Chinese Philosophy II
Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.)

• Confucius is the Latinized name of Kong Fuzi (Great Master K'ung).

• The most detailed traditional account of Confucius's life is contained in the *Records of the Historian* by Sima Qian, who lived from 145 B.C.E. to 86 B.C.E.

• Many modern scholars have dismissed this biography as only legend. However we can use the source to reconstruct an outline of the philosopher's life and influence.
Confucius lived in a time of social and moral chaos. (The Warring States period in Chinese history 475-221 B.C.E.)

Confucius was concerned about the constant warfare among the clans and feudal kingdoms of his day.

He sought moral principles to help see people through the turbulence of the time.
Confucianism and the Tao

• “Confucianism is also concerned with the Tao because it is concerned with living in harmony with the right way. “This way is the cosmic Tao that permeates the entire universe.”
Confucianism and the Tao

• Whereas for Taoists the primary focus of Tao is in nature, with Confucianists the primary focus is on human relationships. Nature acts in harmony with the Tao naturally, but people don’t.
The Tao in the Human

• “The Confucian would say that training in virtue is necessary in order to enable the Tao to manifest itself clearly in the human being.”
Confucian Texts  
(The Analects)

- Not inspired, or revealed, yet regarded as infallible
- Embrace traditional customs, rites and beliefs of the past.

Confucius saw himself as a "transmitter" rather than a creator. "In me, knowledge is not innate," he said. "I am one who loves antiquity and is earnest in the study of it."
THE FOUNDATIONS OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT: CHINESE FOLK RELIGION

A form of nature-worship: spirits associated with natural phenomenon—spirits of mountains, rivers, land, grain, sun, moon, stars, etc.

All inferior to the supreme Heaven-god, Tian (Heaven)

Tian was the upholder of the moral law, exercising a reign over all men.

The spirits of departed relatives were largely dependent for their happiness on the conduct of their living descendants. Children have a duty to their dead parents to contribute to their glory and happiness by living lives of virtue.
TEACHINGS:

Humanity
Confucius held the traditional view that humans are born good.

People are spoiled by bad influences, bad environment, evil examples and a yielding to evil appetites. Each person has the ability to fulfill one’s duty as listed in the rules of conduct.

Greatest concern was for conduct in a social context Communal verses individualistic
TEACHINGS:
Virtue

The pursuit of virtue is primary.

The Five Constants:

Love, benevolence (jen)
Righteousness (yi)
Propriety (li)
Wisdom (zhi)
Fidelity, trust (xin)
Love/Benevolence

Jen/Ren

• The highest virtue.

• Chinese character combining “person” and “two”.

• It represents humans and their moral relation to others.

• The ideal is not the individual but the person in relationship.

• Regard for the welfare of others and a readiness to help.

The Golden Rule:

"Is not mutual goodwill such a principle? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others".
Righteousness

*Yì*

Moral uprightness that evokes the right response from *selfless* motives.

Duty based on reciprocity.
Confucius used the term for reverence and loyalty for others which includes knowing the right thing to do and doing it appropriately.

The primary way of expressing *jen*.

Respect relationships – love and respect parents, ancestors, siblings, rulers.
Wisdom

Zhi

Realizing jen/ren in concrete practice.

Knowing what is right and wrong. Confucius:

“The wise are free from perplexities.”

Know-how rather than know-that.
Fidelity/Trust

*Xín*

Truthful and straightforward in speech; Faithful to one’s promises.

Conscientious in the discharge of one’s duties to others.

Observing the rules of right conduct in one’s heart as well as in outward actions.
The Virtuous Person: The Junzi

Through Study and disciplined practice:

"Exemplary persons understand what is appropriate; petty persons understand what is of personal advantage."
THE ANALECTS:

When a noble person goes out into the world, he has no 'dos' and 'don'ts'; whatever is right, he imitates." (4:10)

"Noble people cherish virtue; petty people cherish property. Noble people hope for justice; petty people hope for favors." (4:11)

Virtue is not left to stand alone. He who practices it will have neighbors.
Proper Relationships

• Society would be chaotic if people did not find their right and proper position and then do their best to fulfill their responsibilities.
Confucius on Relationships

• Human beings cannot reach their potential in isolation. “A human being becomes a full person only through the contributions of other people and through fulfilling one’s obligations to them.”

• We become more human by learning the necessary skills of living in harmony with others.
Father-Son

• “Father-son becomes the primal model of a relationship and in Confucianism it is in interpersonal relationships that one is humanized and Tao is manifested.”
The Five Great Relationships

• “Human beings are not individuals but interwoven threads of relationships with many people. To a great extent, in Confucian thinking human beings are their relationships.”
The Five Great Relationships

• “These relationships (father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, elder-younger, ruler-subject), signify that each person must live up to his or her social role and social status”.
Confucian Virtues

• “Confucianism stresses loyalty, consensus, hard work, thrift, emotional control and sincerity,” which means “choosing to do what is correct for society.” “He who attains to sincerity is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast.”

• The family stands at the heart of the daily experience.
Women and Wives

“A wife was to exemplify Yin (passive, plaint) in order to provide the harmonious complement to the husband’s Yang (active, firm).”

A Qing Dynasty wedding. The groom's parents are seated. The bride is the one in the centre wearing a red dress and blue headpiece, presenting tea to her mother-in-law. The groom usually wears a sash forming an “X” in front of him. Sometimes the "X" includes a giant bow or flower, though not in this picture.
Subservience

Wives were often virtual slaves of their mothers-in-law. There was almost nothing they could do except obey them.
Women and Taoism

• It is not surprising then that women would turn to Taoism to meet their spiritual needs. It offered them a deeper validity then the “masculine” emphasis found in Confucianism.
The Cultural Revolution and Confucianism

• The main thrust of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was to break with the past and all that was antiquated.
• The roles people are allowed to fulfill become so restricted that there is not a lot of room for growth or individuality.