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An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy

KARYN LAI

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Contents

Preface *page* ix
Chronology xi

1 Chinese Philosophy 1
Thinkers, Texts and Traditions 2
Features of Chinese Philosophy 6
Self-Cultivation 6
Relationships and Contexts 9
Harmony 11
Change 13
Thinking Philosophically 16
Suggestions for Further Reading 19

2 Confucius and the *Analects* 20
Reading the *Analects* 21
Ren: Humaneness 23
Ren as General Concern for Humanity 24
Ren, the Confucian Golden Rule 25
Ren and the Cultivation of Particular Relationships 26
Ren as Practical Wisdom 27
Li: Behavioural Propriety 28
Ren and *Li* 30
Ren Is Fundamental 31
Li is Fundamental 33
Ren and *Li* are Interdependent Concepts 33
Self-Cultivation and Exemplary Personhood in Contemporary Philosophical Debates 34
Suggestions for Further Reading 39

3 Human Nature and Cultivation in Confucian Philosophy: Mencius and Xunzi 41
Mencius: Nurturing Goodness 42
Morality Is Not a Naturally Given Aspect of Human Nature 44
Human Nature Is Not Naturally Inclined towards Goodness 49
Not All Humans Are Naturally Inclined towards Goodness 53
Xunzi: Shaping Humanity 55
Regulating Names, Practising Propriety and Transforming Human Nature 59
The Way of *Tian* and the Ways of Humanity 64
Suggestions for Further Reading 71

4 Early Mohist Philosophy 73
The Ten Doctrines 75
Maximising Collective Welfare 78
Working with Standards 84
Suggestions for Further Reading 91

5 Daoism and the *Daodejing* 92
The Philosophy and Practice of the Daojia 93
Huang-Lao Daoism 94
Lao-Zhuang or "Philosophical Daoism" 95
Dao and *De* in the *Daodejing* 97
Dao: Reality or Cosmic Vision 100
De: Potency 105
Dao: A Way 109
Wuwei and *Ziran* in the *Daodejing* 115
Wuwei 115
Ziran: Nature 117
Ziran: Self-So-Ness 121
Suggestions for Further Reading 128

6 The Mingjia and the Later Mohists 130
The Mingjia 133
Hui Shi 134
Gongsun Long 138
Later Mohist Thought 144
Making Distinctions and Recognising Similarities 147
Names, Propositions and Knowledge 150
Scientific Discussions 155
The Practice of *Jianai*: Utilitarian Morality 158

Argumentation in Warring States China 159
Suggestions for Further Reading 162

7 Legalist Philosophy 163
Three Basic Themes: Penal Law, Technique and Power 165
Fa: Standards and Penal Law 166
Shu: Techniques for Managing the Bureaucracy 169
Shi: Power 173
Han Fei, the "Great Synthesiser" 175
Debates in Legalist Philosophy 178
Human Nature 178
The Common People 179
Best Man or Best System? 181
Bureaucracy 183
Secrecy, Power and the Control of Knowledge 185
Government and Human Well-Being 186
Suggestions for Further Reading 187

8 The *Zhuangzi* 188
Zhuangzi's Scepticism 193
Epistemological Questions 198
Cultivation and Mastery 207
Spirituality 208
Participation in Political Life 213
Mastery 216
The Implications of the Philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* 221
Suggestions for Further Reading 223

9 The *Yijing* and Its Place in Chinese Philosophy 224
Synthesis and the Intellectual Foundations of Empire 233
Correlative Thinking 238
Yin-yang, *Wuxing* and *Qi* 239
The Natural, Religious and Human Worlds 241
The Spirit of the *Yijing* 247
The Primacy of Observation 247
A Holistic, All-Encompassing Perspective 248
A Dialectical and Complementary Approach to Dualisms 250
Correlative Thinking and Resonance 252
An Interpretive Approach to the Meanings of the Hexagrams and Correspondences 253

Timeliness and Practical Wisdom 255
The Impact of the *Yijing* 261
Suggestions for Further Reading 262

10 Chinese Buddhism 265
Basic Tenets of Indian Buddhist Thought 266
The Early Period of Buddhism in China 272
Chinese Buddhist Doctrines 281
San Lun (Three Treatise) Buddhism 283
Wei Shi (Consciousness-Only) Buddhism 284
Tian Tai (Heavenly Terrace) Buddhism 286
Hua Yan (Flower Garland) Buddhism 289
Chan Buddhism 294
Chinese Buddhist Philosophy 301
Suggestions for Further Reading 303

Glossary 305
Bibliography 321
Index 349

Preface

This book covers major philosophical traditions in early Chinese philosophy, focusing especially on its foundational period, prior to 200 BCE. It discusses on concepts, themes, reasoning and argumentative methods in Chinese philosophy, introducing readers to fundamental ideas in the different traditions, debates among thinkers, cross-influences between traditions, as well as interpretive theories about these ideas, including views expressed in contemporary scholarship. The chapters are organised partly on the basis of thematic coherence and continuity and loosely according to chronological order. A Chronology is provided at the outset, placing key thinkers in relation to one another. This list is selective and brief, situating only those thinkers and periods that are discussed in the book. The at-a-glance table should help the reader locate thinkers in their historical context in relation to other thinkers. Dates are also included in the text in places where they are integral to the specific point being made.

In a number of chapters, a section discussing *textual matters* is included. These cover, for example, details of different versions of texts, connections between text and thinker, or the dating of texts, where relevant. Some of this material is quite technical, though readers should find the information helpful in understanding how Chinese intellectual history shapes our grasp of Chinese philosophy.

For the sake of consistency, within citations, English transliterations of Chinese concepts, and names of thinkers and texts, have been modified to the standard Pinyin system. However, the names of modern and contemporary scholars (e.g. Fung, Yu-lan) have been retained so as not to confuse bibliographic data. A short list of Suggestions for Further Reading, of primary and secondary sources, is provided at the end of each chapter. A more

extended Bibliography is included at the end of the book. Two separate lists, Primary Texts (listed alphabetically by title) and Secondary Sources (listed alphabetically by author), provide more extensive reading suggestions. References to primary texts follow this format: Graham, *Chuang-Tzu*, 2001; and secondary sources are listed in this way: Fingarette, 1983. The Glossary at the end of the book is set out in three sections, comprising texts and sections of texts, names and proper nouns and concepts and themes. The lists are alphabetically arranged in Pinyin transliteration, and, where possible, an English translation is provided.

Finally, it is advisable to read the chapters in the order in which they appear, as each chapter builds upon the preceding ones. Chapter 1 is important as it presents key themes and argumentative methods in Chinese philosophy, developed in subsequent chapters. Readers might find it beneficial to revisit some of the discussions in Chapter 1 at appropriate points.

Periods in Chinese History	Thinkers	Dates
Sui dynasty		581–618
	Xuan Zang	602–664
	Hong Ren	601–674
	Shen Xiu	c. 605–706
Tang dynasty		618–907
	Hui Neng	638–713
	Fa Zang	643–712
	Shen Hui	670–762
	Han Yu	768–824
	Li Ao	d. c. 844
	Linji Yixuan	d. 866
Five dynasties and Ten Kingdoms		907–960
Song dynasty		960–1260
	Zhu Xi	1130–1200
Yuan dynasty		1271–1368
Ming dynasty		1368–1644
	Wang Yang Ming	1472–1529
Qing dynasty		1644–1911

1 Chinese Philosophy

Over the last two decades, interest in Chinese philosophy has grown significantly among Anglophone scholars, students and interested lay public: more excellent translations of original texts have been produced; scholarly journals highlighting the field established; successful international conferences organised; and monographs and anthologies published. The field has broadened in its engagement across disciplinary boundaries, in studies that bring together philosophical perspectives with historical, archaeological, religious or anthropological approaches. Just as important, dialogue across Western and Chinese philosophical traditions is burgeoning, fuelled in part by the conviction that Chinese philosophy can make significant and insightful contributions to contemporary debates.

An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy examines major philosophical concepts, themes and texts in early Chinese philosophy, paying special attention to the period between the fifth and the second centuries BCE, the earliest time from which we have a substantial collection of texts expressing a plethora of views. We may think of this period as one where we begin to see the origins of Chinese philosophy. The extant texts from this period incorporate key elements of philosophy: presentation of and reflection on worldviews, unmasking of assumptions, argumentation and justification of ideas and debates on values and ideals. The primary aim of this book is to introduce a representative overview of key philosophical ideas and debates proposed by thinkers of the time and which continue to be relevant today. Some attempt is made to compare the features of Chinese philosophy with parallel aspects of Western philosophy. However, the aim of such comparisons is to elucidate the characteristics of Chinese philosophy rather than to present and account for differences in the two fields.

This book is introductory in a few ways. First, it covers representative ideas, themes and debates so that these fundamental aspects of Chinese philosophy

may inform further investigations into more complex and lesser-known areas. Second, it seeks to capture the spirit of the classical Chinese texts, but it cannot replace close reading of these texts. Good translations are available of many texts and recommendations are included in the list of suggested readings at the end of each chapter. If it is not possible to read more complete translations of the texts, readers should at least obtain a reliable compendium of primary sources such as William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom's *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (vol. 1: 1999). Finally, the discussions here focus on the foundational elements of Chinese philosophy, that is, from a period where there is a reasonable volume of texts up to and including ideas from Chinese Buddhism. Buddhist ideas and practices were introduced into China in the first century CE and Buddhism was established only from the sixth century as a distinctive tradition (i.e. different from its Indian origins and not simply fitted within what the Chinese traditions had to offer). Therefore, it is important to include it in this introduction to the field, especially as it shaped the subsequent development of Chinese intellectual history.

The book attempts to achieve a balance between articulating the general spirit and approach of Chinese philosophy as a disciplinary field and identifying the more distinctive features of each of the traditions within the field. Confucian, Mohist, Daoist, Legalist and Buddhist traditions feature in our discussions. It will also examine parallels and divergences across traditions, at times focusing on disagreements between certain representative figures. Understanding the disagreements is at least as important as recognising the distinctive ideas of each tradition; this approach draws attention to both contrasts and common elements of those traditions as they evolved alongside others.

Thinkers, Texts and Traditions

Prolonged unrest in China during the Spring and Autumn (*Chunqiu*) period (722–476 BCE) and the Warring States (*Zhanguo*) period (475–221 BCE) brought an end to the Zhou dynasty (1122–221 BCE). During this extended period of turmoil, many men who had previously lived in privileged circumstances were forced to seek alternative means of living. These men had views about the causes of the unrest and proposed solutions for rectifying it. Confucius and many of his followers, sometimes described as scholar-officials (*shi*), competed with others for the ear of those in power (Hsu 1965: 34–7). The urgency of the political and social unrest shaped the views of this period; many of the

discussions focused on morality, political society and good governance. The *Zhuangzi*, a Daoist text composed between the fourth and third centuries BCE, describes the proliferation of ideas at that time:

> The empire is in utter confusion, sagehood and excellence are not clarified, we do not have the one Way and Power ... There is an analogy in the ears, eyes, nose and mouth; all have something they illuminate but they cannot exchange their functions, just as the various specialities of the Hundred Schools all have their strong points and at times turn out useful. However, they are not inclusive, not comprehensive; these are men each of whom has his own little corner. (chapter 33, trans. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu*, 2001: 275)

Scholars have adopted the phrase *baijia zhi xue* ("Hundred Schools of Learning") to characterise the diversity of ideas and the spirit of debate of the time (e.g. Fung 1952: 132–69). The term "*jia*" (literally "house"; meaning "group") referred to the doctrinal groups the early thinkers were associated with. We need to be wary of how the "groups" are classified. Approximately two centuries after the Warring States period, Sima Tan (d. 110 BCE), a historian of the Han court, categorised the different lines of thought into six groups, often translated as the "six schools of thought."[1] This classification in the *Shiji* (*Records of the Grand Historian*) proved to be extremely influential, dominating the study of Chinese thought for centuries to come. The six groups (*liu jia*) were:

(1) *Yin-Yang* school: grounded in a belief in two major principles *yin* (female) and *yang* (male) and applied in particular to cosmology;
(2) *Ru* school: the school of the literati, the scholars. Confucians were included in this group;
(3) *Mo* school: the Mohist school, a close-knit organisation of soldiers and craftsmen with strict discipline, founded by Mozi;
(4) *Ming* school: the Mingjia (Disputers concerned with names). Thinkers categorised in this group discussed topics relating to the correspondence between language and reality;
(5) *Fa* school: comprised by the Legalists, who emphasised penal law (*fa*) as a primary instrument of social control;

[1] Sima Tan had started on the project to compile a chronicle of Chinese history. He did not complete the project, although his son, Sima Qian (c. 145 BCE–c.86 BCE) did. Entitled *Shiji* (*Records of the Grand Historian*), the work covers over two thousand years of Chinese history up until the rule of Emperor Wu (156–87 BCE) in the Han dynasty.

how should we think about what has been until now the *basic* categorisations of "Confucianism" and "Daoism"? The ideas of lineages, traditions and Chinese intellectual history more broadly must now be approached with greater caution.

We should keep these cautionary notes in mind as we work through this book. There are, however, a couple of caveats. For stylistic reasons, the discussions in the book sometimes associate particular thinkers with specific ideas. Readers should assume that phrases such as "Mencius believed that *x*" indicate that the source of the idea is to be found in the *Mencius*, where Mencius is sometimes presented as the spokesperson for the idea. There is no suggestion that Mencius was without doubt the author of the text. Second, in spite of the concerns about traditional categories such as "Confucianism" and "Daoism," the chapter divisions in the book are made primarily on the basis of doctrinal affiliation, for reasons of accessibility. The discussions in the chapters will indicate, where appropriate, gaps created by the use of these categories, so that readers are aware of their limitations.

We turn our attention next to a number of prominent features of Chinese philosophy.

Features of Chinese Philosophy

Self-Cultivation

The early Chinese thinkers believed that the transformation of the self was the answer to the unrest of the time. They discussed different methods of self-cultivation (*xiushen*) in relation to their respective visions of ideal society. The Confucians believed that cultivation involved discipline and rigour in both reflection and practice. It was believed that, in the process of cultivation, a person would learn from the past, observe human behaviour, reflect on his or her interactions with others and provide and gain mutual support from those who are like-minded. These practices would enable him or her gradually to develop an appreciation of relational attachment, obligations and responsibilities that arise from his or her particular place or roles in society; and understand the importance of taking a stance on matters, whether in relation to one's superior or against the sway of the common people. There were differences among the various Confucian thinkers concerning the resources that were available to humanity: were humans born

with moral sensibilities and capabilities? What kinds of social structures would best engender self-cultivation?

In the Mohist text, the *Mozi*, there is an entire chapter devoted to self-cultivation. There, its author discusses the cultivation of a commitment to benefit the world (Schwartz 1985: 158). The Mohist standard of benefit – improvement of collective welfare – was sometimes understood as antithetical to the Confucian vision due to its (perceived) lack of interest in close relational ties. Texts of the Daoist tradition such as the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi* and *Liezi* advocated intuitive and experiential grasp of *dao*, as opposed to life submerged within conventional practices, beliefs and expectations. The instruments of acculturation, including norms and prohibitions, as well as language itself, are held suspect. Self-cultivation in this tradition involves undoing many of the effects of socialisation and nurturing one's life according to the axioms of nonconditioned action (*wuwei*) and self-so-ness (*ziran*). The *Zhuangzi*, for example, provides many images of skilled craftsmen – among them wheel-makers and cicada-catchers – who have rejected conventional forms of learning and pursuits and who exhibit delightful mastery of their craft. There were also religious Daoists for whom *xiushen* involved esoteric practices, rigorous discipline of the body and explorations in the use of alchemy (Kohn 1993; Robinet 1997). Yang Zhu (c. 350 BCE), who Mencius described as an egoist, was said to have promoted a philosophy of "each for himself" (*weiwo*). His idea of nurturing the self, which included attention to the body, was to keep it unadulterated from corrupting influences in society (Graham 1989: 53–64).[2] Even the Legalists, who were concerned about the maintenance of the power of the ruler, gave cultivation a central place in their program. For them, it was critical for the ruler to develop strategies and skills especially to manage the officials on whom the ruler was dependent.

For the early Chinese thinkers, cultivation was necessary because it equipped individuals with the skills and capabilities to deal with situations as they arose. It seems that they were deeply aware of the need to be *responsive* and were therefore focused on the practicalities of life. As we will see in the following chapters, in the early Chinese texts, considerations about how best to resolve a situation may differ from one individual to another, or

[2] Mencius (a Confucian thinker) was a harsh critic of Yang Zhu, noting the latter's unwillingness to shoulder social and civic responsibilities. See the discussion in Graham 1989: 53–64.

according to the situation, or they might take into account the particular people one happens to be interacting with. This may help explain why not many of the thinkers justified their claims primarily through the use of principles. Here, the suggestion is not that these thinkers did not consider theoretical or conceptual issues; there was much speculative thought, including the contemplation of logical puzzles (especially by the Mingjia), as well as the use of metaphors, analogies and suggestive imagery. Nor was it the case, more specifically, that ethical principles did not figure in their thinking about moral issues. Rather, their discussions tend to focus on concrete events, and it could be that Immanuel Kant, having noticed this feature of their discussions, disparaged them as mere "examples":

> Philosophy is not to be found in the whole Orient . . . Their teacher Confucius teaches in his writings nothing outside a moral doctrine designed for the princes . . . and offers examples of former Chinese princes . . . But a concept of virtue and morality never entered the heads of the Chinese . . . In order to arrive at an idea . . . of the good [certain] studies would be required, of which [the Chinese] know nothing.[3]

Kant's observations (that the Confucian texts offer many examples) are right, although his conclusion is questionable. He assumes that there is only one approach to moral deliberation, which necessarily begins with the determination of "an idea of the good." For the early Chinese thinkers, the differences from one situation to another mattered, and the examples demonstrated a range of possible and alternative ways to handle a situation. Familiarity with existing norms and possibilities, understanding limits and constraints and practising one's responses in different situations – elements of cultivation – helped a person to understand the alternatives available to him or her in light of his or her capabilities. From this point of view, simply to know moral principles or even to be committed to them was practically inert. As the *Mozi* tells us, even if a blind person can articulate the difference between black and white, he does not know black, because he cannot select black objects from white ones.

[3] Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Kant und die Religionen des Osten*. Beihefte zum Jahrbuch der Albertus-Universität, Königsberg/Pr. (Kitzingen-Main: Holzner Verlag, 1954), pp. 104, translated by Julia Ching (1978: 169). Ching focuses on fundamental differences in the structures and dynamics of early Chinese philosophy and Kantian philosophy.

Relationships and Contexts

In the texts we examine, an individual is conceived of essentially in relational terms and as a situated being. An individual's uniqueness rests only partly in the individual's possession of those characteristics which set him or her apart from other individuals. It also derives from the individual's place within the contextual environment and the relationships the individual has therein. The resulting picture of self is complex, with many factors shaping it, including its relationships with significant others and its experiences within its historical, cultural, social and political contexts. In ethical terms, rarely, if ever, is an individual expected to act as an independent, detached moral agent, or judged according to an idealised paradigm of independent selfhood. This has important implications for how we understand decision-making processes, choice and responsibility.

In the different traditions in Chinese philosophy, this view of self is expressed in a range of ways. Confucian and Mohist debates focused primarily on human relationships in the sociopolitical context. They disagreed on whether close affective ties should occupy a central place in social life, with the Mohists being particularly mindful of the implications of such an arrangement. Both Mohists and Confucians also appealed to heaven (*tian*), sometimes as the ground of human morality and sometimes simply to set out the way things naturally were. Especially during the Han period and beyond, Confucian discourse incorporated a tripartite relationship between heaven (*tian*), earth (*di*) and humanity. This encompassing vision placed humanity in a position of responsibility, that is, to realise the dictates of heaven on earth.

Daoist thinkers looked beyond human relationships in their consideration of *dao*. Discussions in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* drew on analogies between the human and natural worlds. The texts emphasise the importance of understanding all entities, processes, events, causes and energies in their contexts. In the Han dynasty, cosmological thinking, which holds that there are connections between the cosmic and human realms, was a popular theme expounded on by both Confucians and Daoists as well as in syncretic texts such as the *Huainanzi*. The *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), a text used for divination, was reinterpreted during this time to reinforce claims about continuities and correspondences in the human, natural and cosmic worlds (Schwartz 1985: 358–70). From around the fifth century, some strands of

Chinese Buddhist philosophy developed a distinctive view of an individual self as "empty" (*kong*). Yet, paradoxically because the self is empty, its distinctiveness arises as a result of its interdependent relationships with other entities. These traditions offer different views of what was "out there," the world as we know it, and how individuals should orientate themselves in the world. In these accounts, metaphysical, epistemological and ethical elements are integrated. As we will see, the pictures of self-realisation in the different philosophies are dramatically different and often the cause of deep disagreement.

From a contemporary perspective, the concept of self as primarily related to others and embedded in its environment raises concerns about the status of the individual. For instance, within the human sphere, would a self conceived in this way be overwhelmed by its relationships? Might the aim in one's life be an unbearable juggling task of being a mother, a daughter, an employee, a teacher, an aunt, a niece and a wife? This is a picture of self, created and determined almost entirely by its roles (see Tu 1985: 51–66). Similar concerns have been raised in conjunction with Confucian or Chinese societies embodying a collectivist outlook, as contrasted with societies that place more weight on the individual and which allow for and encourage responsibility, creativity and other expressions of the self (see de Bary 1991; Tu 1972: 192–3). There is some basis for the concern that Chinese philosophy in general tends to focus on collective interests rather than individual interests, although we must resist the tendency to characterise the conception of relational and situated self simply as collectivist. It is inaccurate to say that the different Chinese traditions do not attend to matters relating to the interests of individuals. They do consider details pertaining to particular individuals and events, but there is often a sense that it is exceedingly difficult to isolate matters that pertain only to an individual or to draw clear lines of responsibility on that basis.

We will see in the discussions that follow that instead of being "collectivist," Chinese philosophy tends to assume interdependence between entities or individuals. There are many discussions about the overlaps between individual interests and common interests, reminding us that it is artificial to think solely in terms of either self-interest or servitude to others. This applies to relationships among humans, human relationships with natural entities, as well as the place of humanity in its social and natural environments. It is not that Chinese philosophy does not have a conception of individual

This brief sketch outlines how harmony in the Chinese traditions is manifest in a variety of ways, in individual and social lives: conformity, unity in purpose, cooperation, integration, composure, order and stability.

Change

Chinese philosophy posits continuities and correspondences between individual entities and across different domains. This feature is articulated to different extents within the different traditions. It was developed much further during the late Warring States and Han dynasties, when effort was put into setting out systems of correspondences between cosmic and natural events (such as eclipses, earthquakes, positions of the planets, climate, weather and seasons), and events in the human world, including those relating to health, social institutions and political leadership. Some thinkers turned their attention to the *Yijing*, a text used in divination, to examine its assumptions about (anticipating) change and its effects. The text attends to change and its impact, so as to minimise harms, if not to maximise benefits. The anticipation of change was the motivation for divination. Given that individuals are exposed to many things beyond their control, it is important for them to understand how change comes about, and how they might be affected. The idea of mutual resonance, *ganying*, crystallises the concept of interdependent selfhood. It captures the susceptibility of individuals to factors external to their being and beyond their immediate control. But the apparent fragility of the individual must not be interpreted solely in negative terms. Effects of change may also be positive. Moreover, because of the innumerable possibilities in mutual transformation, individuals should not seek only what is in their self-interest. It is assumed that the welfare of others and the robustness of their wider environment will directly or indirectly affect an individual's well-being.

The *Yijing* embodies the practical orientation of Chinese philosophy. Not all of the text is philosophical in nature. Its oldest sections, from around the ninth century BCE, were intended for divination, though they did not also set out the rationale for understanding its practices and processes. Yet what is interesting about this text are its implicit assumptions about the world, the connections across its different domains, the relationships between entities, the complexity of causes and effects, the place of humanity in a constantly transforming world, and the importance of individual actions and responses. The Warring States and Han commentaries on the *Yijing* were deeply

introspective about its project, methods and applications. The text and commentaries are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9, with particular focus on the development of Chinese philosophy during the Han period. It is important here to highlight some of the *Yijing*'s themes for two reasons: these themes are manifest more broadly across the range of Chinese philosophical views, and they help to bring out what is distinctive in Chinese philosophy, especially in its thinking about change. The six features discussed here are mirrored in Chapter 9.

1. **The primacy of observation**. The *Yijing* emphasises observation as a critical element in reflective thinking, and procedurally prior to it. The predictions and prescriptions in the text are grounded in observations (*guan*) of connections, movements and transformations in the world. From these observations, one perceives patterns, regularities and correlations. In an approach similar to that articulated in the *Yijing*, thinkers of different persuasions began by observing human behaviour. Their deliberations on social, political and ethical life reflect their observations on corruption and selfishness, as well as compassion and altruism, in society. Daoist and Mohist thinkers, in particular, were struck by the plurality they observed. For example, in their ruminations about language and its connections with reality, the Later Mohists were preoccupied with the question of how language could fulfil both the aims of efficient communication, on the one hand, and accurate representation of the plural and diverse world, on the other. It seems that, being led by their observations of plurality in the world, they were unable to make the kinds of abstractions required in order to reflect on structure in language. In this and other areas of concern, early Chinese philosophy has a palpably empirical character.
2. **A holistic, all-encompassing perspective**. The *Yijing* divination statements place specific events within a larger environmental context in order to understand more fully the factors and agents of change. There is attention to the locus within which individuals or events are situated, be it human society, *dao*, heaven and earth, or the cosmos. In Chinese philosophy, while it is recognised that individuals are the subjects of their experiences, the experiences are fully understood only within a context. As we have noted previously, for example, Confucian philosophy sees the self as a contextually embedded being, constituted in part by elements of its specific cultural and historical tradition. Even the concept *dao*,

sometimes described as transcendent, is not discontinuous from or independent of life in the world.

3. **A dialectical and complementary approach to dualisms**. The *Yijing* sets up complementary opposites in its conceptual framework using contrastive concepts such as high and low, action and repose and hard and soft. These paired concepts are part of the explanatory framework of change, perhaps in seasonal or cyclic fashion, one phase replacing another and being replaced by it in due course. This binary complementation is most pronounced in, though not restricted to, Daoist philosophy. (e.g. Confucianism emphasises reciprocity in relationships.) Daoist philosophy casts doubt on conventional markers of success and well-being by challenging the monolithic structure of values. Binary complementation also figures significantly in the Daoist approach to argumentation, especially in Zhuangzi's disagreements with the Disputers (Bianzhe)[4], who sought to settle disputes by fixing names to their referents (objects and events) in the real world. Zhuangzi rejected their logic that things had to be either so or not-so, suggesting that more could be gained from a dialectical approach that valued contrasts between perspectives.
4. **Correlative thinking and resonance**. Correlative thinking is, broadly speaking, the view that events and situations in one realm are parallel to, or help to explain, those in another. An example from early Chinese philosophy is the correlation between a dysfunctional state and a diseased body, both lacking in alignment between parts and hence disharmonious. The theme of resonance posits tighter causal relations between two events or objects, including responsiveness, whether of one to the other or mutually between the two. Both these themes are integral features of Han thought. Yet there are suggestions of correlative thinking before this period, as, for instance, in the cooperation, collusion or simpler correspondences between the natural world, on the one hand, and the sociopolitical realm, on the other. We also know that beliefs in correspondences between cosmic phenomena and human well-being were widespread during the Warring States period as Xunzi felt the need to dispel superstitious beliefs in cosmic phenomena, such as eclipses, as portents of forthcoming events in the human domain. These beliefs are also documented in the unearthed "Daybooks" (*Rishu*).

[4] Their philosophy is discussed in Chapter 6.

5. **An interpretive approach to the meanings of the hexagrams and correspondences**. The use of the *Yijing* involved interpreting particular hexagrams to articulate its relevance to specific matters. We can see the dominance of the interpretive approach in Chinese philosophy more generally, where abstract, universally applicable axioms only have prima facie status. They are open to modification according to relevant circumstantial factors. The use of interpretation figures prominently in the commentarial tradition in Chinese intellectual history, whereby thinkers would focus on a particular idea or element in a classic so as to draw out its insights on a topic or debate.
6. **Timeliness and practical wisdom**. The *Yijing* dwelt on matters in the wider environment, including the weather, seasons and climate, in order to provide a comprehensive and inclusive picture of the environment within which humans had to situate themselves. In its discussions, issues related to metaphysics, epistemology and ethics are not clearly delineated; understanding the environment was critical for the orientation of the self. Watchfulness was required as imminent changes in the natural and social worlds were expected. The *Yijing* embodies an attitude that is expectant of change and that seeks to prepare for it and deal with it. With this as a fundamental viewpoint, the early thinkers worked with possibilities rather than certainties, thinking about whether some intended course of action was possible (*ke*), and whether, on a particular occasion, a certain action could proceed (*xing*). Recognition of change as a fundamental feature of existence prompted them especially to concentrate on the cultivation of skills associated with awareness of and sensitivity to one's surrounds. This was the best guarantee of appropriate and timely action when the situation arose.

We now turn our attention to a number of features of philosophical thinking in the Chinese tradition.

Thinking Philosophically

Debate and argumentation are prominent features of Chinese philosophy. From the Spring and Autumn period, thinkers have had to grapple with a plurality of viewpoints. John J. Clarke, who investigated the reception and interpretation of Daoist ideas through periods in Western intellectual

history, argued that this context of plurality, and its implications, should not go unnoticed:

> Such debates must . . . be seen in the wider environment of an attitude of toleration and pluralism that has long been endemic at certain levels of Chinese cultural life, a cultural attitude which has not until relatively recently become acceptable in the West. (Clarke 2000: 27)

Clarke is referring to debates between rival Daoist and Buddhist thinkers from the fourth century CE. But there were earlier debates between Confucians, Daoists and Mohists, with each set of thinkers rejecting the doctrines of others. There is some evidence that, during the fourth century BCE, an assembly of thinkers of different persuasions were gathered under the auspices of Jixia, the Ji Gate in the capital of Qi during the Warring States period, under the direction of King Wei of Qi (357–320 BCE).[5] A situation like this could help explain the development of the syncretic method, a significant feature of debates in Chinese philosophy. The method involves drawing views from (seemingly) incompatible doctrines and integrating them into a viable theory. The syncretic approach is markedly different from analysis, which involves exposing the assumptions that lie behind particular theories and scrutinising the justification of basic concepts and ideas. While analysis seeks to identify and isolate basic components of an argument, the syncretic approach integrates ideas from doctrines that seem to be at odds with each other. As a result of the widespread application of syncretic thinking, many Chinese philosophies have come to include elements from traditions other than their own. Thomé Fang, a Chinese philosopher, captured the syncretic spirit in this way: "I am a Confucian by family tradition; a Daoist by temperament; a Buddhist by religion and inspiration" (Fang 1981: 525).

Because of the syncretic element in Chinese philosophy, it is important to acquire a sense of intellectual history in order to grasp the influences across the different traditions. This engenders an appreciation of how ideas are

[5] There is some debate, however, regarding the organisation at Jixia. Some scholars, such as David Nivison, believe that Jixia was an institution (1999: 769–70). They also hold that many influential thinkers including Xunzi (310?–219? BCE) and Shen Dao (350?–275 BCE) were at this Academy. Nivison also notes that the scholars at the Academy were forbidden to take on political roles; they held only advisory capacities. However, Nathan Sivin argues that evidence on Jixia as a formally organised *academy* is very thin (1995b: 19–26).

2 Confucius and the *Analects*

Troubled by the unrest of the Spring and Autumn period, Confucius (Kongzi) (551–479 BCE) proposed the ethical reform of society. His proposal involved the elimination of the power-mongering and exploitative behaviours of those in power. The process was to be initiated by exemplary court officials, men of broad education and committed to beneficent government.

As the instigator of these ideas, Confucius is recognised as belonging to a group known as the Ru (Literati).[1] The Ru were learned men who sought to share and realise their insights on the ethical administration of government.[2] However, the nature of the connection between the Ru and the Confucians depicted in the *Analects* – the Conversations – is quite unclear (Zufferey 2014).

Ruist education consisted in the cultivation of an ethically and ritually disciplined life. As some Ru extended the rigours of ceremonial court ritual to the social and domestic arenas, Confucians have sometimes been thought of as traditionalists. It is interesting that in the *Analects* (7:1), Confucius is noted to have said that he is a transmitter, not a creator. Did he see himself primarily as a proponent of a traditional way?

[1] Details of Confucius' life are patchy, as the key sources date from a period sometime after his death. Refer to the discussions by Eno (2014) and Riegel (2013).

[2] The social mobility of a group of scholar-officials, the *shi*, rapidly increased during the Warring States period. Particularly during 512–464 BCE, the *shi*, having established themselves in their learning, began to play more active roles than rulers (Hsu 1965: 8). It has been suggested that Confucius and many of his pupils belonged to this *shi* class (Hsu 1965: 34–7). Competition between the many warring states necessitated the selection of capable functionaries by those in power (Hsu 1999: 572–83).

Reading the *Analects*

Textual matters	The key text for Confucius' ideas is *The Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*). The text comprises conversations Confucius was meant to have had with his followers. The extant text provides an unreliable picture of Confucius as it was compiled during the Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE), at least two and a half centuries after Confucius' death.[3] More recently, two unearthed versions of the text, believed to pre-date the received version, have received some scholarly attention.[4] In spite of the evidence that suggests multiple versions of the *Analects* were in circulation around the Western Han period, some scholars have attempted to date the received text's sections.[5] How might the text be read? The 499 short passages in the *Analects* are not systematically organised and repetitions and inconsistencies are common. Because the extant text is composite, it is not surprising to find that a term or concept may have several different meanings in its conversations. The reader will not find clearly articulated doctrines or justified points of view, even though it is sometimes possible to construct a plausible account of

[3] The extant text is based on He Yan's (195–249) *Collected Explanations of the Analects*. He Yan's version draws in large part from an earlier version of the text, edited by Zhang Yu (d. 5 BCE) during a time when there were three recensions of the text: the *Gu Lun*, *Qi Lun* and the *Lu Lun* (Makeham 2003a: 363–77).

[4] In 1973, a collection of bamboo slips, including sections of what is believed to be the earliest known version of the *Analects*, was unearthed in Dingzhou, Hebei Province. The tomb was believed to have been sealed at around 55 BCE. The tomb's contents, including the Dingzhou *Analects*, have been bedevilled by a series of unfortunate events including a tomb robbery and fire that destroyed many of the bamboo slips, and an earthquake in 1976 that caused further damage. Scholarly attention on the Dingzhou *Analects* has been somewhat limited because of the damaged slips, together with other reasons (van Els 2009). The other discovery, the P'yŏngyang *Analects* (also known as Lelang *Analects*), is thought to have been roughly contemporaneous with the Dingzhou *Analects*. The former was discovered in a tomb in the early 1990s in North Korea (Csikszentmihalyi and Kim 2014: 32).

[5] Refer to Csikszentmihalyi and Kim 2014 for a discussion of the formulation and circulation of different versions of the text during the Han period. On the issue of dating the sections of the *Analects*, the most prominent study is by Brooks and Brooks (*Original Analects*, 1998), who align sections of the text with certain events in the lives of the early Confucian followers.

the rationale for the conversations and some key themes. Such work may involve the study of texts of the same period, philological study and analysis of historical data, including examination of artefacts of the period. The text remains valuable as a repository of insights into the intellectual history of Confucianism and of China more generally. At another level, a good number of contemporary scholars – philosophers in particular – take the *Analects* as a text that is open-ended. These scholars propose contemporary applications of ideas in the *Analects*, as discussed below.

Confucius emerges from the *Analects* as a committed and conscientious thinker. In many passages a range of people, including his followers, dukes and governors of villages, consult him on issues relating to good government and, more broadly, a good life. Details in some of the passages intend to show how Confucius takes various factors into consideration to arrive at a decision. Yet, many first-time readers of the *Analects* are struck by the lack of basic normative principles or criteria upon which Confucius bases his decisions. For instance, in 13:18, he expects sons and fathers to cover up for each other's misdeeds:

> The Governor of She in conversation with Confucius said, "In our village there is someone called 'True Person.' When his father took a sheep on the sly, he reported him to the authorities."
>
> Confucius replied, "Those who are true in my village conduct themselves differently. A father covers for his son, and a son covers for his father. And being true lies in this." (trans. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 1998: 166–7)

Some are surprised that Confucius, known widely as the founder of Confucian ethics, could make such *im*moral prescriptions as lying or, worse still, encourage nepotism. But if we continue to reflect on this conversation, there are more questions we want to ask. These include, What were the punishments, if any, for theft? What was the worth of a sheep? How was the neighbour affected? What are the consequences for the child, if he were to reveal his father's theft and, alternatively, if he doesn't? The situation of this child is a uniquely difficult one and presents no easy solution whether in Confucius' time or ours. We may simply decide that it is morally unacceptable at any place and time to recommend covering up, or we might focus on

the conversation's contextual details, which may have a bearing on Confucius' remarks. These details include the place of family and loyalty in ethical life, the ethical significance of relationships, the requirement to cover up for another, Confucius' method of moral deliberation and the criteria he uses here.

If we understand Confucius' comments as normative prescriptions, it would be difficult to see how what Confucius said to a duke about running a state, or how Confucius seats himself while eating, has relevance for us today. Perhaps we should not expect the *Analects* to provide normative answers to our ethical dilemmas. Instead, we might read it in order to understand the complexities associated with the processes of moral reasoning as the early Confucians understood it. In this light, I suggest that the *Analects* be read as if it is a collection of diary entries of practice and beliefs associated with the Confucian tradition rather than a book of authoritative sayings or a comprehensive and systematic philosophical treatise. It can be read as a *manual* on how Confucius and others handled situations and responded to others in context, that is, as a repository of insights to generate and encourage reflective thinking about our own actions and commitments.

With this methodology in mind, let us proceed to examine two foundational concepts in the *Analects*, *ren* (humaneness) and *li* (behavioural propriety). Together, they express facets of cultivated humanism in the Confucian tradition. A fuller understanding of Confucian philosophy rests in part on how we understand these two concepts and the interplay between them.

Ren: Humaneness

Ren is mentioned only occasionally in texts pre-dating Confucius.[6] In its earlier usage, the term referred to some manly or virile quality. For example, in two hunting poems in the *Book of Poetry* (*Shi Jing*), two huntsmen are referred to as "handsome and *ren*" (Schwartz 1985: 51). In the *Book of History* (*Shu Jing*), *ren* refers to the benevolent attitude of the ruler to his subjects. In the hands of the Confucians, however, the term denoted a moral quality characteristic of humanity. Hence, it is not surprising to find some variation in its use in the *Analects*, for example, to refer to humanity in general,

[6] Wing-tsit Chan presents a comprehensive discussion of the pre-Confucian usage of *ren* (1955: 295–319).

humaneness as a distinguishing characteristic of humanity, compassion as the primary virtue, or the compassionate character of a community (McLeod 2012). In broad terms, *ren* in the *Analects* captures the idea of a distinctively human need and disposition for relationality, manifest in an exemplary life within a socio-political context. The meaning of the term is also revealed in its Chinese character: *ren* (仁) is comprised of two characters, the left signifying humanity (人) and the right, the number two (二). This suggests that the term pertains to human relatedness. Hence, it has been variously translated into English as benevolence, love, humaneness, humanity, human-heartedness, compassion and sympathy.[7] Its meaning in the *Analects* is multifaceted, and some more recent translations of *ren* avoid identifying it with any one English term as that may change the meanings and scope of the term. Aspects of *ren* are considered in the following sections.

Ren as General Concern for Humanity

Ren is "to love all humanity" (*ai ren*), says Confucius in 12:22 (adapted from the translation by Legge, *Chinese Classics*, 1991, vol. 1: 261). This anecdote identifies *ren* with a general, indiscriminating love. However, in 4:3, it is said that "only the man of *ren* knows to like and dislike others" (trans. author), which suggests that the person of *ren* is discriminating in his assessment of others. How is it possible both to "love" all humanity and yet to dislike some people? *Analects* 4:3 uses the phrase "*hao ren*" which means to like someone rather than to love them (*ai ren*). We should also keep in mind that the phrase "to love all humanity" in 12:22 was typically used in relation to those in positions of power, suggesting a ruler's general concern for all his people. Hence, "to love all humanity" is not to demonstrate attentiveness marked by affection. It is possible both to hold a general concern for the populace and, at the same time, to exercise one's judgment about individuals. In 17:24, Confucius is explicit about the kinds of people he dislikes, including slanderers and gossip-mongers. This is consistent with the importance of "knowing men" (*zhiren*), also described in 12:22; it was critical for those in positions of power to understand individuals well so as to employ them optimally in office (see also 20:3).

[7] Wing-tsit Chan suggests that Confucius was the first to have conceived of *ren* as the general virtue (1975: 107).

This interpretation takes filial piety and, by extension, other familial ties as a primary fact of human existence. Alternatively, "root" may indicate that the family context is the initial environment for moral development. Within this environment, one learns to empathise, negotiate, love, care for, gain sympathy, express regret, balance competing loyalties and prioritise obligations (4:18). The skills learnt in the family environment are vital for a person's interactions with others in later life.

These two meanings of the "root" of *ren* – the first emphasising feelings for others, and the second, family context – are not mutually exclusive. Basic feelings such as affection are a central part of human life. They are established, in the first instance, in the bond between parent and child. Ideally, family contexts are positive and nurturing, giving children emotional stability and confidence. If the *Analects* is correct that family relationships play a dominant role in one's formative years – that they shape the person in many important and subtle ways – we should examine the text to uncover its reflections on the place of primary relationships in moral life.

Ren as Practical Wisdom

The *Analects* offers many examples of how *ren* is manifest in the life of the Confucian paradigmatic individual. For example, it is associated with five attitudes: deference, tolerance, making good on one's word, diligence and generosity (17:6). It is realised in both domestic and public contexts (13:19). One's commitment to *ren* is not simply a commitment to see things a particular way. It is realised only in practice, especially in one's interaction with others. Therefore, a person must learn broadly, from a range of sources, so as to familiarise oneself with possibilities for action in different contexts (19:6; see also 2:11). The exercise of practical wisdom involves drawing on ideas and experiences (of others' and one's own) *in order to* enlighten one's own situation, and to apply these reflections to one's actions. The person of *ren* is confident in his interactions:

> The Master said, "A wise person (*zhi*) is not perplexed (*huo*); a *ren*-person is not anxious (*you*); a courageous person is not timid." (9:29; trans. author)

The simplicity of the statement highlights the calmness of the *ren*-person, in contrast to a person who is anxious. It is interesting that this passage draws together wisdom, *ren* and courage. Confucian scholar Antonio Cua aptly

describes the enviable disposition of the man of *ren*: "His *easeful* life is more a matter of attitude and confidence in his ability to deal with difficult and varying situations, rather than an exemplification of his infallible judgement and authority" (Cua 1971: 47). *Ren* is practically oriented; the primary question in the *Analects* concerns how it is optimally realised in a person's actions and undertakings (Lai 2012). We now turn to explore another major term in the *Analects*, *li* (behavioural propriety) before investigating its connections with *ren* in practice.

Li: Behavioural Propriety

The concept *li* also has considerable elasticity. In pre–Warring States (prior to the fifth century BCE) texts, the term referred to religious ritual for harvest and thanksgiving conducted by the emperor, also referred to as the "Son of Heaven." Through the Western Zhou period (1045–771 BCE), rituals were part of courtly life; some of them involved magnificent, multi-faceted displays involving music and musical rhythm, dance, speech and comportment (Kern 2009: 153–4). During the Spring and Autumn, and Warring States periods, ceremonial ritual was carried out in the petty courts as well (Dubs 1966: 116). Rituals were also practiced more widely to induce supernatural protection and a wide range of blessings, including for one's material welfare (Poo 1998).

We can detect some of these features of *li* in the *Analects*. Here, *li* may refer to religious ritual (3:17), the comportment of the cultivated person (12:1) and behavioural propriety in the ordinary interactions of the common people (2:3). Partly because of its association with ancient ritual, *li* sometimes evokes a sense of conformity and conservatism. However, its employment in the *Analects* is not always consistent. At some points it appears to be rather inflexible, as, for instance, when Confucius insisted on following through with ritual practice rather than sparing the sheep (3:17). Yet, on occasions, Confucius suggests it is permissible to deviate from accepted practice if sound reasons have been provided as, for instance, when he chooses to bow before, rather than after, ascending the steps to the hall (9:3). In some of its conversations, the *Analects* makes room for flexibility in the exercise of discretion. In *Analects* 4:10, Confucius purportedly said, "In dealing with matters in the world, an exemplary person is not for or against anything. He follows what is appropriate" (trans. author). Here, the term "appropriate" (*yi*) brings out how the exemplary person needs to do the *right* thing in context. On the basis of our discussions so far, we may envisage *li*, *ren* and

yi as engaged in a three-way relation. *Ren* pertains to human affect, *li* to the received ways of expressing that affect, and *yi* to enacting *ren* in light of what is right in a particular situation.[8]

In the *Analects*, standards of behavioural propriety served as guides for correct behaviour in a range of relational contexts: between children and parents (2:5), subject and ruler (3:18) and prince and minister (3:19). *Li* mapped out different requirements for appropriate behaviour according to one's place in a particular relationship. In addition, *li* also has an aesthetic dimension as it incorporates decorum in a person's interactions with others (8:2). The assumption here is that through their own performances (as well as observing those of others), individuals will gradually grasp the different obligations, appropriate emotions and motivational reasons that properly underlie *li*-practices. Ideally, ongoing *li*-practice fosters a deeper appreciation of human relationships. We should also note the anti-conformism which comes across in 2:3:

> The Master said, "Lead the people with administrative injunctions (*zheng* 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (*xing* 刑), and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves." (trans. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 1998: 76)

This passage draws a sharp contrast between *li*, and punishments as instruments with which to regulate behaviour. It is undesirable for people simply to comply with regulations in order to avoid punishment. The culture of punishments made people "clever" and glib in order to evade punishment.[9] In contrast, Confucian *li* is not concerned with avoidance but seeks to incorporate moral reasons in action (1:3; 4:24; 14:20; 14:27). Added to these concerns was the issue of penal law being overly general, universalising over persons and situations.[10]

[8] *Yi* figures in a few conversations in the *Analects*. However, it has a number of different meanings in the conversations in this text. The term has more developed and defined meanings in the *Mencius* and *Xunzi*. We will devote more attention to *yi* in the following chapter, when we discuss those two texts.

[9] Hansen convincingly juxtaposes punishment as self-preserving, against *li* as other-regarding. Hansen provides an insightful analysis of the role of words in litigation (1992: 64–5).

[10] The theme that relational attachment must be recognised in legal institutions has persisted through Chinese history, even up until the Ming (1368–1644) and Qin (1644–1911) dynasties; some scholars dub this phenomenon the "Confucianisation of law." Refer to Ch'u (1965: 267–79).

A number of the passages in the *Analects* emphasise that *li*-practices are expressions of reverence (3:26; 17:21). In 17:11, the practice of both *li* and music is grounded in the sincere intentions and emotions, of the gift-giver and the performer, respectively:

> The Master said, "Surely when one says 'The rites, the rites,' it is not enough merely to mean presents of jade and silk. Surely when one says 'Music, music,' it is not enough merely to mean bells and drums." (trans. Lau, *Confucius*, 1979a: 145)

The presentation of gifts – even expensive ones such as jade and silk – is an act devoid of significance if it is not accompanied by the appropriate underlying emotions. The analogy with music is informative too: clanging bells and beating drums do not constitute music. Meaningful performances of music are always accompanied by appropriate emotions. Here, the emotion and its correct or optimal expression are irreducible, each to the other. Both are critical: the expression is the manifestation of the emotion, and emotions unexpressed are not realised. But what is the place of emotions in the *Analects*? Are they a component of *ren*?

Many of the passages in the *Analects* suggest a deep connection between *ren* and *li*: one's concern for humanity, *ren*, must be expressed intelligibly in lived contexts. In the words of Tu Weiming, Confucian self-cultivation is about "Learning to be Human" (1985: 51–66). Here, it is important to reflect on the normative force of *li*: might *li* stifle individuality, or might it inhibit emotions? Is there room in Confucian philosophy for the individual to challenge the status quo? This depends in part on how the relation between *ren* and *li* is understood, and which of the two concepts is thought to have precedence.

Ren and *Li*

The conversations in the *Analects* are divided on the relative priority of *ren* and *li*. Those associated with the disciples Zi You and Zi Xia seem to emphasise the greater significance of *li*, while those involving Zeng Zi, Zi Zhang and Yan Hui show a greater commitment to *ren* (Schwartz 1985: 130–4). This disagreement was later characterised as the "*nei-wai*" (inner-outer) debate. Within this debate, the "*nei*" position refers to the internal, perhaps innate, moral sense of humanity as the core idea of *ren*. By contrast, the "*wai*" stance centres on the spirit of *li*, the externally imposed, socially constructed norms

which guide and in some ways limit the "inner" self. This debate also touches on the nature-nurture question and its implications for moral cultivation. Which is more fundamental to the Confucian programme, natural (inner) moral inclination or its (outer) cultivation? *Analects* 6:18 makes it clear that both basic disposition (*zhi*) and refinement (*wen*) are necessary. Confucius here wittily rejects overemphasis on either:

> The Master said, "When one's basic disposition (*zhi* 質) overwhelms refinement (*wen* 文), the person is boorish; when refinement overwhelms one's basic disposition, the person is an officious scribe. It is only when one's basic disposition and refinement are in appropriate balance that you have the exemplary person (*junzi* 君子)." (trans. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 1998: 107–8)

There is no clear support in the *Analects* for either an "inner" or "outer" morality. The debate plays out in a more prominent way in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* texts, as we will see in the next chapter. In the following three sections, we explore how some contemporary scholars understand the relation between *ren* and *li*.

Ren Is Fundamental

Analects 3:3 asserts the priority of *ren* over *li*:

> The Master said, "What has a person who is not authoritative (*ren* 仁) got to do with observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮)? What has a person who is not authoritative got to do with the playing of music (*yue* 樂)?" (trans. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 1998: 82)

Music has two dimensions, one being the performative and the other its underlying emotion (*ren*). By analogy, the practice of ritual propriety encompasses both performative know-how and the expression of human feeling. Neither *li* nor music is meaningful if it is not accompanied by the appropriate human sentiments (*ren*). In this passage and a number of others (3:12; 3:26; 17:17; 17:21), *ren* is the ethical and motivational basis of ritual propriety. In 3:26, Confucius effectively sums up the futility of mechanical compliance:

> What could I see in a person who in holding a position of influence is not tolerant, who in observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) is not respectful, and who in overseeing the mourning rites does not grieve? (trans. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 1998: 88)

meaningless on its own. According to this view, *ren* is manifest only in *li*-practice. *Ren-li* interdependence has been most clearly articulated by Shun Kwong-Loi (1993). Shun explains their interdependence by analogy with the use of language. He aligns grasping the concept of tense with *ren*, and being able to use tense in language with *li*. The analogy works in the following way:

Tense in grammar	*Ren* and *Li*
To understand the concept of tense *is* to be able to use its various forms effectively.	To comprehend the significance of humanity (*ren*) *is* to be able to express it appropriately in one's interactions with others.
The use of grammatical structures associated with tense is an indication of a person's grasp of the concept.	A person's manner of interaction with others is an indication of her grasp of humanity.

Shun suggests that mastery of the usage of tense is both necessary and sufficient for the mastery of the concept within the linguistic community. One cannot plausibly claim to have mastered one but not the other. Similarly, one cannot claim to have fully mastered *li* without also understanding the human feeling it conveys; nor can one claim to be a person of *ren* if one is repeatedly unable to convey that to others in one's interactions with them. Shun's analysis of the *ren-li* connection is a creative and philosophically satisfying one, as it raises other important issues, including the criteria or basis for modifying *li*. It is a good example of contemporary scholarship in the field that both critically analyses ideas in Chinese philosophy and enlivens them in contemporary debate.

Self-Cultivation and Exemplary Personhood in Contemporary Philosophical Debates

The Confucian pictures of *ren* and *li* are embedded within a program of self-cultivation, through which one becomes an exemplary person. A person advanced in the cultivation process will have developed inner resources that enable him or her to evaluate existing norms and practice and to incorporate them in his engagements with others. These qualities are critical for the Confucian *junzi*, who holds an official position and who needs to have general capabilities (such as negotiation skills), as well as firm moral commitments (12:4; 15:18–23; 16:10). There are demanding requirements; he needs to edify

the people (12:16; 14:42) and have the ability even to guide a young orphan prince (8:6). In 4:5, Confucius asks, rhetorically, how a *junzi* who has abandoned the life of *ren* can properly bear his title.[12] In practice, the *junzi* has the dual responsibilities of serving his superior and administering the state (5:16). The *Analects* does not see the *junzi* as an official who simply implements the policies of the ruler; he is therefore not an "instrument" (2:12). He holds independent views and sometimes has the difficult task of persuading his superior to see things his way. Hence, he is cautious about taking on the position (9:13; 14:37). The complexity of the *junzi*'s role is expressed incisively in 19:10: he has to gain the trust of both the people and his superior.

It is necessary for the *junzi* to have some degree of detachment from conventional norms and expectations. This is articulated in the description of both Confucius' own developmental path (2:4) and the *junzi*'s qualities (15:21; 15:22). *Analects* 13:23 notes that the *junzi* does not seek to be similar to other people, although he aims to be harmonious with them:

> The *junzi* seeks to be harmonious [*he*] but does not attempt to be similar [*tong*]. The small man, by contrast, seeks to be similar and is not [necessarily] harmonious. (trans. Lau, *Confucius*, 1979a: 122; annotations by author)

The *junzi* will not tolerate certain behaviours, for instance, of those who speak ill of others or who slander their superiors (17:24). He is a discriminating thinker who critically evaluates the beliefs, norms and practice of his society, a creator of standards rather than a follower (2:1; 12:19), and who possesses a keen sense of moral discrimination (4:3). These considerations lead us to think that discretion plays a significant role in Confucian moral reasoning. The term *yi* – doing the right thing or taking an appropriate course of action – emphasises the flexibility required in living an exemplary life (4:10). *Yi* plays a particular role in practical deliberation as it reflects the Confucian concern for ethical appropriateness rather than

[12] This expresses the Confucian idea of *zhengming*, a phrase often translated as "rectification of names," although in the *Analects*, it is not that names must be rectified but rather that conduct must be brought in alignment with the titles that people bear (see 13:3; Lai 1995: 251–3). For the Confucians more generally, names had a regulative function, prescribing how people bearing certain titles should conduct themselves. The idea of names having normative force takes a central place in pre-Qin discussions, as we will see in the chapters to follow.

normativity.[13] On this account, the emphasis is on doing the right thing or taking appropriate action in a particular context. Hence, for the *junzi*,

> . . . [m]oral life is displayed not as a set of court-judgments on specifiable actions but rather as the development of relationships, skills, and ongoing virtues that make it possible to affect things for the better at the right time and in the right way. The power of this point derives from its contrast to the usual Western mode of moral thinking. Perhaps because of the pervasiveness of the juridical model, Western philosophers have looked at the judgeable action as the proper unit of moral worth. (Neville 1986: 191)

How have these and other elements of Confucian philosophy been covered in contemporary discussions? In the area of Confucian ethics, many studies focus on its unique features, often placing them in comparison with Western moral theories. Quite a few of the investigations highlight the distinctiveness of Confucian ethics and use its elements to challenge existing concepts and assumptions in Western moral philosophy (e.g. Cua 1971, 1973, 1979, 1989, 1996a, 1996b; Ivanhoe 1990, 2013; Lai 1995; Chong et. al. 2003; Chong 2007; Shen and Shun 2008; Yu et. al. 2010; McLeod 2012; Froese 2013; and Olberding 2014). Some discussions draw on Confucian insights to enlighten debates on contemporary ethical issues, for example, in discussions on government, human rights and politics (e.g. de Bary 1991, 1998; de Bary and Tu 1998; Hall and Ames 1998, 1999; Tan 2004; Grange 2004; Bell 2007; Brindley 2010; Angle 2012 and Ivanhoe 2014) and on environmental ethics (e.g. Tucker and Berthrong 1998; Callicott and McRae 2014). An area that warrants specific mention is the comparison of Confucian ethics with the feminist care ethic. These comparisons are particularly interesting as the Confucian tradition has been criticised for its failure to attend to the needs and interests of women (see Wolf 1994; Li 2000 and Rosenlee 2006). These analyses have been rewarding, as alternative models of a relational or care ethic are considered and new ideas generated as a result of the dialogue (Pang-White 2016; Tan and Foust 2016).

In discussions of comparative moral theory, deontological approaches fail to capture many features of Confucian philosophy. These include the Confucian picture of agency in light of its integration of human feeling and practice, the long-term aspect of the cultivation of *ren* and its motivations,

[13] See, for example, Hall and Ames (1997), Chong (1998) and Lai (2003b).

the narrative view of a person's life as a relational being and a situationally-sensitive account of self-realisation. These elements of Confucian ethics resonate with some elements of virtue ethics and hence possible alignments have been extensively explored (Ivanhoe 1991; Chong 1998; Star 2002; Van Norden 2007; Angle and Slote 2013). Importantly, in these discussions, Confucian virtue ethics provides rich resources for interrogating virtue ethics in the Western tradition, raising questions about the compatibility of virtue and consequentialist approaches; character and its realisation in situations; agency, conduct and character; competing goods and balancing virtues; the elements of a flourishing life and *teloi*; and so on.

Some other accounts avoid using the terminology and conceptual frameworks in Western philosophy to present Confucian philosophy. They claim there is a lack of fit between the two and that this could result in a reduced account of Confucian philosophy. Roger Ames' *Confucian Role Ethics* places the relational person – whose life embodies her roles – at the centre of Confucian ethics (2011a). Amy Olberding proposes that the *Analects* offers accounts of exemplary lives; we should not read the text as if it were offering a universally applicable model of life for everyone and which holds across all situations (2011). Although Olberding's analysis draws from a version of virtue ethics – exemplarist virtue ethics – her discussion carves out the distinctiveness of the *Analects* in providing different exemplars for our consideration in our own moral reflections.

A thread that runs through most, if not all, of these accounts of Confucian ethics is the inseparability of commitment and practice and, correspondingly, of the centrality of cultivation in its conception of a flourishing life. A fuller picture of a Confucian life must consider the epistemological assumptions that underlie its notion of learning. In the *Analects*, we find an empirical approach to learning, that is, a person learns by *doing*. These practically oriented ways of learning involve a wide range of human capacities, including:

- Looking (*jian*) and listening (*wen*) (2.18; 7.28)
- Having discussions with others (*yan*) (1:15)
- Asking questions (*wen*) (3:15)
- Observing (*guan*) the practice and conduct of others (2:10; 7:22)
- Reading (*dushu*) (16.13; 11.25; 17:9)
- Practising propriety (*li*) (12:1)

- Cultivating friendships with the benevolent (*qingren*) (1:6)
- Undertaking self-examination (15:6)
- Practising (*xi*) to build one's capacities (1:1; 1:4; 17:2)
- Reflecting on what one has observed and learnt (*si*) (2:15; 7:28; 19:6)

These elements of learning highlight Confucian philosophy's focus on handling tasks well, in different scenarios. What is appropriate in one case may not fit another, so Confucius gives different advice to two of his followers, for example, in 11:22. The *Analects* itself provides rich detail on scenarios, giving the sense that the practicalities do matter. Indeed, a concern Confucius had was confusion (*huo*) – not knowing how to choose between alternatives in a given situation (9:29; 12:20; 12:21). Following from this view, cultivation would involve the development of capacities to deal with and respond to situations as they arise.

In this regard, another key term in the *Analects* lends weight to the picture offered here. *Xin*, described metaphorically as the pin of a yoke that enables a carriage to be drawn (2:22), is often translated "sincerity" or "trustworthiness." This translation seeks to capture the idea of a person standing by his word.[14] However, while it brings out the alignment between a person's commitment and his actions, it fails to reflect another aspect of the term, the consistency of a person's actions over time. From this angle, the key question we need to ask is not just whether a person's actions are commensurate with his words but how a person realises his commitments, reliably, in different situations (1:4–8; 9:24–5; 12:10; 14:28). The conversations are concerned with whether a certain commitment can be realised (*xing*: to proceed) in context (11:3; 13:3; 18:7). This account of reliability brings together the *Analects*' ethical and epistemological concerns. It generates a picture of agency that focuses not only on ethical commitment but on its *realisation*. In this way, its ethical concerns come to life. They prompt questions such as: when should I overturn prevailing *li*-practice? How might I learn from the mistakes of the past? How do I generalise from patterns of moral conduct and how will these patterns inform my judgments? How do I learn to see the relevant moral and nonmoral features in each situation?

[14] D. C. Lau translates *xin* as "trustworthiness" (*Confucius*, 1979a). The picture of "a man standing by his word" was suggested by Ezra Pound, who articulated the views of his teacher Ernest Fenollosa (Pound 1951: 22; discussed in Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 1998: 53).

3 Human Nature and Cultivation in Confucian Philosophy: Mencius and Xunzi

Confucius' vision for rectifying society was idealistic: good government begins with the moral self-cultivation of able leaders. At times, the *Analects* acknowledges that the chances of such rectification were low (*Analects* 7:26; 9:13). Nevertheless, its theme of self-cultivation (*xiushen*) has had far-reaching effects in Chinese society and culture. The belief that education begets moral wisdom was articulated in the Chinese Civil Service Examination system for recruiting officials. The system, which had its beginnings during the Sui dynasty (581–618) and which thrived during the Qing (1644–1911), employed men who performed well in examinations based largely on Confucian texts. It was believed that scholars of the classical texts would also be ethically adept practitioners of good government (Elman 2009).

The Confucians were optimistic, yet to some extent pragmatic, in their assessment of human moral capacities and how these could be shaped to produce more fruitful outcomes for society. Self-cultivation played a central role in the Confucian hope for a better, more ethically focused society. Both Mencius (c. 385 BCE–c. 312 BCE) and Xunzi (c. 310 BCE–c. 219 BCE) reflected on the resources available to humanity for its cultivation. They discussed the human capacity to be moral and the fabric or infrastructure of society that supported its development. They drew different conclusions, however. Mencius believed that humans had a natural tendency to feel compassion even though some acted maliciously and selfishly; these latter behaviours resulted from a negligence to nurture the original compassionate heart-mind (*xin*). Xunzi held that individuals were not naturally predisposed to ethical conduct; it was only through the establishment of standards for human conduct, initiated by the ruler, that these problems could be addressed. In spite of their differences, both viewed morally-inspired government as the key to their respective approaches to establish a humane society. Their debates on human nature and its cultivation engaged with a range of views held by

other thinkers. These discussions and ensuing tensions shaped conceptions of morality, government and society in China for years to come.

Confucian philosophy holds a unique conception of the relational self, one that is shaped by its relationships and situated within a particular human community, within which it has its spheres of influence. It attends to the contexts within which learning is situated; in the texts associated with the Confucian thinkers Mencius and Xunzi, the nature of social institutions and the practices and ideals promulgated through these institutions were of vital importance. The following Confucian themes that have been shaped by the debate between the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi* are highlighted in current debates in comparative philosophy: character development and issues in moral psychology, centrality of relationships in moral life, the progressive nature of moral development (focusing on different elements of moral reasoning that are cultivated at different stages in a person's moral life) and the integrated nature of personal development and socio-political progress. This chapter explores key themes in the two texts in light of a range of views expressed in contemporaneous texts that were excavated only in the last fifty years, followed by discussion of some insights arising from their disagreements.

Mencius: Nurturing Goodness

The figure Mencius comes across as an estimable Confucian, said to have been taught by Confucius' grandson, Zisi (c. 483 BCE–c. 402 BCE), famous for his upbringing because of his mother's (Mengmu) exemplary moral teaching[1] and author of an eponymous text that frequently refers to the ideas of Confucius.[2] Although the issue of authorship and details of Mencius' life are disputed, the text nevertheless holds a central place in Confucian philosophy for its optimistically humanistic views of human goodness and

[1] On Zisi, refer to Refer to Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book*, 1963a: 49. The Mengmu story is told by Liu Xiang (first century BCE) in the *Lienü Zhuan*. Refer to Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 2014: 18–20, and Wang 2006: 96–7. For an account of the Confucian followers and their views, refer to Lo 2014.

[2] The *Books of Mencius* is one of four sets of books in the Confucian canon, the *Four Books* (*Si Shu*). Collated by the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130–1200), these four books, the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), the *Analects* (*Lunyu*), the *Books of Mencius* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*) were part of the core curriculum of the civil service examinations.

compassionate government (*ren zheng*). A short, cryptic phrase captures its philosophy of human goodness: "human nature is good" (*xing shan*) (*Mencius* 6A:6). This statement of Mencius' position arises in a conversation with one of his disciples, Gongduzi, where three competing views are laid out:

> Gongduzi said, "Gaozi said, 'There is neither good nor bad in human nature,' but others say, 'Human nature can become good or it can become bad, and that is why with the rise of King Wan and King Wu, the people were given to goodness, while with the rise of King Yu and King Li, they were given to cruelty.' Then there are others who say, 'There are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature. For this reason, Xiang could have Yao as Prince, and Shun could have the Blind Man (Gu Sou) as father, and Qi, Viscount of Wei and Prince Bi Gan could have Zhou as nephew as well as sovereign.' Now you say human nature is good. Does this mean that all the others are mistaken?" (*Mencius* 6A:6; trans. Lau, *Mencius*, 1979b: 247)

In the context of this conversation and others in the *Mencius*, there is a fundamental concern about how goodness is *natural* to human beings. Translators have sometimes understood this to mean "intrinsic," "inherent" or "inborn," suggesting that goodness is a tendency or disposition humans are born with. However, in the discussion here, we use the term "natural" to capture the nonspecific and varied uses of the term in the *Mencius*. On this interpretation, for Mencius to say "human nature is good" is to imply that goodness comes naturally to humanity because of the kind of being humans are and, possibly, that this is *distinctively* human. This interpretation avoids essentialism and is better able to accommodate a developmental path as well as the fact that individuals may not be consistently good. What, then, is meant by "human nature" (*xing*) and "goodness" (*shan*)? Closer examination of the three positions will help us better understand Mencius' views as well as their place in Confucian intellectual history.[3] The competing conceptions of human nature set out in this conversation are as follows:

- Morality is not a naturally given aspect of human nature. ("There is neither good nor bad in human nature.")
- Human nature is not naturally inclined towards goodness. ("Human nature can become good or it can become bad").

[3] Refer to A. C. Graham's careful description of the three positions (1967: 13–5).