Chinese Philosophy

Philosophy 201
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Classical China

BACKGROUND
Classical Chinese Civilization

- Xia Dynasty (2100-1760 BCE)
- Shang Dynasty (1760-1046 BCE)
- Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE)
  - Western Zhou (1046-771)
  - Duke of Zhou
  - Eastern Zhou (770-256)
    - Spring and Autumn Period (771-476)
      - *Laozi (605-530)
      - Confucius (550-479)
      - Mozi
    - Warring States Period (476-221)
      - Mencius (371-289)
      - Zhuangzi (369-286)
      - Daodejing (300-250)
- Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE)
## Linguistic Presuppositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Classical Chinese</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Substantial</td>
<td>• Eventful</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A world of things</td>
<td>• A world of processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Language is descriptive</td>
<td>• Language is performative, exhortative</td>
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• “The young woman who just entered the room is very bright.”
• “Just now room-inside enter that-young-woman very bright.”
  • *Gangcai wuzili laide xiaojie feichang congming.*
Classical Chinese

- Interested in understanding processes, not in seeking the essence of things
  - No appearance-reality distinction
  - What is a tree? vs. What does a tree do?
  - What is proper government? vs. How does one govern properly?
  - ‘Person’ as an entity that has experiences vs. as an ongoing event, defined by roles and relationships

- Change is the only constant
  - *Yijing (I Ching)*
  - Parent-child relationship as illustration
Confucius and Mencius

CONFUCIANISM
Key Concepts in Confucianism

- Important terms
  - Dao 道
  - Tian 天
  - Junzi 君子
  - Xin 心

“It is the person who is able to broaden the way, not the way that broadens the person.” (15.29)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

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“Having a sense of appropriate conduct as one’s basic disposition, developing it in observing ritual propriety, expressing it with modesty, and consummating it in making good on one’s word: this then is an exemplary person (junzi).” (15.18)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

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“Do even exemplary persons (junzi) find themselves in such adversity?” The Master replied, “Exemplary persons are steadfast in the face of adversity, while petty persons are engulfed by it.” (15.2)

“Junzi make demands on themselves, while petty persons make demands on others.” (15.21)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

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Key Concepts in Confucianism

- Confucian values
  - Xiao 孝
  - Ren 仁
  - Li 禮

  “Those today who are filial are considered so because they are able to provide for their parents. But even dogs and horses are given that much care. If you do not respect your parents, what is the difference?” (2.7)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

- Confucian values
  - Xiao 孝
  - Ren 仁
  - Li 禮

“А person who for three years refrains from reforming the ways (dao) of his late father can be called a filial son (xiao)”
(4.20)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

- Confucian values
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“A person who is able to carry into practice five attitudes in the world can be considered authoritative (ren). ... If you are deferential, you will not suffer insult; if tolerant, you will win over the many; if you make good on your word, others will rely upon you; if diligent, you will get results; if generous, you will have the status to employ others effectively.” (17.6)
Yan Hi inquired about authoritative conduct (ren). The Master replied, “Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (li) one becomes authoritative in one’s conduct. If for the space of a day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would defer to this authoritative model. Becoming authoritative in one’s conduct is self-originating—how could it originate with others? Yan Hui said, “Could I ask what becoming authoritative entails?” The Master replied, “Do not look at anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not speak about anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not do anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety.” (12.1)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

• Confucian values
  • Xiao 孝
  • Ren 仁
  • Li 礼

“Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (li). In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work.” (1.12)
Key Concepts in Confucianism

- Five relationships
  - Ruler – Ruled
  - Husband – Wife
  - Parent – Child
  - Elder brother – Younger brother
  - Friend – Friend
Lunyu (Analects)

The Master said: “From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of tian; from sixty my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries.”
(2.4)
The Master said: “Lead the people with administrative injunctions and keep them orderly with penal law, and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.” (2.3)
Lunyu (Analects)

• The Master said: “In strolling in the company of just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly.” (7.22)

• Zaiwo was still sleeping during the daytime. The Master said, “You cannot carve rotten wood, and cannot trowel over a wall of manure. As for Zaiwo, what is the point in upbraiding him?”

The Master said further, “There was a time when, in my dealings with others, on hearing what they had to say, I believed they would live up to it. Nowadays in my dealings with others, on hearing what they have to say, I then watch what they do. It is Zaiwo that has taught me as much.” (5.10)
Mencius

- Develops and defends Confucianism from critics
  - Mozi
  - Gaozi
- Defense of Confucianism
  - Tradition is correct, natural
Mencius on Human Nature

- Root of human nature is xin, 心
- Four aspects
  - Compassion
  - Shame
  - Deference
  - Discrimination
Mencius on Human Nature

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  - shame begets righteousness (義)
  - deference begets propriety (禮)
  - discrimination begets wisdom (智)
Laozi and Zhuangzi

DAOISM
Chapter 1

*Dao* that can be put into words is not really *dao*,
And naming that can assign fixed names to things is not really naming.
The nameless is the beginning of everything that is happening (*wanwu*),
While the named is their mother.
...
Chapter 2

As soon as the beautiful are known as beautiful,
There is already ugliness.
As soon as the able are known as able,
There is already ineptness
Having and lacking give rise to each other
Difficult and easy complement each other.
...

This is why sages abide in the business of *wuwei*
and disseminate teachings that go beyond what can be said.
...
Daodejing

Chapter 12
The five colors blind our eyes.
The five notes deafen our ears.
The five flavors deaden our palates.
The chase and the hunt madden our hearts.
Precious goods impede our activities.
This is why sages are for the belly and not for the eye;
And so they cast off the one and take up the other.
There is some process that formed spontaneously, emerging before the heavens and the earth. Silent and empty, standing alone as all that is, it does not suffer alteration. It can be regarded as the mother of the heavens and the earth. I do not know its name. If I were to style it, I would call it dao. And if forced to give it a name, I would call it grand.
Daodejing

Chapter 11
Thirty spokes are joined in the hub of a wheel,
But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the carriage.
By adding and removing clay we form a vessel,
But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the vessel.
By carving out doors and windows we make a room,
But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the room.
...

Chapter 17
With the most excellent rulers, their subjects only know that they are there.
The next best are the rulers they love and praise.
Next are the rulers they hold in awe.
And the worst are the rulers they disparage.
...
With all things accomplished and the work complete
The common people say, “This is just how we are.”
Chapter 18
It is when grand dao is abandoned that ren and yi appear.
It is when wisdom and erudition arise that great duplicity appears.
It is when the six family relationships are disharmonious that xiao and parental affection appear.
It is when the state has fallen into troubled times that upright ministers appear.
Daodejing

Chapter 38
It is because the most excellent do not strive to excel that they are of the highest efficacy.
And it is because the least excellent do not leave off striving to excel that they have no efficacy.
Persons of the highest efficacy neither do things coercively nor would they have any motivation for doing so.
Persons who are most authoritative (ren) do things coercively and yet are not motivated in doing so.
Persons who are most appropriate (yi) do things coercively and indeed do have a motive for doing so.
Persons who are exemplars of li do things coercively, and when no one pays them any heed, they yank up their sleeves and drag others along with them.
Daodejing

Chapter 38, cont’d
Thus, only when we have lost sight of *dao* is there excellence,
Only when we have lost sight of excellence is there *ren*,
Only when we have lost sight of *ren* is there *yi*,
And only when we have lost sight of *yi* is there *li*.
As for *li*, it is the thinnest veneer of doing one’s best and making good on one’s word,
And it is the first sign of trouble.
...

Chapter 47
Without going out the door, one can know the whole world. Without looking out the window, one can see the *dao* of *tian*. The further one goes, the less one knows. This is why sages
- know without going abroad,
- name without having to see,
- perfect through nonaction (*wuwei*).
Chapter 64
What is at peace is easy to secure.
What has yet to begin is easy to plan for.

... Work at things before they come to be;
Regulate things before they become disordered.
A tree whose girth fills one’s embrace sprang from a downy sprout;
A terrace nine stories high arose from a layer of dirt;
A journey of a thousand leagues began with a single step.
Those who would do things ruin them;
Those who would control things lose them.
This is why sages practice wuwei and so do not ruin;
They do not lay hold and so do not lose.

...
Chapter 78
In all the world, nothing is more supple or weak than water;
Yet nothing can surpass it for attacking what is stiff and strong. And so nothing can take its place.
That the weak overcomes the strong and the supple overcomes the hard,
These are things everyone knows but none can practice.
This is why sages say,
Those who can take on the disgrace of the state
Are called lords of the altar to the soil and grain.
Those who can take on the misfortune of the state,
Are called kings of all the world.
Straightforward words seem paradoxical.