

Introduction

BRIAN BRUYA

I. THE BATTLE OF THE HUNDRED SCHOOLS

The Imperial Period in China began in 221 BCE, when the First Emperor, hailing from the far western state of Qin, completed his conquest of China. From that time until 1911, there were six subsequent major dynasties: the Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing. But what about before the Qin? For 789 years, from 1045 to 256 BCE (much longer than any subsequent dynasty), a single lineage held the throne as Son of Heaven, ruler of China. This dynasty's name is Zhou (pronounced *joe*—see the Pronunciation Index in the back of the book for how to pronounce other Chinese names and terms). The period of the Zhou that concerns us is the second half, when traditional order had broken down.

The traditional order was unique among world civilizations. The Zhou Dynasty begins with the victors over the preceding Shang Dynasty fanning out across the country, taking control of key cities and towns—over 150 in total. We can think of each of these newly formed states as a fief, loyal to the Zhou king. Each enfeoffed ruler had local control but served at the pleasure of the king: visiting the king regularly to renew bonds of fealty, sending tribute to the king, and doing the king's bidding when necessary. Each fief was handed down to the ruler's eldest son. In the beginning, these fiefs were close, either in terms of familial relationships or in terms of military loyalty, and the relationship between king and vassal was viewed as like that between father and son. Over time, however, disputes arose, loyalties frayed, and battles occurred. 250 years in, and ties were stretched to the breaking point.

A traditional story (perhaps apocryphal) is often used to illustrate a key turning point in the dynasty. In 773 BCE, the king had just divorced his primary wife and replaced her with his favorite, who was difficult to please. In order to entertain her, the king arranged for a large feast on the outskirts of the capital, and at nightfall he had the warning beacons on the city wall lit. The beacons went up in flame one after another in a spectacular display that reached to the horizon, and after several hours, troops from neighboring states arrived breathless at the capital to bring aid to the king, whom they thought was in grave danger from invasion. The spectacle delighted the queen, but of course the generals and soldiers who had rushed to help were not amused. This happened more than once.

Not long after, the state of Shen, which nursed a grudge against the king, allied with the Quan Rong tribe and attacked the Zhou capital. When the Zhou warning beacons were lit, the neighboring states ignored them. The capital was laid waste, and the king was killed. The Zhou lineage was allowed to continue, but it was forced to move its capital east, its area of direct control was reduced, and it lost the fealty of the major vassals. From that point on, the various states quickly realized it was every state for itself. For the next five and a half centuries the states gradually swallowed each other up until only seven major states remained at the end of the Spring & Autumn Period (770–481 BCE). As armies increased in size during the Warring States Period (481–221 BCE), the disruption of warfare increased as well. The battle for ultimate supremacy continued until Qin was the last state standing.

In this battle for ultimate supremacy it would no longer do for a ruler to simply rely on his circle of close nobility to act as generals and ministers. Every ruler needed the most capable people around. And so an intellectual ferment began. Not only did rulers look beyond the nobility for brains and talent but people of brains and talent began to promote their own views about how best to govern—theories that blossomed to include all kinds of associated philosophical concerns. Over time, similar lines of thinking coalesced into a variety of schools of thought, such as Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, Daoism, and so on. The Chinese refer to it as the period of the contending voices of a hundred schools of thought.

The first major Confucian text was the *Analects* of Confucius, a handbook for creating a flourishing society through cultural education and strong moral leadership. Mencius, a student of Confucius' grandson, Zisi, was the second major Confucian thinker. His influential book, *The Mencius*, uses memorable analogies and thought experiments (such as the child on the edge of a well) to drive home subtle points about the goodness of human nature and effective governing. Two short pieces that were important to the revival of Confucianism in the Song Dynasty were also products of this time. They are *Advanced Education* (*Da Xue*) and *The Middle Path* (*Zhong Yong*), traditionally attributed to Confucius' student Zengzi and to Zisi, respectively. *Advanced Education* offers a pithy formula for the self-development of caring, world-class leaders, while *The Middle Path* discusses how to achieve balance both internally and externally.

While the Confucians concentrated on creating moral leaders, others, known to us now as Daoists, preferred to concentrate on becoming as close as possible to the natural way of things. The major Daoist texts from this period are the *Zhuangzi* and Laozi's *Daodejing*. The *Zhuangzi* is one of the great works of world literature, simultaneously a profound philosophical study of metaphysics, language, epistemology, and ethics. It's also seriously fun to read for its colorful characters and paradoxical stories. Laozi's *Daodejing* echoes many themes of the *Zhuangzi*, with an emphasis on the sage as leader, non-action, and emptying the mind. Its poetic language and spare style stand it in stark contrast to the *Zhuangzi* but also allow for a

richness of interpretation that has made it an all-time favorite of contemplative thinkers across traditions. A third Daoist from this time period, Liezi, had his name placed on a book a few centuries later. The *Liezi* adopts the style and themes of the *Zhuangzi* and continues the whimsical yet profound tradition.

Other thinkers concentrated on ruthless efficiency in government and came to be known as Legalists. One major Legalist thinker was Han Feizi. His book, the *Han Feizi*, condemns ideas from other schools of thought that had devolved into practices that were considered wasteful, corrupt, and inefficient. In response, he speaks directly to the highest levels of leadership, using Daoist terminology and fable-like stories to make his points, advising rulers on how to motivate people, how to organize the government and the military, and how to protect their own positions of power.

Still other thinkers concentrated their theories on military strategy and tactics. The major representative of this genre is, of course, Sunzi, and his classic *Art of War*, a text that so profoundly and succinctly examines how to get the greatest competitive advantage with the least harm done that it is still read today by military leaders and captains of industry.

The political, military, and intellectual battles continued throughout the Warring States Period in a complex interplay until Han Feizi's version of Legalism seemed to tip the balance for the Qin. But the victory was short-lived, and soon a version of Confucianism would rise to the top as the preferred philosophy of political elites. But Daoism, and later Buddhism, had their own periods of dominance and influenced many aspects of Chinese culture over the centuries.

II. CONFUCIUS AND HIS IDEAS

As social roles were changing during the Spring & Autumn Period and rulers were turning to talent outside the nobility, there arose a need for teachers to instruct aspiring leaders. Confucius was, himself, an aspiring leader, but he made his mark as an educator and as a philosopher of education. C. C. Tsai opens this book with the story of Confucius' life, where we see Confucius commonly interacting with his students.

As for his ideas, there are two foundational ideas in Confucius that are prerequisites for understanding and contextualizing all other ideas in the book—one is perfectly familiar to a citizen of a modern liberal democracy like ours and one is quite the opposite. They are culture and hierarchy.

First, culture. In general terms, culture is whatever gets passed down to the next generation. We often narrow the meaning, however, either to something like high art or to touristic caricatures associated with ethnic minorities, like performance of hula dance or Native American drumming. Both of these conceptions of culture are distant from everyday life. For Confucius, culture is a set of practices and traditions that enrich everyday life and engender stability and harmony in society.

Does culture really provide stability and engender harmony? Think about shared holidays, family dinners, birthdays, weddings, funerals, and norms of behavior. What does more in our society to provide stability and engender harmony than the patterns of shared activities that structure our lives? Confucius had a word for this aspect of culture. He called it *li* 禮, which is translated in the book variously as ceremony, propriety, ritual, proper behavior, or sacrifice, depending on the context. It also includes basic etiquette, such as bowing, handshakes, saying “please” and “thank you,” and so on. *Li* enriches our lives by providing meaning (think weddings, baptisms, birthday parties), and other aspects of culture (in which *li* is embedded) provide subtle ways of understanding current events and our place in the world (think novels, TV dramas, satirical comedy, songs, etc.). These customs and forms of art and entertainment are avenues of emotional involvement in our world, without which we would be at a loss to both understand our world and express ourselves in it. Our established forms of etiquette are also like this. Imagine if you went to a job interview in a foreign country, and didn’t know how to express the good will that is expressed in our society through a common handshake. It would be awkward, and trying to figure out what to do or say would sap your energy and distract you from more important things. *Li* gives us these forms for expression and understanding.

Just like we require our children to read novels or poetry to expand their minds and foster a moral sensibility, so Confucius

thought that a primary goal of education was creating a moral person. You can see the emphasis he places on *li*, culture, and education by the number of times they appear in this book. In 7:5, Confucius shows a fervent nostalgia for the Duke of Zhou, whom he understood to be the founder of the cultural forms he espouses. 5:15 gives a definition of “culture” based on inquiry and a love of learning. In 6:20, Confucius shows the necessity of an emotional connection to learning—mere interest is not enough; the best kind of learning is a joyful process. And through learning, one can accomplish great things (14:35), such as creating a moral society. In our society today, we may look to the law for order in society, but Confucius was leery of extrinsic motivation and preferred that each of us do the right thing because we want to, not because we have to. His preference for *li* over law is clear in 2:3. *Li* limits what we’re willing to do (6:27, 12:1) and also provides opportunities and avenues for appropriate behavior (3:15, 12:5). More than anything, *li* engenders the kind of humble and deferential behavior that keeps a hierarchical society functioning smoothly.

In our society, we favor equality across the board, so we might expect that a philosophy that favors hierarchy will be about getting power and preserving it. In fact, we see just that in the work of Han Feizi (coming later in this series). For Confucius, though, humility and deference are paramount, no matter where one is in the hierarchy (13:1, 13:19). On top of this, Confucius views hierarchies as dynamic, not static. Just as an infant daughter eventually moves her way up through the hierarchy of a family from dependent child to wife, mother, and aunt, and eventually matriarch, so a commoner can eventually make his way up through the hierarchy of society to become a government official who looks after others. We would think of it today as social mobility.

Social mobility depends on a more fundamental political idea: meritocracy—rule by the able. The idea is simple: The best person for the job is the person best able to do the job. As familiar as this idea is to us today, it has taken a frightfully long time for it to take root in our society. In fact, it really is only since the Civil Rights movement that we have stopped explicitly excluding people based on characteristics unrelated to ability.

The Greeks favored wealth as a criterion of inclusion. Later Europeans favored blood lineage. Other exclusionary criteria have been race, religion, and gender. Although the Chinese long excluded one whole gender from political power, beginning well before the time of Confucius they started the process of elevating men of ability over men of good birth.

Confucius was fully on board with the idea of meritocracy among men. He promoted it through educating all who came to him (7:7), giving them a shot at improving themselves to take on a large role of responsibility in society—one that would have been closed to them in other major cultures around the world, including the early democracies of Greece and Rome. Later, the idea of educating the next generation of leaders was institutionalized in China, and after European contact it contributed to our own institutions of entry into civil service via a process of institutional learning and uniform examination.

So we shouldn't be put off by Confucius' emphasis on hierarchy. Hierarchy is all around us, whether we like it or not. In the sense that you may be a better piano player than me or know more about politics or science, you are higher up the ladder of ability in that respect than I am, and so are in a position to teach me. I am in a position to learn from you. That's a hierarchical relationship in Confucius' eyes, and each of us, if we wish to exploit that differential, should act in certain ways. You should treat me with the care of a mentor and generously guide me. I should treat you with respect while humbly and assiduously learning from you. When these roles are fulfilled, great strides are made. In 6:30, Confucius says, "A benevolent person wishes to establish himself by establishing others and to achieve through helping others achieve." Teachers are mentors. On the other side, students mustn't slack off. In 7:8, Confucius says, "If a student doesn't feel troubled in his studies, I don't enlighten him. If a student doesn't feel frustrated in his studies, I don't explain to him. If I point out one corner, and he can't point out the other three, I don't repeat myself."

According to Confucius, the main virtue guiding the behavior of the mentor/leader is *ren* 仁, translated here as benevolence. The first step in benevolence is developing yourself (12:1, 12:17, 15:10). There are many episodes in this book

where Confucius refers to the *junzi* 君子 (translated here as "gentleman"), by which he means the person who is so fully developed in character and virtue that he can act as a model and guide for others: "a gentleman supports the good in people" (12:16). "Gentleman" isn't a perfect translation because in our day it refers to a pretty minimal set of virtues, like holding the door open for others, and it is also gender specific. *Junzi*, on the other hand, is gender neutral and involves well-developed virtues and leadership abilities. A gentleman in Confucius' sense is the kind of person worth looking up to, who has cultivated a genuine concern for others and has the ability to make good on it. Think of someone in your own life who, through kind and patient guidance along with steadfast integrity, has had a strong positive influence on your life, like a coach, a teacher, a grandparent, or a supervisor at work. This is what Confucius meant by a *junzi*. In 6:30, a benevolent leader is someone who spreads kindness to the people, and in 18:1, he goes so far as to sacrifice himself speaking truth to power.

Before one can get to such a high level of moral and social achievement, one must begin at the bottom of the hierarchy and learn the virtues of the follower. The ideal of behavior at the bottom rung is *xiao* 孝, translated here as filial virtue or thoughtfulness toward one's parents. This ideal begins in the home, the most natural hierarchy in Confucius' eyes and the hierarchy that, in its ideal form, should act as a model for the rest of society. In the home, the child is *xiao* to the parents, obeying them and treating them with respect and thoughtfulness when young (1:2) and taking care of them through feelings of respect and gratitude when older (2:7, 4:19). By exercising *xiao* at home, one learns to serve others, which can be naturally extended when one steps onto the bottom rung of the ladder out in society. While working one's way up the ladder, one concentrates on being *zhong* 忠, conscientious (3:19).

Out in society, there will always be temptations to act immorally, to choose one's own short-term interests over the right thing to do more broadly. The term in Chinese for doing the right thing is *yi* 義. We see the idea clearly in 4.16, 9.1, and 14.12. Confucius also reminds us that the right thing to do is often dependent on circumstances and cannot be decided

ahead of time according to unbending principles (4.10). There is no final arbiter in the Confucian system, no St. Peter waiting at the Pearly Gates, no god to offer a final judgment, no holy book of commandments to tell us what is right and wrong. This is why self-cultivation is so vitally important for Confucius and why reflection and study must go hand in hand (1.4, 2.15, 19.6).

The philosophy of Confucius is often considered a philosophy of ethics or of politics. It certainly is those—Confucius favors a certain specific set of intertwined virtues, and he favors a government based on the structure of the family. But his philosophy is also a philosophy of education. He advocates a way to create competent, intelligent, sympathetic, moral leaders—the kind of people who instill confidence and cause others to naturally gravitate toward them. In 2:1, he says, “If you govern with virtue, the people will happily follow you—like the North Star, which rests quietly in its place while the other stars revolve around it.” Today in China, Confucius is still known as the First Teacher, and is celebrated in the national Teacher’s Day holiday, which has precedents going back 2,000 years.

In the *Analects*, nearly every episode has something to do with education, culture, governing, or getting along with others, which to Confucius are various angles on the same thing—how to develop a harmonious society in which inevitable differences work to the benefit of all. This is the kind of wisdom that we can all use more of.

III. THE ARTIST AND HIS WORK

When I was a kid and the daily newspaper was dropped at our doorstep, I loved reading the comic strips and the political cartoons. They could be cute, amusing, and insightful all at once. When I came across C. C. Tsai’s illustrated versions of the Chinese classics, I recognized the same brilliant combination of wit and wisdom and fell in love with his books.

I would be remiss if I finished this introduction without introducing the inimitable Chih-chung Tsai (蔡志忠), who goes by “C. C.” in English, and whose own story is as amazing as anything he depicts in his books. The way he tells it, he knew at

the age of five that he would draw for a living, and at the age of fifteen, his father gave him permission to drop out of school and move from their small town to the metropolis of Taipei, where a comic publisher had welcomed him after receiving an unsolicited manuscript, not realizing how young he was. The young C. C. developed his own humorous comic book characters, all the while honing his skills and learning from other illustrators. During a required three-year stint in the military, he devoted his free time to educating himself in art history and graphic design. On leaving the military he tested into a major movie and television production company, beating out other applicants with their formal educations. There, he had the good fortune of coming across a cache of Disney films, and taught himself animation. Soon he was making his own short films, and then decided to open his own animation studio, winning Taiwan’s equivalent of the Oscar just two years later.

Always looking for a new challenge, C. C. began a syndicated comic strip, which quickly expanded to five different strips in magazines and newspapers across Southeast Asia. At the height of his popularity as a syndicated cartoonist, he turned in yet another direction—the illustration of the Chinese classics in comic book format. They were an instant success and propelled him to the top of the bestseller list. That’s what you have in your hand.

According to C. C., the secret to his success is not ambition, or even hard work. It’s just about having fun and following his interests. One of his interests has been studying the classics. Remember, he dropped out of middle school. By ordinary standards, he should be unable to grasp the language of ancient China. The early Chinese wrote in a language that is to contemporary Chinese as Latin is to contemporary Spanish or Italian. But he is a tireless autodidact, with a nearly photographic memory. He knows as much about the Chinese classics as many Ph.D.’s in the field. The main difference between him and a tenured professor is that he isn’t interested in the refined disputes and distinctions on which scholars spend their careers. He merely wants to understand the ideas and share them with others. This book, and others in the series, is the result of playtime in his modest studio—serious and lighthearted, whimsical and profound all at once.

In working with the classics, C. C. stays close to tradition, and in his illustrations he more or less follows the prominent commentaries. This means that the texts that underpin his books are pretty much the same as the texts that underpin other translations you will find on bookstore shelves, with incidental differences here and there that are insignificant to the overall meaning.

C. C. translated the Classical language into contemporary Chinese so that the average reader could understand it. While respecting his interpretive choices where there is ambiguity, I've also chosen to translate with an eye to the Classical language, rather than just from his contemporary Chinese. This helps avoid the attenuation of meaning that happens when communication goes through too many steps—like in the “telephone” game that children play.

In this book, there are just a few places where some explanatory content has been added. For example, in 6:23, C. C.

explains why wise people might enjoy water or benevolent people the mountains. That explanation is not in the original, although it can be found in traditional commentaries. This can also be said for the explanation of 9:1. I also added a bit of context for historical figures who would likely be unfamiliar to modern readers. For example, I point out that people mentioned only by name in the original are students, noblemen, etc.

The reader should have full confidence that each classic illustrated by C. C. is the real deal. The advantage that these versions of the classics have over regular, text-only editions is the visual dimension that brings the reader directly into the world of the ancients.

I hope that you enjoy this English version of C. C.'s illustrated *Analects* of Confucius as much as so many others have enjoyed the original Chinese version.