CONFUCIANISM
Confucianism is one of the three main “religions” followed in China (along with Daoism and Buddhism).

In China the three teachings mix and mingle quite freely.

According to a popular Chinese saying: “Every Chinese wears a Confucian cap, a Daoist robe, and Buddhist sandals.”
Confucianism became the state religion/philosophy during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and it emphasizes codes of conduct, orders of obedience and ancestral respect/worship.
Confucius (551-479 BCE)

- Little is known about him.
- He lived in China during the age of Socrates, the Hebrew prophets and roughly the same time as Buddha.
- Confucius was neither an ascetic nor a contemplative, but a practical person. He liked to fish, hunt and sing. He was married with children.
Confucius (551-479 BCE)

- Born in Qufu in the state of Lu (today’s Shandong province) to a poor family.
Confucius
(551-479 BCE)

• Devoted himself to study.
• Used his expertise in ritual, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, mathematics, poetry, history and music to set himself up as the first private teacher in China.
• His aim in teaching was character formation and self-cultivation.
• Taught through conversational question and answers much like Socrates.
• Credited with editing and writing portions of the five Confucian classics.
Confucius

• Claimed he was doing nothing more than passing down the wisdom of the great teachers.

• Although sacrifices are offered in Confucian temples everyday across the world, Confucius is remembered as neither a saint nor a miracle worker, but as a teacher/scholar.
Confucius

• Had a fanatical faith in the ability of human beings to improve and even perfect themselves.
• How is this accomplished?
• EDUCATION – which is more about building character than gaining knowledge.
• We improve ourselves and our society by studying the ancient classics, emulating the sages, learning proper etiquette and rituals, and practicing virtues.
The Five Confucian Classics

1. The metaphysical BOOK OF CHANGES (Yijing or I Ching) - A divination manual that provides readings of human events through 64 randomly produced hexagrams.
BOOK OF CHANGES

• The most celebrated of the Five Classics.

• Reveals ancient secrets about how things are born, die, and change through the endless interaction of yin (feminine, shady, cold, hidden, passive, soft, yielding, Earth) and yang (masculine, bright, hot, evident, aggressive, hard, controlling, Heaven).
The Five Confucian Classics

2. The historical BOOK OF DOCUMENTS - A collection of historical records and speeches of the great sage rulers of early Chinese dynasties that detail the importance of governing by virtue.
The Five Confucian Classics


4. The social BOOK OF RITES – Describes the proper etiquette and rituals and envisions society as a beloved community of mutual cooperation.
The Five Confucian Classics

5. The historical SPRING AND AUTUMN ANNALS – Documents from Confucius that underscore the centrality of collective memory (tradition) in creating a stable society.
• The Analects are Confucius’ commentary on the 5 classics written by his student Mencius.

• The Analects grew to be one of the central texts of Confucianism and one of the world’s most influential books.

• In it Confucius identifies chaos as the human problem and order as the solution.
• The techniques Confucius employs to move from sickness/chaos to cure/order are ethical and ritual.

• Confucius taught each of his students to try and become an exemplary person by learning to cultivate ren (human-heartedness) and li (ritual/etiquette/propriety).
The virtue of Ren

- Virtue is the foundation of civilization and the foundation of virtue is ren.

- Ren is mentioned over 100 times in the Analects.

- Ren = Humanness, humanity, altruism, love, compassion, “human-heartedness.”
The virtue of Ren

• The Chinese character combines the image of "human being" with the image of "two" so ren refers to right relationships among people.
The virtue of *Ren*

- *Ren* should be cultivated foremost in the family.
- Honoring parents is central to Confucius.
- The opening lines of the Analects refer to family piety as the “root” of *ren*.
- Of the five relationships, the first each of us learns (or fails to learn) is that between parent and child.
- If families are well ordered, human interactions will be harmonious, and if human interactions are harmonious, society will be harmonious too.
How do we cultivate human heartedness?

Li = “to arrange in order”.

Etiquette, customs, manners, ceremony, courtesy, civility, and propriety.

Li is so crucial to Confucians that the Chinese sometimes refer to Confucianism as the religion of li.

Doing the proper thing in the proper way under any given set of circumstances is to act in the Way of Heaven.
LI

• *Li* stands alongside *ren* as one of the two key concepts in Confucius’s thought.
• *Ren* is inward and subjective.
• *Li* is outward and objective (it is *ren* put into practice).
• *Li* extends to the seemingly mundane matters as how to look, listen, speak, and move.
“Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites (li); do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.”

(Analects 12:1).
**Li**

- *Li* is to ask tactfully about your parent’s health. It is to stand up straight. It is to seek wealth within the rules. It is to allow your teacher to speak first.

- *Li* is to avoid extremes in both thought and behaviour, taking your pleasure in moderation, and otherwise following the balanced and harmonious Way of Heaven.
**Li**

- *Li* is to eat slowly, to pour tea just so, to avoid slurping your soup, and knowing what to wear at a wedding, or a funeral.
- In sum, *li* is to make space for reverence in all things; treating ordinary interactions as if they were sacred ceremonies.
LI

- *Li* is how *ren* expresses itself in the world. But ritual and propriety in turn makes us more human-hearted and in the process act as the social glue that creates and sustains social order.

- It is *li* that makes society run smoothly, harmonizing Heaven and humanity.
Confucianism

• Lack of interest in the divine, (but does speak of heaven as an impersonal force that watches over human life and legitimates the authority of rulers.

• Heaven (though impersonal) does have a will.

• Does not address issues of death and the afterlife. (When asked what happens when we die Confucius said, “I’m still trying to figure out life, why ask me about the afterlife?”)
Confucianism

• Everyday ethical and worldly concerns are regarded as profoundly spiritual.

• Human nature comes from heaven and the good life is living in accordance with nature, which carries out the mandate of heaven.
Confucianism

• One of the hallmarks of Confucians is their conviction that ethics and ritual are inextricably intertwined.
• Social life is essential.
• Self transformation is a communal act.
• We become human by being social.
Confucianism

• The focus is not on our relationship with the divine, but with each other.
• Morality, etiquette, ritual and propriety.
• Only through interaction with other human beings do we become fully human.
• If you want to change society you need to change individuals.
Confucianism

• The self is not a solo individual, but the center of a vast web of relationships with family, community, nation and world.
• Self cultivation is for the purpose of transforming society as we interact with others.
Confucianism

• Sees hierarchy as an essential ingredient of social harmony.
• Things should be called what they really are.
• Things should conform to what they are called.
• Disharmony comes on society when people do not know their roles and/or do not act in accordance with them.
The Five relationships

• Parent/child
• Husband/wife
• Elder brother/younger brother
• Friend/friend
• Ruler/subject

• Each of these relationships is suppose to be characterized by two-way mutuality and reciprocity rather than one way obedience.
Five virtues

• Human-heartedness
• Justice
• Propriety
• Wisdom
• Faithfulness

• Careful cultivation of the relationships and the five virtues is supposed to produce social order and make us fully human.
History

• Confucianism gave us Chinese mores and the Chinese mind.

• For roughly two millennia Confucianism was China’s official orthodoxy.

• The Five Classics were the core texts in Chinese schools in 136 BCE and, for more than a millennia, the only way to get a civil job was through passing exams on these scriptures.

• This ended in 1905 and in 1928 the official state sacrifices to Confucius were discontinued by communism.
History

• Communist party officials denounced Confucius as the “number one hooligan” and credited Confucianism with all sorts of high crimes against the new Marxist-Leninist creed of Chairman Mao.

• The Red guard seized and burned Confucian books and smashed the statue of Confucius at the Confucius temple in his hometown of Qufu.

• What was once the heart and soul of Chinese civilization was recast as an affront to progress, anti-modern, superstitious and an instrument of sexism and class oppression.
• Confucianism is rising up again in China today.

• Today the pro-Confucian momentum is so strong that some believe that Confucianism will soon replace communism as the official state ideology.
History

- Over the centuries Confucianism has become increasingly religious through its interactions with Buddhism and Daoism. But it ultimately remains a this-worldly philosophy.
Mencius and Xunzi

Disciples who followed Confucius after his death, and who produced two schools of Confucian thought and practice.

Are human beings basically good?

This question mattered because the whole Confucian system depended on self-improvement.
Mencius

We are good.

When we do evil, it is nurture, not nature, that short-circuits the good.
Xunzi

We are evil.

When we do evil we are acting according to our nature.
The Confucian Solution
Mencius (we are good) used gentle metaphors of taking care of plants to describe how education should be done. Through nurture they grow naturally.

(Cultivate and give opportunity for the good that is within to develop by providing the right environment and customs).
Xunzi (we are bad) relied on harder metaphors of shaping metal by hammered to describe how education should be done.

(Punish and beat out the bad that is in us through severe punishment and strict laws).