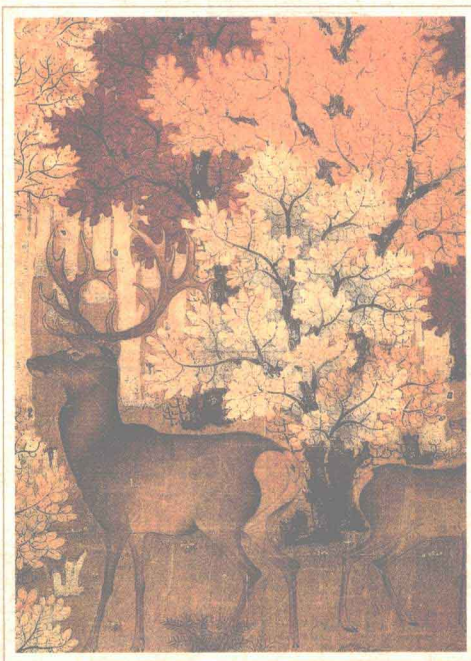


Insights into Chinese Culture

中国文化读本(英文版)

叶朗 (Ye Lang)

朱良志 (Zhu Liangzhi)



外语教学与研究出版社

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作者 / Authors:

叶朗 (Ye Lang)
朱良志 (Zhu Liangzhi)

译者 / Translators:

章思英 (Zhang Siying)
陈海燕 (Chen Haiyan)

英文审订 / English Consultants:

May Yee (加拿大)
Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta (加拿大)



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Preface

The 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, with athletes and visitors attending from 205 countries and regions, will be the largest ever Olympic Games in history.

Since the dawning of the 21st century, the international community has been paying greater attention to China. People around the world want to learn more about Chinese culture in more comprehensive and profound ways. The Beijing Olympics will provide just such an opportunity. Friends from all parts of the world will savor the 5,000-year-long culture of this country and see what modern China is really like today.

It is at such a hopeful time that Professors Ye Lang and Zhu Liangzhi have written this book to share with readers their insights into Chinese culture.

Several years ago, Professor Ye Lang and I became friends when we worked together in initiating aesthetic education programs for children and youth, in an effort to improve their overall qualifications. Professor Ye is an influential philosopher and aesthetics scholar in contemporary China. In 2002 and 2003, he concurrently served as the dean for three departments at Peking University: Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Arts. Professor Zhu has long been engaged in research in Chinese philosophy and arts, with his special focus on Zen Buddhism, painting, calligraphy, and landscape gardening.

Beyond general knowledge, this book provides a detailed, vivid introduction to certain unique features and highlights of Chinese culture. The authors have attempted to represent the spirit and core values of Chinese culture, especially those with universal significance. They have also tried to exemplify the inner world, the life views and aesthetic interests of the Chinese people. They hope this book will serve as a popular introduction to Chinese culture for readers both in China and abroad. At the same time, they also hope their insights can provide

a new perspective for readers to gain a deeper understanding of the true essence of Chinese culture.

Subjects covered in his book range from ancient wonders such as the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Terracotta Army, and traditional residences of ordinary people, to enduring artworks of calligraphy, painting, landscape gardening, Peking Opera, and porcelain. Under the authors' pen, these subjects have all been imbued with a living spirit to epitomize Chinese people's real life interests. Even in a game of go, the authors have discovered "kindred friendship" among the players, who play a "good game" through principles of cooperation and coexistence. In the description and analysis of *A Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival*, or of Old Beijing and Old Shanghai, the authors provide readers with glimpses of Chinese people's contentment with a peaceful and harmonious life. This is perhaps part of the reason why Chinese culture has lasted for thousands of years.

Not only is the text written in a superbly fluent and fascinating way, the accompanying illustrations also bring to life the splendor of many aspects of Chinese culture.

The publication of *Insights into Chinese Culture* is a timely addition to the content of the "People's Olympics."

李岚清

Li Lanqing

Vice Premier of China from 1993 to 2003

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Wisdom and Beliefs

Human beings have only one home under the heavens. How we arrange our domestic lives and how we live together in harmony is the essence of traditional Chinese thinking. First and foremost, Chinese culture regards human life as part of nature and, as such, the only way for us to survive is to live in harmony with nature. The fundamental significance of civilization lies in the creation of a peaceful world, which also requires avoiding conflict between humans and nature. Instead of dictating to nature, people should hold nature in awe and gratitude. A second characteristic of Chinese culture is its emphasis on harmonious human relationships. An individual cannot live without community and society. Thus Chinese culture strives to build a world of harmony based on friendship between individuals, mutual assistance between families, and respect between nations. Thirdly, Chinese thinking stresses self-reflection. People should not only understand the external world, but also and more importantly, improve their internal state of mind. Only after humans have cleared away any intentions of combating nature, are we able to live up to the philosophy of living in harmony with nature.





1. *Confucian Thought on Heaven and Humanity*

Confucius (551-479 BC), known in China as Kongzi, given name Qiu and alias Zhongni, was a native of Zouyi (present-day Qufu in Shandong Province) of the State of Lu during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). A great thinker, educator and founder of Confucianism, Confucius is an ancient sage to the Chinese people. His words and life story were recorded by his disciples and their students in *The Analects (Lunyu)*.

An enduring classic of Chinese culture, *The Analects* has influenced all thinkers, writers and politicians in the over-2,000-year-long history of China after Confucius. No scholar could truly understand this long-standing culture or the inner world of the ancient Chinese without this book.

Much of Confucian thought on Heaven and people represent universal human values. This is perhaps why Confucian thought in the 21st century still retains the interest of not only the Chinese but also people in other parts of the world.

Confucius on Heaven: the Source of Everything

In the Shang (1600-1046 BC) and Zhou (1046-256 BC) dynasties, the prevalent concept of “Heaven” was that of a personified god, which influenced Confucius. Generally, however, Confucius regarded “Heaven” as nature. He said, “Heaven does not speak in words. It speaks through the rotation of the four seasons and the growth of all living things.” Obviously, Heaven equaled nature, in the eyes of Confucius. Moreover, nature was not a lifeless mechanism separate from humans; instead, it was the great world of life and the process of creation of life. Human life was part and parcel of nature as a whole.

Confucius’ equation of Heaven with the creation of life was an innovative idea in his time. The natural process of life creation was the “way of Heaven.” This idea was later developed in *The Book of Changes (Yijing)*, as it stated “Continuous creation of life is change.”

As the natural process of creation of life, Heaven was the source of all living things and the source of all values. This was the “virtue of Heaven.” Thus, *The Book of Changes* said, “The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is creating life.”

In the natural process of creation of life, Heaven had its inner purpose in creating all things as well as protecting and improving life. Heaven had originated humanity, and humans were obliged to accomplish this purpose. In other words, humans are born with a sense of “heavenly mission,” and this is the meaning of human life.

Confucian “Heaven” also had a certain sacred element, which was related to it being the source of life. Thus Confucius required people to hold Heaven in awe. He says that a person of virtue must “respect his heavenly mission,” listen to and live out the purpose of Heaven by caring for and improving life.

Under the influence of Confucius, the ancient Chinese developed a sense of awe and belief in Heaven. To them, Heaven was the highest sacred being, with its

profound mystery never to be fully understood by mortals. It was not a supernatural, personified deity, but was the world of ever-generating life. As the most intelligent of all beings, humans should take to heart the purpose of Heaven by cherishing life. If one remained “ignorant and disrespectful of one’s heavenly mission” by killing or maiming life, one would be punished by Heaven. Confucius said, “He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray.” The Confucian respect for and belief in Heaven represented a form of religious spiritualism of the ancient Chinese.

In the 21st century, the Confucian caveat of “standing in awe of the ordinances of Heaven” still holds true, as human society begins to pay greater attention to ecological civilization. Humans should indeed listen to the voice of nature, respecting and loving it as the world of life. This is our sacred mission and gives value to all human life.

Confucius on People: *ren* (仁) and *li* (礼)

Ren and *li* are the two core concepts of Confucius’ doctrine about people.

When his student Fan Chi asked him about *ren*, Confucius replied, “Love of people.” This is Confucius’ most important interpretation of *ren*. Love for the people is universal love. Confucius further emphasized that this kind of love should “begin with the love of one’s parents.” He believed no one could love people in general if they did not even love their own parents. Confucius regarded “filial piety and fraternal duty” as the essence of *ren*. *The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)* quotes Confucius as saying, “The greatest love for people is the love of one’s parents.” He also said, “Children should not travel far while their parents are alive. If they have no choice but to do so, they must retain some restraint.” He did not mean that children should not leave their parents at all. What he meant was that children should not make their parents anxious about them while away from home. Confucius said again, “Children should think often of the age of their parents. They should feel happy for the health and longevity of their parents. They should also feel concern for the aging of their parents.”



Cry of Deer in a Red Maple Forest (detail), unknown artist, Song Dynasty, a scene of contentment and harmony, as valued by Confucian scholars

By *ren*, Confucius meant universal love based on love of one's parents. How should people love one another then? Confucius said, "One should be aware that other people may have similar desires as oneself. While fulfilling one's desires, allow others to fulfill their desires as well." He further said, "Do not do toward others anything you would not want to be done to you." Thus from oneself to one's family, from family to society, one should extend love to all people. Mencius (c. 372-289 BC), a great Confucian scholar, best summarized *ren* as, "loving one's parents, loving the people, loving everything in the world."

Today, the Confucian doctrine of "Do not do toward others anything you would not want to be done to you" still holds true for humankind.

Li refers to rituals, traditions and norms in social life. Of these, Confucius regarded burial rituals and ancestral worship rituals as the most important, because they arose from human feelings. He said, "A child should not leave his parents' bosom until he is three years old." He naturally loved his parents.

The ritual of wearing mourning for a deceased parent for three years was an expression of the child's love and remembrance.

Confucius placed emphasis on *li* with the aim of preserving social order, stability and harmony. *The Analects* says, "The role of *li* is to maintain harmony among people."

Li also has philosophical implications. While individuals have a limited lifespan, life in nature is everlasting. Life is given by one's parents and extended through one's children. In this way, a limited, individual life becomes merged with the limitless life of nature; the individual dream of eternal life can thus come true. Through burial rituals and ancestral worship rituals, people are able to experience the everlasting continuity of life, appreciating the value and meaning of life. This gives people metaphorical solace.

Confucius on the State of Life

Before Confucius, only the nobility had the right to education. He was the first figure in Chinese history to initiate private education. According to historical records, Confucius taught for many years and trained 3,000 disciples. A total of 72 of them excelled in the "six arts," i.e., ritual, music, archery, (carriage) driving, calligraphy, and mathematics. A great educator, Confucius has been admired by later generations as the "sage of sages."

Confucius believed the basic goal of education was to cultivate "persons of virtue," who should have sound character and uplifted minds. Such persons should be able to shoulder important social responsibilities and to make contributions to society. Confucius regarded lofty ideals, great virtue, love of people, and the "six arts" as the general principles of education. Of these, virtue was the most important. His students were involved in a variety of professions, including politics, trade, education, diplomacy, ritual ceremony, and classifying ancient books. Whatever they did, they all wanted to improve their learning of the humanities and to enhance their virtue.