa Confucianism, as well as ways in which

Q. Edward Wang is Professor of History at Rowan University and Changjiang Professor at Peking University (2007–present). Among his publications are Inventing China through History: the May Fourth Approach to Historiography and Chopsticks: A Cultural and Culinary History. He also serves as editor of Chinese Studies in History.

Oliver Weingarten, PhD (Cantab), is Research Fellow at the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague. He has published on textual traditions and the intellectual history of the pre-imperial era in the Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, the Journal of the American Oriental Society, the Bulletin of the School or Oriental and African Studies, and the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. His current research focuses on two topics: courage, confrontation and violence in early China, and textual structures, especially potential mnemonic features, of early Chinese writings.
Confucius is a Latinization of the Chinese name Kongfuzi 孔夫子, meaning Gentleman or Master Kong (traditional dates: 551–479 BC). Throughout East Asia, he has always been more commonly called Kongzi 孔子, but his status as the premier teacher in the Chinese tradition was crucial to the Jesuits who popularized the Latinized name, and thus they seem to have preferred the even more august locution Kongfuzi (Standaert 1999, 123–27). The accommodationist strategy of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and other Jesuit missionaries was to declare Confucius’ teachings, as well as the tradition on which they rested, as fundamentally congruent with Christianity (e.g., Mungello 1985; Rule 1986, 10–69). One key piece of evidence for Jesuit readers was the presence of multiple variants of the Golden Rule in Confucian texts, such as “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” 己所不欲,勿施於人 (Analects 12.2). This was naturally compared to Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

The Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism was well intentioned, but misleading in several respects. For example, while Ricci advanced Confucius as the most authentic and praiseworthy embodiment of Chinese wisdom, he denigrated many other traditions, including not only organized religions like Buddhism and Daoism, but also popular practices such as divination, as vulgar superstition (Ricci 1953, 82–105). This has led to the unproductive analytical habit, sometimes discernible even in today’s scholarship, of equating all aspects of Chinese culture with Confucianism, which not only overstates the role of Confucian teachings in the organization of Chinese society (e.g., Goldin 2011, 2–4), but has also contributed to a lack of appreciation of other philosophical and religious movements.

Nevertheless, most Chinese literati in Ricci’s day would have agreed that Confucius was the most important of their many cultural forebears. One of Confucius’ many Chinese appellations is xianshi 先師, a powerful term meaning both “former teacher”
and “foremost teacher.” Confucius was similarly venerated in other East Asian cultures influenced by Chinese examples, such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (even as they recognized, more readily than Ricci, that other traditions were worthy of respect as well).

What did Confucius accomplish that warranted such immense and institutionalized praise? The title xianshi offers a good preliminary basis for an answer: he was regarded as first among teachers. He was assuredly not the first teacher in any literal sense, for the cultic rituals of the Bronze Age (manifested by complex assemblages of ritual bronze vessels that were hoarded by leading lineages and interred with prominent men and women upon their deaths) must have required instructors to insure that the ceremonies were properly performed and the finical spirits duly appeased. Over time, it seems, such ritual masters started to include moral and political lessons in their curriculum. For example, in a scene set in 662 BC, occasioned by the appearance of a spirit in a place called Guó, two ritual officers are said to have predicted the demise of that state because its ruler “listens to spirits” instead of “listening to his populace,” as an enlightened sovereign would (Yang Bojun 1990, 1.251–53; cf. Xu Yuangao 2002, 28–31). Hardly anything else is ever said about these two officers; we must surmise that they were masters who would be consulted when the government required an expert opinion on ritual affairs. Their statement that the ruler must above all heed his people suggests an underlying political philosophy that charges the ruler with safeguarding the welfare of his subjects (Pines 2002, 78), and may even anticipate Confucius’ humanistic view that spirits do not offer useful moral guidance (Goldin 2011, 13ff.). Another ritual master, Scribe Lao, an advisor of King Ling of Chu (r. 540–529 BC), may be the dimly remembered historical figure who inspired the world‐famous text Laozi.3

Confucius is the first such master for whom we have substantial evidence of the content his teachings. Remembering that he lived over 2,500 years ago, however, we should not be surprised that the sources leave many open questions. The foremost text purporting to record his teachings is the so‐called Analects (the Jesuit translation of Lunyu 論語, meaning Selected Sayings), which was supposedly compiled after Confucius’ death by his disciples – or perhaps disciples of disciples, since some of Confucius’ disciples are identified in the text as masters in their own right. Strangely, however, there is no record of the Analects until centuries later (e.g., Makeham 1996). Michael Hunter, in Chapter 1 of this volume, discusses the interpretive consequences lucidly: my view (Goldin forthcoming) is that that whoever was responsible for compiling the Analects included an overwhelming proportion of genuine material within it, but at a minimum modern readers must bear in mind that they are not reading the work of Confucius himself – that is to say, the Confucius we are given to see in the Analects is the Confucius that some posterior committee wanted us to see. To muddy the waters further, sayings and conversations are often presented with scant context. Reconstructing a coherent philosophy out of such fragmentary material requires considerable creativity. Nor are we alone in this quandary: the varied interpretations of Confucius’ philosophy even in antiquity indicate that there was no authorized ideology shared by all Confucians.4

Of Confucius’ life and heritage we know only the barest of details, especially after eliminating the eager hagiographies that emerged in the centuries after his death.
In reality, his ancestry was murky (Eno 2003); his father, called Shuliang He 叔梁梁 in most sources, may have been a warrior from a place called Zou 邜/鄒. The highlights of his career, according to tradition, were serving his home state of Lu 魯 as Minister of Justice (sikou 司寇) and attracting dozens of disciples, some of whom were among the social elite. Latter-day Confucians regarded the position of Minister of Justice as incommensurate with Confucius’ prodigious gifts, and were at pains to explain his failure to achieve more. Sometimes posterity called him “the uncrowned king” (suwang 素王), alluding to the rank that he should have attained (see Alan K. L. Chan, Chapter 12, and On-cho Ng, Chapter 14, this volume). Passages in the Analects (e.g., 16.13), similarly, hint at unseemly discord in his household, and it is suggestive that more is known about his grandson, the philosopher Zisi 子思 (483?–402), than his ne’er-do-well son, Boyu 伯魚 (532–483). Confucius died in his seventies, perhaps with a sense of a mission unfulfilled.

As presented in the Analects, Confucius’ philosophy begins with the premise that one must think for oneself. Confucius continually deconstructs received religion and enjoins his disciples to think through a new moral system with human interaction as its base.

Fan Chi 樊遲 [b. 515 BC] asked about wisdom. The Master said: “To take righteousness among the people as one’s duty, and to revere the ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance, can be called wisdom.”

(Analects 6.20)

Confucius is not an atheist— he concedes that there are ghosts and spirits, and that it is advisable not to offend them – but he believes that pondering the afterlife and the supernatural will only impede moral reasoning (Analects 11.11).

And how does one instill “righteousness among the people”? Here the Golden Rule, admired by Ricci, comes into play: “What you yourself do not desire, do not do to others” (Analects 15.23; cf. also 5.11). This is presented as Confucius’ own definition of shu 恕, “reciprocity.” Sometimes it is called the Silver Rule, so as to distinguish it from the Judeo-Christian Golden Rule, because it is formulated in the negative (cf. Huang 2005, 394). Another qualification is necessary: in practice, shu has to be interpreted as doing unto others as you would have others do unto you if you had the same social role as they (Nussbaum 2003, 6; Goldin 2005, 1–4). Shu is a relation not between two individuated people, but between two social roles. How does one treat one’s father, to take a typical Confucian example? In the same way that one would want to be treated by one’s son if one were a father oneself. Moreover, whether formulated as the Golden or the Silver Rule, Confucius’ principle is open to the same doubts that Alan Gewirth (1981) has raised with reference to the Western tradition (see also Ivanhoe 2008).

In Analects 15.23, Confucius identifies shu as “the one word that one can practice throughout one’s life” (cf. also 4.15 and 15.2), and in 6.28 he defines a paraphrase of shu as “the method of humanity,” or ren 仁, which he regarded as the cardinal virtue. Considering how reluctant he is elsewhere to define ren, we must apperceive this is a very big hint: the way to become a “humane” person starts with the moral reasoning entailed by shu, that is, asking ourselves in each particular situation how we ought to treat other people by imagining ourselves in their shoes and thinking through our relationship to them. Another big hint comes in Analects 12.1, where Confucius responds
to a question about ren by saying: “Overcome the self and return to ritual in order to practice humanity.” When the disciple presses Confucius further, he says:

Do not look in opposition to the rites. Do not listen in opposition to the rites. Do not speak in opposition to the rites. Do not move in opposition to the rites.

Western interpreters of Confucius (such as Fingarette 1972) have frequently mischaracterized “the rites” (li 礼) as something like a code of conduct, leading to serious misconceptions about what Confucius means here by not looking, listening, speaking, or moving in opposition to the rites. One might think there is a discrete and knowable code, called li, on which one can rely for guidance in all matters: if you do not know how to act, cleave to the li, and you will never be wrong. This might even have been the standard conception of li in Confucius’ own day: a practicable code that ambitious young men hoped to learn from experienced ritual masters. The problem is that this understanding of li is inadequate for Confucius, because he explicitly contrasts the rites with anything like a predetermined code (and, to this extent, the very translation of li as “rite” or “ritual” can be misleading). In Analects 2.3, for example, Confucius states that laws and punishments are inferior to virtue and ritual because although the former can be effective at molding behavior, they do not cause people to reflect on their conduct and develop a conscience (chi 恥, sometimes translated as “shame”). As a philosopher who values moral reasoning above all else, Confucius is wary of anything like a code that one could cheat oneself into practicing unthinkingly and automatically.

Other comments on li are in the same spirit. The most revealing passage has to do with rituals in a ceremonial hall (Analects 9.3): the contemporary habit of replacing a prescribed linen hat with one of cheaper silk is approved as frugal, but the habit of bowing at the top of the hall, when the rites call for bowing at the bottom of the hall, is criticized as self-aggrandizing. Thus, the rites are subject to emendation in practice, but one cannot depart from them capriciously or groundlessly. Rather, they must be practiced in such a way as to convey and reinforce deeper moral principles. Nor can one simply follow the majority: laudable practice of the rites requires thinking for oneself.

Li is best understood, then, as embodied virtue, the thoughtful somatic expression of basic moral principles, without which the ceremonies are void (cf. Analects 3.3 and 17.11). Far from a static code of conduct, li is the sum total of all the moral calculations that a thinking Confucian must go through before acting, and must be constantly reinterpreted and reapplied to suit changing situations. Thus, when Confucius tells his disciple not to look, listen, speak, or move in opposition to the rites, he does not mean that one need only memorize a certain body of accepted conventions and take care always to follow them; rather, using the fuller sense of li, he means that one must ask oneself how to put the most humane face on the rites in each new situation, and then to carry them out conscientiously. What sounds like a deceptively simple instruction is really a demand not only to act with unflagging moral awareness, but also assess for oneself the right course of action at every moment.

Political action relies, likewise, on the thoughtful performance of the moral obligations entailed by one’s position, but here Confucius’ ideas are harder to reconcile with modern preferences because of the heavy emphasis on the figure of the ruler and his decisive influence, positive or negative, on his subjects’ behavior (e.g., Analects 12.17–19;
see Olberding 2012 on the importance of exemplary conduct). The key passage is *Analects* 12.11: “May the lord act as a lord, the minister as a minister, the father as a father, the son as a son.” As they were understood by the tradition, the phrases “to act as a lord,” “to act as a minister,” “to act as a father,” and “to act as a son” are moral demands: if a ruler, minister, father, or son are to be reckoned as such, they must act as required by their positions in society. “To act as a lord” means to live up to the moral demands of rulership: to be vigilant about one’s own conduct so as to provide a worthy model for the people to follow in their quest for moral self-cultivation.

Confucius’ pronouncement permits some other inferences. First, modern readers can hardly avoid observing that all four characters – the lord, the minister, the father, and the son – are male. It was a social reality in Confucius’ day that lords and ministers were without exception male, but instead of “the father” and “the son,” he might well have said “fathers and mothers” and “sons and daughters.” Readers must decide for themselves how much to make of this problem (see Anne Behnke Kinney, Chapter 7, this volume). On the one hand, there is little reason why Confucius’ ideas could not be extended today to include women as well (Rosemont 1997; Clark and Wang 2004; Goldin 2011, 115–20); on the other hand, there is also little reason to suppose that he would himself have thought to do so. All his disciples were male, and his few comments about women suggest that he thought most consequential actions were undertaken by men (Goldin 2002, 55–59).

Another inescapable observation is that the four cardinal roles are all relative. No one can be a lord without a minister, a minister without a lord, a father without a son, or a son without a father. By the same token, it is possible for the same person to play more than one of these roles in different situations and in relation to different people. All males are sons, and thus any father is not only a father to his son but also a son to his own father. Similarly, a minister may be a lord in his own right, but a minister to a lord higher than he; indeed, in Bronze Age politics, even the highest king, the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子), is conceived as a lord to all other human beings but only a viceroy of Heaven above. These dimensions of Confucius’ saying should not be overlooked. All Confucian morality, as we have seen, emerges from relations with other people. It is impossible to practice *shu* except in relation to other people, just as virtue always has neighbors (*Analects* 4.25). Moreover, the stipulation that we must act in accordance with our social role means that the right way to behave depends on our relationship with the person with whom we are presently engaged (Ames 2011). There are no universally valid moral injunctions because no one is in the same social position at every instant of his or her life.

At the level of state politics, however, merely exhorting the ruler to live up to the demands of his supreme position may seem inadequate to modern readers, because Confucius does not tell us what to do if the ruler fails – as they often do. A Confucian minister is obliged to remonstrate in such cases (Vandermeersch 1994; Schaberg 1997, 2005), but rulers who heed principled remonstrance have always been in the minority. Mencius 孟子 (372–289 BC), who expanded Confucius’ philosophy roughly two centuries later, confronted such questions more squarely, even implying a right of rebellion in extreme cases of misrule (Tiwald 2008). Confucius, by contrast, suggests that when the state is hopelessly misgoverned, one can scarcely do better than “to avoid punishment and disgrace” (*Analects* 5.1). He was not a democrat (Elstein 2010).
Just as there is no good solution to the problem of serving a reprobate king, Confucius acknowledges that immoral parents can place their children in intractable situations as well. On the one hand, he declares that a son should not turn in his father for stealing a sheep (*Analects* 13.18), because he is misguided if he thinks he owes more to the faceless state than to the father who reared and raised him. On the other hand, he recognizes that serving parents can be difficult:

The Master said: “In serving your parents, remonstrate slightly. If you see that they do not intend to follow [your advice], remain respectful and do not disobey. Toil and do not complain.”

(*Analects* 4.18)

The remonstrance is indispensable; “acting as a son” must include raising controversial issues with one’s parents whenever necessary. But imperfect parents are not always persuaded to mend their ways, and Confucius does not accept taking parents’ mistakes as grounds for losing one’s filial respect. “Toil and do not complain”: you may know you are in the right, but if you have done everything you can to make your case, and your parents are unmoved, you must endure your lot.

The foregoing summary of Confucius’ philosophy is by no means exhaustive; it merely presents the background necessary for understanding why he has been venerated throughout East Asia as the forefather of a distinctive moral and cultural disposition. In Western languages, this has been called “Confucianism,” a term with both supporters (for my view, see Goldin 2011, 5–6) and critics (e.g., Nylan 2001, 2n; Elman 2002). The present volume, however, is a companion to Confucius, not a companion to Confucianism, and just as Marx declared that he was not a Marxist (Marx and Engels 1975–2004, 46:356 and 49:7), the two are not identical. A companion to Confucianism would have to survey major Confucian thinkers after Confucius, their philosophical innovations, and so on. While that would be a welcome and useful resource (in English, the only large reference work of this kind is Yao 2003), the subject of this book is the figure of Confucius and his diverse representations down to the present day.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I focuses on early representations of Confucius in both textual and visual sources. In Chapter 1, “Early Sources for Confucius,” Michael Hunter begins by surveying the extant sources for Kongzi, concluding that they are so diverse, and of such questionable reliability, that they scarcely combine to paint a coherent portrait of the master. Hunter then considers the text that has traditionally been the most venerated, namely, the *Analects*, and observes that a reader’s assumptions about the origins of this collection, which remain disputed, will necessarily inform his or her imagination of Kongzi himself. The historical Confucius may be beyond reconstruction.

In Chapter 2, “Confucius in Excavated Warring States Manuscripts,” Scott Cook focuses on Confucius’ image in a group of texts that was not available before the 1970s: previously unknown manuscripts, some excavated by archaeologists, some looted by tomb-robbers. After surveying the material, Cook argues that its portrayal of Confucius’ philosophical outlook is “largely concordant with what we find ascribed to him in received texts dating from the Warring States period,” yet he concludes by reminding us that these new documents await more thorough investigation.
Oliver Weingarten examines creative literary uses of the figure of Confucius in Chapter 3, “The Unorthodox Master: The Serious and the Playful in Depictions of Confucius.” These include satires, parodies, playful misreadings, the use of Confucian utterances as proof texts, and nascent hagiographies. Such appropriations and adaptations, which were often ludic, bespeak broad familiarity with the figure of Confucius at diverse levels of literate society; otherwise one could not find such a variety of depictions, Confucian and non-Confucian alike.

In Chapter 4, “Representations of Confucius in Apocrypha of the First Century ce,” Zhao Lu discusses a particular subset of later appropriation: a corpus commonly translated as “apocrypha” (chenwei 讫緯). These texts, which were mostly lost over the subsequent centuries, reflected a growing enthusiasm for an ideal society based on the Five Classics and the restoration of the Han 漢 dynasty. In this context, Confucius became a prophet and messenger of Heaven who not only encoded his political teaching in his work, but also foretold the ascendance of the ruling Liu 劉 family. This superhuman image of Confucius was rooted in knowledge shared amongst scholars of that time.

In the final chapter in Part I, “Visual Representations of Confucius” (Chapter 5), Julia K. Murray discusses Confucius as a subject for visual representation after the Han court formally endorsed his teachings. While the earliest images appeared in schools and offering shrines during the Song 宋 period (960–1279), portrayals became more diverse and some reproduced pictures kept by his descendants. Moreover, pictorial biographies of Confucius brought him more vividly to life and to a wider range of society, and in recent decades new images of Confucius have evolved to serve a range of contemporary purposes, including politics and advertising.

Part II, “Confucian Ideas,” addresses the philosophical perspectives that have been attributed to Confucius over the centuries (some with a more solid historical basis than others). Kwong-loi Shun opens this section with “Le in the Analects” (Chapter 6), a discussion of a term commonly translated as “joy” (le 樂). Shun begins with a survey of usage in early texts, then considers the nature of le in the Analects: a state akin to tranquility, and anchored in one’s following the ethical path and affirming such a way of life. Because the different elements of the mind are blended together in an ethical direction, there is a sense of harmony and ease. Furthermore, because the external conditions of life are invested with minor significance as compared with the ethical, one is not subject to worries about them.

In Chapter 7, “Women in the Analects,” Anne Behnke Kinney focuses on three famous (some might say infamous) comments about women that are attributed to Confucius in that text. Taken together, they demonstrate that in Confucius’ mind, high social status overrides the restrictions of gender. Just as he expresses his frustration with low-ranking men and women of unseemly ambition, he seems willing to regard certain elite women with the same respect usually reserved for elite men. Although such women were extraordinary even among their own peers, it is no less extraordinary that the Confucius of the Analects acknowledges their accomplishments and actively engages with them, despite the objections of a narrow-minded disciple.

Yuri Pines focuses on two other keywords, “noble man” (junzi 君子) and “petty man” (xiaoren 小人), in Chapter 8, “Confucius’ Elitism: The Concepts of junzi and xiaoren Revisited.” By comparing the usages in the Analects with earlier texts, primarily the Zuo
zhuàn 左傳 (Zuo Commentary), Pines argues that Confucius revolutionized the concept of junzi, expanding it to include members of his own social class, the shì 士. Originally, shì denoted the lowest stratum of nobility, but eventually it referred to the elite more broadly, with membership primarily determined by one’s qualities rather than one’s pedigree. Confucius contributed to this process by allowing a more flexible conceptualization of membership in the elite. This flexibility, coupled with persistently rigid emphasis on sociopolitical hierarchy, became an effective recipe for preserving a highly stratified society while maintaining the possibility of social mobility.

Thomas Radice considers a related concept in Chapter 9, “Confucius and Filial Piety.” Rooted in early Chinese religion, Confucius’ understanding of filial piety (xiǎo 孝) is, in Radice’s words, “an ornamented expression to both the dead and the living.” Because parents can be fallible, filial piety requires more than straightforward deference: one must gently remonstrate with them, but also be ready to conceal their misdeeds. These are imperfect solutions for imperfect situations, and they undermine simplistic characterizations of the parent–child relationship in Confucian ethics.

In Chapter 10, “The Gentleman’s Views on Warfare According to the Gongyang Commentary,” Sarah A. Queen focuses on a different Confucian text, namely, a commentary to the canonical Springs and Autumns that operated on the assumption that Confucius was the august author. Though often overlooked as a source for understanding Confucius’ position on warfare, the Gongyang Commentary is replete with relevant material. It articulates a complex set of ethico-ritual principles that provisionally permit certain kinds of military activities for the sake of mediating conflict until the sage rule symbolized by King Wen of Zhou 周文王 (d. 1050 BC) can be restored and peace returned to the realm.

In the final chapter in Part II, “Comparisons with Western Philosophy” (Chapter 11), Erin M. Cline explores similarities and differences between Western philosophy and Confucianism. While works that compare the thought of Confucius and Western philosophy are diverse, they share the view that comparative study is worthwhile and seek to address, in various ways, some of the common challenges that comparative studies face. In light of this body of work, Cline examines different proposed answers to the question of why comparative philosophy is worthwhile, and highlights three sets of challenges that frequently arise in comparative philosophy, which she calls thematic, interpretive, and procedural.

Parts III and IV turn to the legacy of Confucius in later centuries: Part III is devoted to imperial China, and Part IV to the modern world. In Chapter 12, “From Uncrowned King to the Sage of Profound Greatness: Confucius and the Analects in Early Medieval China,” Alan K. L. Chan limns the concerted effort by literati in the third through the sixth centuries to interrogate tradition afresh. The discourse called xuánxué 玄學 (which Chan translates as “Learning in the Profound”) juxtaposed the Confucian Analects to other texts, especially the Changes (Yìjīng 易經), Laozi, and Zhuangzi 庄子. This radical reinterpretation resulted in a Confucius who was a sage of “profound greatness” embodying the fullness of dao 道 in his being (xuānshēng 玄聖). As literati’s interests changed, so did their Confucius.

In Chapter 13, “The Reception of The Classic of Filial Piety from Medieval to Late Imperial China,” Miaw-fen Lu observes that biographies of women indicate the increasing importance of this text in female education, whereas biographies of men
exhibit the opposite. Her explanation is that *The Canon of Filial Piety* played a significant role in political culture before the medieval period, but became mainly a primer after the Southern Song. The marginalization of the text in political and elite circles caused it to figure less prominently in biographies of males until it regained political importance with the support of the Qing dynasty (1636–1912).

On-cho Ng revisits the Gongyang tradition and the concept of the “uncrowned king” in Chapter 14, “Kongzi as the Uncrowned King in Some Qing Gongyang Exegeses.” In their synoptic judgment of the ancient past, Ng maintains, Gongyang commentators of the Qing dynasty not only resisted the destructiveness of time, but also relived, retrieved, and rendered events of yore as transhistorical archetypes that serve as muse and model for contemporary political amelioration. Moreover, the symbolic enthronement of Kongzi as “uncrowned king” introduces a peculiar order of time. Whereas the historical succession of the ancient dynasties is based on a realistic temporality, the mythic systems of Confucius’ reign are built on idealized ethico-moral standards, and thus subvert and claim priority over recorded histories.

The three chapters in Part IV address Confucius and new Confucianisms in modern East Asia. In Chapter 15, “Confucianism, Capitalism, and Shibusawa Eiichi’s *The Analects and the Abacus*,” John A. Tucker discusses Shibusawa Eiichi (1840–1931), who is widely known as the father of Japanese capitalism and was also one of the more outspoken advocates of Confucius’ learning in modern Japan. Tucker examines Shibusawa’s *The Analects and the Abacus* (*Rongo to soroban*) against the bleak assessment by his contemporary Max Weber (1864–1920) of Confucian cultures and their alleged inability to develop capitalism. Tucker suggests that Shibusawa’s life and thought constitute considerable counterevidence to Weber’s thesis, and also offers a historical contextualization of Shibusawa’s promotion of Confucius.

The negative images of Confucius during the 1910s and the 1920s constitute the theme of Chapter 16, “Confucius in the May Fourth Era,” by Q. Edward Wang. After the fall of the Empire, Confucius was associated with conservative political forces that were regarded as causes for the challenges faced by the newly founded Republic. To many intellectuals, the 1911 Revolution was incomplete because it created a new type of government without a new mindset for the Chinese to become citizens of the Republic. Accordingly, Confucianism was declared obsolete – but the question of how much blame to pin on Confucius himself remained open. There was also the unresolved problem of what should replace it.

In Chapter 17, “New Confucianism,” Yong Huang addresses the Confucian response to the challenge posed by modern Western ideology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. What is unique about this movement, often called “New Confucianism” (*xin Rujia* 新儒家), is its attempt to show that traditional Confucian values and such modern Western values as rationality, modernity, science, and democracy are not only compatible, but can also significantly enrich each other. Moreover, it is noteworthy that a small but vocal conservative group of Confucians has emerged. These thinkers stress the political dimension of Confucianism, including meritocracy, and some of them advocate a Confucian constitutionalism.

In today’s bustling China, the figure of Confucius is evidently as controversial as ever, sometimes standing for the right things, sometimes standing for the wrong things, but never standing for nothing. With the conviction that only the rarest of personages
can endure as cultural symbols for century after century, we offer this book to readers in search of diverse perspectives on Confucius and all that he has represented.

Notes

1 Whether the date can be trusted depends on one’s judgment of the text. The Zuo Commentary (Zuo zhuan 左傳). The most even-handed discussion of this issue is now Li (2007, 33–59); see also Blakeley (2004).

2 The officers’ names are Inner Scribe Guò 内史過 and Scribe Yin 史嚚. Inner Scribe Guò, who must have been a royal official, makes another prescient statement in a record dated 649 bce (Yang Bojun 1990, 1.337; Xu Yuangao 2002, 31–35). A manifestly different Scribe Yin appears in connection with an event in 522 bce (Yang Bojun 1990, 4.1415).

3 According to the commentary of Wei Zhao 韋昭 (204–273 CE), his courtesy name was Lao Ziwei 老子亹. In his otherwise thorough study of the legend of Lao Dan 老聃, the archivist who supposedly berated Confucius for his ignorance, Graham (1990, 111–24), does not consider this reference. Scribe Lao is in the right place at the right time: as a member of King Ling’s court, he was from Chu, where Laozi is said to have been born (Sima Qian 1959, 2139), and he was probably an older contemporary of Confucius, just like Lao Dan.

4 The following overview of Confucius’s philosophy is condensed from Goldin (2011, 7–30).

5 Useful treatments of Confucius’ life include Wilhelm (1931, 3–95); Shigeki (1956); Creel (1960, esp. 25–172); Roets (1998); Csikszentmihalyi (2001); Lévi (2002).


7 On the so-called Mandate of Heaven (tianming 天命), see, e.g., Kominami (1992); Shaughnessy (1999, 313–17); Deng Peiling (2011, 30–48); Luo Xinhui (2012). The discussion in Creel (1970, 93–100), is marred by his misconception of the political system as feudalistic.

References


Part I

Representations of Confucius
No discussion of Kongzi's 孔子 life, thought, or significance in the ancient Chinese context can proceed without first confronting two basic problems: (1) what are the earliest sources for Kongzi; and (2) which, if any, of these sources can be relied on for accurate information about him? How one goes about answering the latter question determines to a large extent the version of Kongzi one ends up with. Let us take each question in turn.1

The Sources

The simplest way to measure Kongzi’s impact on the early textual record (with “early” defined as the period ending with the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty in 220 CE) is to count the number of sources2 that include Kongzi sayings, stories, and testimonia. Such an approach yields a remarkably large and diverse assortment of texts that might be grouped into the categories below.

Kongzi-centric Anthologies

Far and away the most important collection of Kongzi material in the Chinese tradition is the Lunyu 論語 (Analects), a heterogeneous mix of stand-alone zi yue 子曰 (the Master says) sayings, mini-dialogues featuring Kongzi’s followers and contemporaries, third-person descriptions of Kongzi’s character and conduct, and sayings attributed to his followers. The Lunyu comprises approximately 16,000 characters across 500 or so entries in twenty chapters. (For more on the Lunyu, see below.)

The received version of the Kongzi jiayu 孔子家語 (Family Sayings of Confucius), a much larger compendium (56,600 characters) of early Kongzi traditions, was compiled by Wang Su 王肅 (195–256) in the third century CE but contains a significant amount
of material from earlier sources. Another third-century compilation that likely includes earlier material is the Kong congzi 孔叢子 (Kong Masters Anthology).

The “Kongzi shijia” 孔叢子世家 (“Hereditary House of Kongzi”) and “Zhongni dizi liezhuang” (“Biographies of Zhong Ni’s Disciples”), chapters 47 and 67 of Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (d. c. 86 BCE) Shiji 史記 (Grand Scribe’s Records), also warrant special mention. As the earliest extant biography of Kongzi, the “Kongzi shijia” in particular has often been relied on to contextualize Kongzi sayings and stories found in other sources.

Canonical Traditions

The classic most closely associated with Kongzi in the early period, and the text most often said to have been “composed” (zuo 作) by Kongzi himself (e.g., at Mengzi 孟子 3B/9), is the Chunqiu 春秋 (Annals). However, the Chunqiu’s value as a source of Kongzi material is limited given that extant versions of the Chunqiu mention Kongzi only once. The version of the Chunqiu within the Zuozhuan 左傳 (Zuo Traditions) recension includes only a brief entry appended to the end of the text and dated to the sixteenth year of the reign of Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公, or 479 BCE: “Summer, the fourth month, on the day jichou 孔丘卒: Kong Qiu died” (夏四月己丑: 孔丘卒). Two other Chunqiu recensions, those of the Gongyang 公羊 and Guliang 谷梁 commentarial traditions, include the line “Kongzi was born” (孔子生) in brief entries dated to 552 BCE (note that Sima Qian dated Kongzi’s birth to 551, the twenty-second year of Duke Xiang’s 襄公 reign, not 552). Of the three Chunqiu commentarial traditions, the Zuozhuan (fourth century BCE?) quotes Kongzi most extensively (×43) and also includes a number of anecdotes in which Kongzi features as a character; the Gongyang and Guliang quote Kongzi only several times apiece.

The Zhouyi 周易 (Zhou Changes) includes about thirty quotations prefaced with the zi yue 子曰 (“the master said”) quotation marker, material that has traditionally been interpreted as quotations of Kongzi despite the lack of any overt references to him. These quotations are clustered within two sections of the text, the Wenyan 文言 (Patterned Words) commentary to the first hexagram (qian 乾) and the Xi zhuan 謹辭傳 (Commentary to the Appended Phrases).

The richest source of Kongzi material among the classics is the Liji 禮記 (Ritual Records). Although the Liji anthology was probably compiled toward the end of the Western Han period (Baker 2006), the pre-imperial provenance of at least two of its chapters – “Zi yi” 緇衣 (“Black Robes”) and “Zhongni xianju” 仲尼閒居 (“Zhong Ni at Leisure”) – has been confirmed by recent manuscript finds. Twenty-two chapters of the Liji quote or reference Kongzi, with four chapters – “Zengzi wen” 曾子問 (“Zengzi Asked”), “Ai gong wen” 哀公問 (“Duke Ai Asked”), “Zhong Ni yanju” 仲尼燕居 (“Zhong Ni at Leisure”), and “Kongzi xianju” 孔子閒居 (“Kongzi At Rest”) – consisting exclusively of Kongzi material. Three additional chapters – “Fang ji” 坊記 (“Embankment Record”), “Biao ji” 表記 (“Exemplary Record”), and “Zi yi” 緇衣 (“Black Robes”) – are collections of zi yue 子曰 (the Master says) sayings. All told, the Liji includes more than 300 statements prefaced with zi yue or Kongzi yue (Kongzi said). The Yili 儀禮 (Etiquette and Ritual), another canonical ritual compendium, contains only a single Kongzi saying.

The Xiaojing 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety) is a much shorter, 2,000-character, dialogue between Kongzi and his disciple Zengzi 曾子 on the subject of xiao 孝 (filial piety).
From the mid-Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE) onward, the belief that Kongzi was responsible for compiling and editing the canonical traditions of the Yi, Shu 書 (Documents), Shi 詩 (Odes), Li 禮 (Rituals), Yue 樂 (Music), and Chunqiu into a single, unified canon meant that all of the classics could, in theory, be read as sources of Kongzi’s wisdom, regardless of whether they quoted or mentioned him.

Commentaries and Other Scholastic Texts

Within the Yi 易 (Changes) tradition, these include the several Kongzi yue and zi yue commentaries discovered in the Mawangdui 馬王堆 manuscript find dated to the early part of the Western Han period (see below), in addition to the zi yue commentary layers within the Zhouyi itself.

Within the Shi 詩 tradition, the largest source of Kongzi material is the Hanshi waizhuan 韓詩外傳 (Outward Commentary to the Han Odes), attributed to Han Ying 韓嬰 (second century BCE). The Hanshi waizhuan includes more than seventy sections with Kongzi sayings, stories, and testimonia. The commentary of the Mao Shi 毛詩 (Mao Odes) also includes a handful of Kongzi sayings. Among pre-Han sources, the so-named “Kongzi shilun” 孔子詩論 ("Kongzi on the Odes") manuscript from the looted Shanghai Museum collection presents Kongzi as a source of miscellaneous commentaries on the Shi.

Within the Shu 書 tradition, the Western Han Shangshu dazhuan 尚書大傳 (Great Commentary to the Exalted Documents), a text traditionally attributed to Fu Sheng 伏勝 (third–second century BCE), contains a few dozen Kongzi quotations. Chapter two of the Kong congzi, “Lun shu” 論書 ("Discussing the Documents"), consists of several dialogues between Kongzi and his disciples on the subject of the Shu.

Extant commentaries dating to the Eastern Han period, including Zhao Qi’s 趙岐 (110–201 CE) Mengzi commentary to the Mengzi, Wang Yi’s 王逸 (fl. c. 120 CE) Chuci 楚辭 (Verses of Chu) commentary, and the several commentaries attributed to Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), frequently invoke Kongzi but tend to borrow overwhelmingly from the Lunyu. Other scholastic texts that make liberal use of Kongzi include Xu Shen’s 許慎 (c. 55–149 CE) Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 (Explanations of Characters Simple and Complex) dictionary and the Baihu tong 白虎通 (Summary of the White Tiger Hall [Discussions]), which purports to be a summary of an imperial conference called in 79 CE to resolve disagreements over the interpretation of the classics.

Discrete Kongzi yue 孔子曰 (Kongzi said) comments on various canonical traditions can also be found scattered throughout the early corpus within many texts not exclusively devoted to commentary.

Historiographical Sources

In the pre-imperial era, these include the aforementioned Zuozhuan and the Guoyu 國語 (Discourses of the States), the latter of which contains only ten or so Kongzi quotations. Its Kongzi-centric biographies aside, the Shiji 史記 (Grand Scribe’s Records) includes a large number of Kongzi quotations scattered throughout the work, particularly within Taishigong yue 太史公曰 (His Excellency the Grand Scribe says) comments, the Shiji postface, and other passages written in the voice of the Shiji author. Ban Gu’s 班固 (32–92 CE) Hanshu 漢書 (History of the Han) and Fan Ye’s 范曄 (398–445 CE) Hou Hanshu 後
Hanshu (History of the Later Han) are invaluable sources for the representation and use of Kongzi in the Western Han, Xin, and Eastern Han dynasties, particularly as reflected in imperial edicts and memorials.

**Masters Literature**

Kongzi figures prominently in the masters texts of the early period, both as a quotable authority and positive exemplar and also as an object of derision and parody. Among sources attributed to the masters of the Warring States era, the pro-Kongzi Mengzi 孟子 (fourth century?) and Xunzi 荀子 of Xun Qing 荀卿 (fourth–third century?) contain a substantial number of Kongzi sayings, stories, and testimonia, many of which are clustered within the last five chapters of the Xunzi. At the other extreme stands the Mozi 墨子 of Mo Di 墨翟 (fifth century?), who quotes or references Kongzi in several passages, all but one of which are polemical. The Han Feizi 韓非子 of Han Fei 韓非 (third century) and Yanzi chunqiu 晏子春秋 of Yan Ying 晏婴 (d. 500 BCE) contain dozens more quotations and references, many of which are critical. The Kongzi material of the Zhuangzi 莊子, comprising close to a hundred Kongzi quotations and a number of Kongzi dialogues, is a mix of positive and negative portrayals. Particularly noteworthy is chapter 29, “Dao Zhi” 盜跖 (“Robber Zhi”), in which Kongzi fails to persuade a notorious brigand to follow a more virtuous path, with humiliating results.

In the Han period, Jia Yi’s 賈誼 (c. 201–c. 169) Xinshu 新書 (New Writings), Lu Jia’s 陸賈 (d. c. 150 BCE) Xingyu 新語 (New Sayings), Dong Zhongshu’s 董仲舒 (c. 179–c. 104) Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals), Huan Tan’s 桓譚 (43 BCE–23 CE) Xinlun 新論 (New Discourses), Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) Fayan 法言 (Model Sayings), Wang Chong’s 王充 (d. 100 CE) Lunheng 論衡 (Discourse Balance), Wang Fu’s 王符 (c. 85–c. 163) Qianfu lun 潛夫論 (Discourses of a Hidden Master), and Xu Gan’s 徐幹 (d. c. 217) Zhonglun 中論 (Discourses that Hit the Mark) all contain a substantial number of Kongzi references and quotations. Of particular note are the Fayan, a text modeled on the Lunyu in which Yang Xiong presents himself in the manner of a latter-day Kongzi, and chapter 28 of the Lunheng, “Wen Kong” 问孔 (“Interrogating Kongzi”), which poses a number of objections to the Kongzi of the Lunyu.

**Other Compendia**

In the Warring States period, these include the dozens of sayings, stories, and testimonia within the Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 (The Annals of Lü Buwei), a text compiled under the auspices of Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE), a powerful minister at the Qin court. Roughly a century later, the Huainanzi 淮南子 of Liu An 劉安 (d. 122 BCE), the King of Huainan, made frequent use of Kongzi as an exemplar and quotable authority.

In the latter part of the Western Han, the Yantie lun 鹽鐵論 (Iron and Salt Discussions), a record of a court debate between certain high officials and invited Ru 儒 in 81 BCE, includes dozens of Kongzi sayings and numerous references to various pieces of Kongzi lore. Imperial bibliographer and prolific compiler Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE) included hundreds of Kongzi-related passages within his Shuiyuan 說苑 (Garden of Persuasions) and to a lesser extent in the Xinxu 新序 (New Arrangement) and Lienü zhuan 列女傳 (Traditions of Exemplary Women).