

A Lead-up to Confucianism

洪庆福 著

儒学精义

子曰：吾十有五而志乎学，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳顺，七十而从心所欲不逾矩。

有子曰：礼之用，和为贵。先王之道斯为美，小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以礼节之，亦不可行也。

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儒学: 一个比较与阐述的视角

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Preface



ublications in English on Chinese humanities, with particular reference to Confucianism, have long been a notable presence in academic life both at home and abroad. Naturally, the question itself emerges: why another while there is already choice among many?

A marked proportion of English learners on Chinese collegiate campuses simply demonstrate little knowledge, or even concern about, the many cultural milestones Confucianism has recorded, for good or bad, in the progression of Chinese civilization. Growing by the day their verbal expressiveness on issues relating to the West as they are, they just find it a tall order to address Chinese cultural themes in proportionate effectiveness. These two observations, when combined, readily suggest or well translate into a cultural one-sidedness at best and cultural unconsciousness at worst. For all their alleged command of English, as a result, years of academic pursuit finish with only a “one-way ticket” to excellence in terms of broadly defined mastery of English, and, this “pass” comes to nothing substantial in advancing themselves to the demanding world of cross-cultural communication in an age labeled “multiculturalism” and “globalization”, all on a re-engineered traditionalism and localism basis.

A corresponding picture featuring international students doing Chinese studies, as is everywhere recognizable and instantly acknowledged by many, lends an almost equal cause for serious concern. While offered a broad basis for approaching and, then, appreciating the Chinese humanities, they are in the want of a



non-partisan guide to the marrow of cultural China and its fabric of life along the lines of Confucianism. Volumes-thick scholarly writings harass and perplex those expected to get initiated; pocket-size general-interest ones insult, by way of over-simplicity, the intellect and judgment of those well under way to Confucian scholarship; and textbook-format ones neither suffice in extending the horizons of nor stand chances to enrich the grounds for those well-established in Chinese studies. More seriously, there remains to be filled the vacuum of a Chinese-authored (in English) introduction—hermeneutics-and-comparativism-perspectived at once—to Confucianism, Confucian China and Confucian culture.

The delivery to you of this 3-volume long *Confucianism: A Comparative Approach & Interpretative Study*—with its respective subheadings being *A Lead-up to Confucianism*, *Confucianism: Ascension to State Ideology & the Thick and Thin Through*, *Confucianism: the Rise and Fall of the Principle and Mind Doctrines*—is not just meant to supply a cure to the situations briefed on in the above. Aside from an analysis and appreciation of the Confucianism-styled Chinese cultural expression within an interpretative historical framework coupled with an approach lent by comparative studies of Confucianism and Christianity, another key intention is to recapture and present the Confucian impulses to seek answers to the mysteries of human experience in this secular-oriented Oriental land; decipher or carve out order in relating the Chinese man to his perceived universe; respond creatively or otherwise to nature, both inner and outer, as well as to the shifting landscapes of dynastic rise and fall; express the earthly ambitions of the Confucian man himself in his rigidly stratified society; and create lasting monuments in variously fashioned forms indigenous to the Confucian mind.

Also, I have it as my aim first to demystify the Chinese cultural record by showing that Confucianism, as is true of all other

time-honored ideologies, did not spring force spontaneously or independently of other beliefs or creeds, but reflected a set of specific shaping forces of history out of which its material and spiritual representations emerged and, then, to shed light on the view that the many questions, ideas, desires and longings prevailing in a China, a Chinese culture, and a Chinese society now in transition, carry in their "physiology", "psychology" and "ethos" Confucianism for part of their living functions, i. e. just as human endeavors are inseparable from the nature of the universe, the passage for China, the nation, the culture, and the society, to modernity will be ill fated if at the cost of severing linkages with China's national heritage, cultural legacy and societal tradition, of which Confucianism is unmistakably a most enduring element.

Above all, this presentation of Confucianism is expected to serve as a jumping-off point for further exploration into Confucian premises as well as an invitation to promote intercultural dialogue and multi-cultural symbiosis.

In terms of structure and content, the materials used, culled from both primary and secondary sources, are offered chronologically. Each chapter will begin with an introduction designed to bring up a brief sketch of some of the most important dates, people, events, and developments of the period or topics under focal study. Put otherwise, subject-matter is produced successively and presented in a meaningful historical context, facilitating the eye and mind with an unobstructed view of the prevailing historical and material conditions that so powerfully impacted the form, content, reach and reverberation of each weighty Confucian expression in the realm of attitude and idea and in that of cultural artifact. This approach, whenever needs be, is modified to accommodate culturally significant ideas or developments by way of pulling them out of the chapter or section covering their period of occurrence and discussed either separately or in conjunction or



comparison with others that came to life in other periods or entered the cultural stage of other nations. A detailed survey and, hence, treatment of all the Confucianism-related Chinese humanities can not only be unwieldy and confusing, but also go out of bounds for the purposes of this approach to and study of Confucianism. Instead, I have distilled from the mass of available information covering Confucianism in all its sweeping historical periods what I consider the crucial points, always aiming to grasp the essence of the mosaic of political, economic and social developments, bringing to light, thereby, the pervasive themes attracting, choices made and propositions upheld by the Confucian scholar-official (both conventionally favored ones and those discounted or neglected for various reasons) and the Confucian society in both times of certainty and confidence and those of challenge and crisis.

For the generation of this guide to a comparative and interpretative study of Confucianism, I'm grateful to many an encouraging voice, instructive hand, enthusiastic eye, and enlightening mind. I owe special thanks to Professor Rolph R. Mirus, University of Edmonton, Canada. He was a major force in driving the need for such a writing into my mind when I was working on a CIDA (Canada International Development Agency) project in the 1995-1996 period. Professor Sun Jingyao, Shanghai Normal University, Professor Fang Hanwen and Professor Ye Linsheng, Soochow University, they all shared my vision and affected, both with their insight into comparativism and Chinese culture and with their intelligent concern for structure and detail, the way I discuss certain issues and frame particular arguments, and for this I'm most appreciative.

I'm also fortunate enough to have been extended invaluable and hard-to-single-out support from the following teaching and research staff members with the Foreign Studies School, Soochow University: Zhou Zhengxing, Lu Zhaoming, Xu Qinggen, Ding Wanjiang, Du



Zhengmin, Zhu Quanming and Chen Gao. I wish to recognize in particular the contributions of Miss Yang Zhihong: working with me on the project all along, she has assisted me all the way from manuscript through clean copy with patience, smile, and advice, a vote of confidence in this undertaking.

This writing is a rewarding experience. The task has been made more enjoyable by many of my students. Rather than the “dum-dum” kind of empty-eyed gawkier, they have exhibited surprising originality in the feedback process, a follow-up to my instructing them on traditional Chinese culture with the draft of this book functioning as core reading material.

Finally much credit for the successful production of this 3-volume long project goes to Shanghai Educational Publishing House. I offer my thanks for their sponsorship, academic review and criticism. Equally, I acknowledge the cooperative spirit the editorial staff have displayed in transforming manuscript into this beautiful book. Mr. Zhang Wenzhong and Ms. Ni Yajing deserve a special note of appreciation: their unflappability, good humor, and eagle eyes have led to considerable improvements in the launch of this project.



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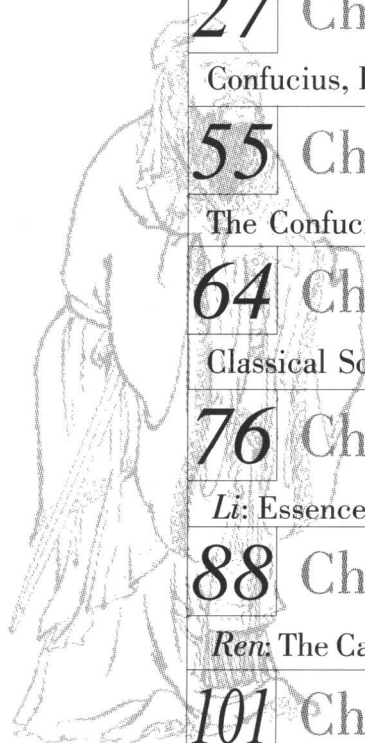
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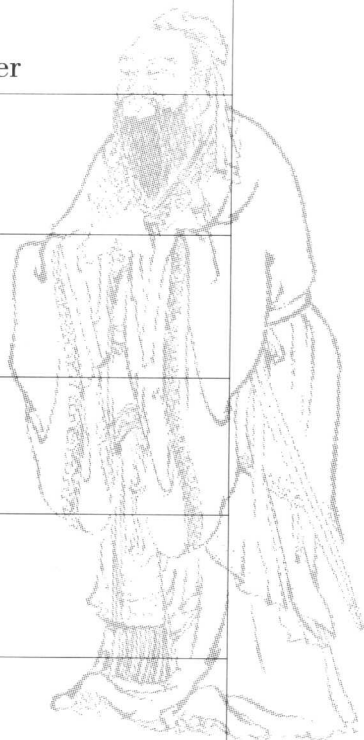
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Chapter 1

A Historical Lead-up to Confucianism



or any serious attempt at an understanding of the nature of any given thought, it calls invariably for a detailed inquiry into the historical developments that make its birth possible. As the socio-cultural institutions of the Xia, Shang, and the early Zhou times constituted the core frame of historic reference for the Confucian Way of man and the Confucian Way of society, it makes it all the more important here to trace the shaping forces of history that provided the background against which Confucianism emerged.

The farther things go back to ages past, the flimsier available data becomes, however. While Confucius referred to the Xia era, which is now generally accepted as the 2205 B. C. through 1766 B. C. period, as one of the ages of "Great Harmony", we find in the *Analects* only limited reference to the Xia rule. Just who were the ancestors of the Xia people remains as dazzling a question as just how they founded the royal house and ruled the lands. Even with the proliferation of legends about earliest Chinese times (which, of course, do not count much in historical scholarship), of other source materials passed down to us from the Zhou Dynasty onward, and of modern archaeological findings, we can form at best only the following faint picture of the Xia hunting-fishing society: In a time roughly contemporaneous with the late Neolithic age, there rose in China proper a few clans, or royal houses, out of which the Xia House grew most eminent toward the end of the 3rd millennium B. C. . By this time, people had already been instructed by such legendary figures as

Fu Xi, Shen Nong and Huang Di to domesticate cattle, fish on the boat paddled with the oar, cultivate the five grains with the plow, clear with fire grill the hills and plains of trees and bushes, barter daily necessities at the market, and entertain themselves (ruling clans) with music.

The Shang reign (c. 1766-c. 1122 B. C.) has left us much more in verifiable history. Viewed by Confucius as the prototype of the early Zhou ruling style, the Shang rule extended over a broad area all the way from modern Xi'an to present-day Jinan. Recorded history shows the Shang as a settled agricultural society already, with the family tilling the millet field with spade, hoe, mattock (shod with stone or shell) and foot plow, breeding goats and fowl, and, having tamed elephants assist in heavy building operations.

With agriculture being the chief industry, the Shang court was deeply concerned with calendrical reckoning. Lunation studies bore encouraging results. Intercalation was introduced as early as the 1324-1266 B. C. period—the court would add an intercalary month in time so as to bring the lunar calendar in line with the solar year. It is something of a wonder that the Shang people came to recognize the mean length of a solar year as being a rough 365 1/4-day cycle. What is more wonder-striking, perhaps, is the fact that by the end of the Shang rule, something close to a decimal system was in the making—days, say, were divided into ten parts instead of seven.

Corresponding to these developments in agriculture, astronomy, and math was an advancement in the arts. Bronze casting brought socketed axe heads, arrowheads, fish hooks, knives and halberds for hunting, fishing and warring purposes. Hairpins, washbasins, vessels for liquor and other bronze objects like awls were offered to the marketplace in immense amounts. A proliferation of pottery kilns turned out the first fine white wares. Glazed pottery featuring a brownish body witnessed high-temperature firing techniques. Carving in stone and ivory flowered for the first time in Chinese history. Marble



sculpture in animal and human shapes was brought to a high level of artistry. Impressive was the sight of both jewel-encrusted vases, axes, swords and bone articles inlaid with turquoise or mother-of-pearl. And, clay stamps were made to impress decorated designs.

The Confucian concept of rectification of name and position, as we shall find later in this book, was based in part on division of labor. It was in the Shang times that division of labor done the conscious way as known to China entered its first phase. While we find it difficult to ascertain whether or not there had been formed a class of professionals engaged in the above-mentioned arts and crafts as distinct from the farmer, we read in historical archives that merchants were busy trading across the country. The coinage of the term 商人 (*shang ren* in pinyin, literally meaning the Shang tradesman) may arguably be traced to those merchants who, relying on jade as a chief medium of exchange, bought and sold salt, seashells, silk (used primarily as wrapping paper for precious metals) and hemp cloth.

The Shang society in its early years came to Confucius as one of peace, with farmers, craftsmen, and traders harmoniously integrated under the Shang royal house. What attracted him most was the establishment of the Shang Establishment of (religious) rituals and social etiquette, for it was in this system that the Confucian ideal of an orderly society saw its first seeds.

Just like the Xia House, the Shang one rose out of dozens of clans on the bases of economic and military strength. To legitimize, if that's the word, their rule, the Shang overlords developed a leniency toward monotheism from animism. To further justify their claim to the proprietary power in linking the secular with celestial spheres, they professed themselves to be descendants of the Almighty Lord of Heaven. Posing himself as the intermediary between man and the many mystic forces, the Shang sovereign and his court practiced divination, an effort, in part, to attribute public discontent to causes beyond the control of the sovereign and his court. The employment of bones and tortoise carapaces for sacred and/or oracular purposes, in



passing, exercised significant impact on Chinese civilization. Out of the bone-and-carapace inscriptions—either written with a brush with the help of cinnabar or black fluid, or incised against the scorched areas on the bones of oxen and/or seashells—were born the first Chinese characters: pictographs, ideographs, and phonographs. This very appearance of the Chinese script also helped create the royal post of the recorder of events, the forerunner of Chinese archivist. (In Shang times, this post was majorly taken by astrologers.)

Religion went hand in hand with divination. Thanks to advancing techniques, ceremonial vessels made of stone, bronze and pottery offered ready service, on religious occasions, to the sovereign and all classes down the then social hierarchy, with slaves being the only exception. Vessels of the most beautiful design were of course reserved for the head of the Shang House, while the ones of lesser design and value were used by nobles and, then, freemen. Accompanying these rituals were hymns and other forms of music performed by the wind and percussion, stone chimes, ocarinas, and other musical instruments. It was in these ritual ceremonies that the position of the Shang sovereign was secured as Lord of the Shang people. Ancestor worship functioned, on the lower end of the scale, as the chief religion through which the Shang sovereign commanded his subjects. With the creation of the ancestral shrine, the Shang ruler not just strengthened the royal succession system done the father-to-son fashion, and or the elder-brother-to-younger-brother way, but also so linked ancestral cult with the worship of Heaven, the then Chinese Almighty Lord, that ethics and religion joined forces in propping up the rule of the Shang House. Throughout it all, the primordial elements of the Confucian moral canon came to light, the essence of it being loyalty to the sovereign and filial piety.

Regardless of the foregoing, unrivaled military prowess—Confucius ranked the art of war among the six arts (to be discussed later) he meant for his followers to pursue—remained a key source of power for the Shang court. Records show that the court commanded, on



average, a 3,000-5,000 strong armed force. Equipped with bronze spears and halberds on the one hand, and protected by shields and helmets on the other, it would charge to the battlefield, should needs be, on chariots drawn by two or four horses.

“Set-to-win” days, however, were doomed. Sometime around the 14th century B. C., militarily strong nomads in the north started posing an acute threat to the Shang House. Worse, certain native tribes in the east were rising up against its rule. Wars were fought, only to put the Shang reign at increasing disadvantage: the royal house now under the rule of Pangeng, which had previously occupied several seats geographically speaking, had but to move its capital to Yinxu near modern-day Anyang by the Yellow River. Yet, this came to no long avail. The Shang House saw henceforward a fast exhaustion of strength. Its replacement by the Zhou House was only a matter of time. And very soon.

The Zhou were a nomadic people in origin. The Chinese term for “Zhou” found frequent appearances in the Shang oracular bone inscriptions, meaning first a friendly tributary neighbor, with inter-marriages being not uncommon, and then as a hostile rival competing for dominance over the Central China plain. Hard as it is to determine the dates of its birth and the specifics of its founding fathers, evidence confirms that in trying to avoid the pressure of strong tribes to its north, the Zhou migrated to the Weihe river valley during the reign of Emperor Wen’s grandfather around the end of the 13th century B. C. . Wen and his son, Wu, who were to figure importantly in the Confucian paradigm of humane rulers, displayed the then unparalleled statecraft. The father, depicted by Confucius as being intelligent and benevolent, joined persuasion with conquest to win over support from weaker tribes to his diplomatic-military drive against the Shang and other lesser houses that declined to accept the Zhou hegemony. Toward the final years of his reign, the Zhou House had emerged as the most formidable power to rival the Shang. When the son assumed



overlordship upon the father's death over what is now two thirds of China proper, the Shang was fast deteriorating. While the father recognized the political and cultural superiority of the Shang out of loyalty, the son saw no such bondage. Rather, he proclaimed that since the Shang was ruling against the Will of Heaven as was manifested by its last ruler's despotism, Heaven's Mandate had passed to the Zhou. So it seemed. When Wu led the final conquest, the Shang vanguard defected to join the Zhou.

Wu had hardly any time to represent in person this Mandate, for he died shortly after his armies vanquished the Shang forces in 1112 B. C. . The death of Wu, however, lent no serious cause for worry. His brother, Zhou Gong, or Duke of Zhou, who had assisted him in his probing expeditions against the Shang, rendered a ready help to Chen, Wu's son. Serving as regent during Chen's reign, Zhou Gong consolidated the now huge Zhou territory and re-instituted the suzerainty of the Zhou House after putting out a 3-year long Shang rebellion. In order to curb possible incursions from northern barbarians, check future uprisings from within the old Shang domain, and assume effective control over newly conquered lands, Zhou Gong sent the Zhou kinsmen to strategic locations and border areas, executing in the meanwhile the blueprint he drafted on civil administration. What was more important, he upgraded the Zhou culture by incorporating the erstwhile superior Shang norms into his newly constructed systems of religious ritual, social etiquette, and political rule. The major effort he made in this direction was at building up cohesion of the Zhou Establishment through strengthening familial relationship among the nobility and identifying the Zhou extended family system with its political structure. Zhou Gong recorded such personal accomplishments in terms of moral self cultivation and such socio-cultural contribution to the Zhou regime that Confucius, some 600 years later, was to regard him as the Pre-sage, and the feudal institution he put into shape as the ideal sum total of the ways of man, society and government.



But just what happened between the times of Zhou Gong, the progenitor of Confucianism, and Confucius, its founder? How come that man and his position no longer matched by the time of Confucius? What on earth went awry?

As said earlier, Zhou Gong delegated to nobles ruling power over strategic and border regions in the Zhou sphere of influence. For a sizable period following Zhou Gong's death, these kinsmen duly recognized the Zhou Son of Heaven. The domains assigned to them buttressed the Zhou order in much the same way that the line of lordship as enacted by Zhou Gong was complied with in the family line where the elder brother enjoyed seniority and political superiority. Also, satellite cities which were first built at convenient distances from the capital city of Gaojing (near present-day Xi'an) bred more and more satellite towns in the process of sub-enfeudalization. By joining them with the above-mentioned strategic and border areas, the Zhou court wove a feudal network stretching to the four corners of the Zhou rule.

As time went on, however, there appeared several centrifugal forces. At the turn of the 1st millennium B. C., some 20-70 domains or the so-called states, each with its own fortified towns, had gradually won each of their own territorial independence or solidarity, so to speak. In an effort to enlarge their domains so that their own kinsmen and/or relatives could be satisfied in their demand for special fiefs with exclusive land and slave-owning privileges, some of these states set about extending their influence to other states by such means as arranging inter-state marriages and polishing military dominance. Resultingly, some weak states had but to accept vassal status imposed upon themselves by their powerful neighbors. Worse still, the building of strong local ties and the developing of parochial interests of the feudal lords began to take precedence over loyalty to the Zhou head.

That was not the end of the story yet. At the same time that these states and the fiefs therewithin were consolidating their land and slave ownership, the Zhou sovereign found an increasing shortage of land to