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**Title: From Heaven to History: Authority in Early Confucianism**

**Name: Ronghu Zhu**

**Student Number: s2147769**

**Supervisor: Dr. Paul van Els**

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## From Heaven to History: Authority in Early Confucianism

### Introduction

Confucianism is often conceived as being concerned with individuals. In the philosophical study of Confucianism, ethics is the focal point of interest, a conception that can be traced back to Feng Youlan who highlighted the emphasis on “methods of self-cultivation” for the ultimate attainment of “sageliness within and kingliness without” in Chinese philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In the religious study of Confucianism, Confucian religiosity is to be found in individual consciousness, that is, spirituality is felt and acquired by individuals through ritualized mundane actions, an influential view launched by Fingarette.<sup>2</sup> Recently, Ames echoes the two scholars in his attempts at fusing the two strands of scholarship concerning ethics and religiousness. Holding that the central concern of “the Confucian project” is individuals that are located within “the manifold of relations that constitute family, community, and the natural environment,” Ames declares that the spirituality felt in individual consciousness through ritualized mundane actions is “a signature of classical Confucian religiousness.”<sup>3</sup>

One critical problem with the conception of Confucianism as being primarily concerned with individual cultivation is that it does not distinguish between “classical Confucianism” and its variations, the most prevalent being Neo-Confucianism. For instance, Ames claims that “the Confucian project”, with its preoccupation with individual self-cultivation, was initiated by the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200 CE). Confucianism has come in many shapes and it would be inappropriate to attempt to interpret it without due attention to its particular historical context; perhaps a truism, but one that is often overlooked. I do not intend to go into depth to explore the differences between early Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. Suffice it to say that the individual concern in Confucianism is a latter-day Neo-Confucian conception. This is pointed out by Peter K. Bol in his study of Tang and Song intellectual history, which advocates the view that Neo-Confucian scholars, by stressing the mind’s ability of each individual “to arrive at true ideas about moral qualities inherent in the self and things,” shifted “the focus of learning away from cultural activities to the cultivation of ethical behavior.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the principal aim of this thesis is to take issue with the influential thought that conceives of early Confucianism as being primarily concerned with self-cultivation that culminates in a union between Heaven and man. This conception is problematic for it is seen through the lens of Neo-Confucianism. It is also problematic for it hinges on the speculative reading of Heaven in the *Analects* as a divine being. Distinct from this influential thought, this thesis proposes that early Confucianism transferred authority from Heaven to history, which, by the unfolding of cultural developments, constitutes

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<sup>1</sup> Feng 1931, cf. Bodde, 1952: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Fingarette 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Ames 2010: 231-233.

<sup>4</sup> Bol 1992: 2-3.

the norm for human society and further judges human individuals according to the extent that they embody, transmit, and implement the culture. Thus, it is the history of cultural developments, rather than self-cultivation, that is the major concern of early Confucianism.

This thesis will proceed as follows: First, contextualizing Confucius in the intellectual history of the Chunqiu (Spring and Autumn; 771-481 BCE) period, when the supernatural realm stopped to be an explanatory mechanism in thinking about worldly affairs, I will make explicit that Heaven's Will (*tianming*) in the *Analects* does not refer to divine commands, but an impersonal historical process, and Confucius got to know *tianming* not through mysterious communication with a conscious Heaven, but through historical study. Next, I will elucidate the conception of history as authority in early Confucianism. This will lead to a discussion of the conception of history as an integrated vision of both values and facts and as a developmental process. How early Confucianism constructed authority in Confucius' historical account will also be discussed. Finally, it will be suggested that history holds authority over humans in that individuals are evaluated at the bar of historical justice. The pursuit of posthumous fame will be discussed. The concept of benevolence (*ren*), primarily thought to be the cardinal virtue for cultivation, will then be reexamined, highlighting its connotation of outward social and historical contributions. The seemingly contradictory evaluations of Guan Zhong (c. 730-645 BCE) in the *Analects* will be rendered consistent within the frame of reference celebrating the outward social contributions over the inward cultivation.

At the outset, a few terms should be clarified. First, since the *Analects* are attributed to the sayings of both Confucius and his disciples, Confucius' thinking refers not to the idea of the historical figure, but what can be generalized from the *Analects*.<sup>5</sup> Second, early Confucianism refers to the school of thought originated from Confucius. This is to distinguish Confucius from both his predecessors and successors. Some scholars have wished to abolish the term Confucianism and adopt *Ru-ism* 儒 instead.<sup>6</sup> However, *Ru-ism*, referring to the ideas of *Ru*-scholars, could generate more trouble than elucidation. Since *Ru*-scholars have existed long before the time of Confucius, the term *Ru-ism* is likely to create a confusion between the concept of Confucianism as a coherent and integrated thought with the fact that some sporadic ideas resembling Confucianism existed before the time of Confucius.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Confucius' successors did not agree with each other and were likely to deviate from Confucius as well.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, I focus mainly on the *Analects*. Other early texts, such as *Zhongyong* and *Mencius*, are adduced only as illustrations, not as the basis, of early Confucianism.

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<sup>5</sup> Makeham suggests that the form of the *Analects* we see today probably dates from the Western Han dynasty (206-8 CE.) and "as early as Han times, it was accepted that the *Analects* was the product of a variety of editorial hands." Makeham 1996: 1-24; 2002: 55-69. For recent discussion on the compilation of the *Analects* in the Western Han dynasty, see Hunter 2017.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion on *ru*, see Zufferey 2003.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Keightley thinks that oracle-bones inscriptions from Shang (c. 1600-c. 1045 BCE) suggest that "the philosophical tensions that we associate primarily with the Taoism and Confucianism...had already appeared." Keightley 1988: 388.

<sup>8</sup> Even Mencius, traditionally believed to be the true successor of Confucius, is challenged as "misinterpreting Confucius in a very important sense." Hwang 1980: 52-53.

## 1. Knowing Heaven's Will (*tianming*): Mystery or History

Taking the reading of Heaven in the *Analects* as a divine being to be problematic, I shall be concerned to unpack its problem, noting first that it fails to deal with the collapse of the supernatural realm in the Chunqiu period. It is against the Chunqiu intellectual backdrop that we can put the diverse meanings of Heaven in the *Analects* into perspective. In this light, this section will first review the conception of Heaven as a divine being and then turn to depiction of the dissolution of Heaven and the supernatural realm in general during the Chunqiu period. Recognizing that Heaven was devoid of attributes of transcendence, we are then able to tolerate the inconsistent uses of Heaven in the *Analects*. I shall then point out that Confucius got to know *tianming* through historical study and *tianming* refers to the impersonal historical process of cultural development.

### 1.1 A Review of the Conception of Heaven in the *Analects* as a Divine Being

Ying-shih Yu, focusing on the idea of the “unity of heaven and man” (*tianrenheyi*), delineates a history of the relationship between heaven and human in early China. Yu reads the ancient Chinese myth of the “separation of Heaven and Earth” as implying two contradictory notions.<sup>9</sup> In his account, while it may suggest that only the Son of Heaven has the exclusive privilege of communicating with Heaven, it also “presupposes that every individual person on earth is in principle communicable with heaven.” Yu believes that the development of the second line of thought flourished and eventually overturned the “royal monopoly of the access to Heaven”, bringing forth “the Chinese Axial breakthrough” that Yu characterizes as “inward transcendence.” Yu further states that by the time of Confucius, the idea of Heaven's Will was no longer confined to the fate of royal lineage, but located in the hearts of human individuals. In this way, he reads accounts of Heaven's Will in the *Analects* as suggesting that “Confucius as an individual was capable of communicating with Heaven directly.”<sup>10</sup>

Yu's account about the privilege of Son of Heaven to communicate with Heaven is attested by historical records.<sup>11</sup> His view that the breakdown of the authority of Heaven for the legitimacy of Zhou's rule triggered the philosophical breakthrough also enjoys a wide consensus among scholars of early Chinese intellectual history.<sup>12</sup> However, his depiction of the direct communication with Heaven as the only way to know Heaven's Will fails to deal with the complexity of the diverse means of the procurement of knowledge about the supernatural realm in the Chunqiu period. For Yu, the fundamental distinction in the acquisition of Heaven's Will is monopolized communication with Heaven versus egalitarian communication with Heaven. However, as I will show below,

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<sup>9</sup> For discussion on this myth, see Bodde 1981: 45-84.

<sup>10</sup> Yu 2003: 62-80.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion, see Schwartz, 1985: 17-55.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Graham suggests that the intellectual flourishing in the Zhanguo (Warring States; 475-221 BCE) period be seen as “response to the breakdown of moral and political order which had claimed the authority of Heaven.” Graham 1989: 3.

the actual distinction in the Chunqiu period is one between communicating with Heaven and inferring Heaven's Will through worldly affairs.

Yu acknowledges his inspiration from Schwartz's characterization of early China as "the age of transcendence."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Schwartz's generalization, in his study on the Chunqiu period, Chen Lai argues that Chunqiu thought exhibits the process of humanist rationalization, rather than a transcendental breakthrough.<sup>14</sup> But before turning to the Chunqiu intellectual history, Schwartz's view deserves examination as well because of his wide influence. Schwartz's use of "the age of transcendence" refers to the Axial period when he observes that transcendental movement gained prominence worldwide. The transcendental manifestation in Confucius is his "turning inward to the source of *jen* [*ren*]." Schwartz later articulates this transcendental reading of the *Analects* in more details in an effort to derive a consistent conception of Heaven as a divine being from the scattered references to Heaven in the *Analects*. He prefers to see Heaven as "possess[ing] attributes of consciousness and spirit" rather than "an 'impersonal order' of nature." But Schwartz himself acknowledges a crucial problem in construing Heaven as conscious: If a conscious Heaven has generated virtue and cultural pattern in Confucius, "why has Heaven not made it possible for him to make it manifest in the world?" Schwartz simply explains away this problem by resorting to "a divine plan" by Heaven.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the conception of a conscious Heaven can hardly explain the decline of order and the failure of Confucius' political career. Eno, for another instance, also lays claim to a "teleological plan" of Heaven in order to account for "Confucius' failure" in his functional definition of Heaven as prescribing "a normal value standard" for human activities.<sup>16</sup>

With a conscious Heaven in mind, Schwartz logically reads Confucius' references to Heaven ('s Will) as the actual communication between Confucius and Heaven and further suggests that Heaven "has endowed him with a particular mission in the world," which "refers above all to his 'personal mandate' to fulfill his moral-political vocation."<sup>17</sup> Eno echoes Schwartz in proposing that Heaven "employs" Confucius to promote the teachings of "self-cultivation and political idealism." Eno is more blunt in explaining away Confucius' political failure by asserting that Heaven "has judged it more appropriate to employ Confucius as a teacher than as a political leader."<sup>18</sup>

Assuming that early China was "the age of transcendence," these scholars interpret Heaven in the *Analects* as a conscious divine being, with which Confucius had a direct contact. This direct contact is believed to be attainable by everyone, which was later encapsulated in the phrase "*tianrenheyi*" (the union between Heaven and man) and became the consummate goal of self-cultivation. This interpretation is untenable because the presumption of early China as "the age of transcendence" is groundless considering

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<sup>13</sup> Schwartz 1975: 57-68.

<sup>14</sup> Chen 2017: 21.

<sup>15</sup> Schwartz 1985: 57-75.

<sup>16</sup> Eno 1990: 81-94.

<sup>17</sup> Schwartz 1985: 117-127.

<sup>18</sup> Eno 1990: 89. For further discussion of Confucius' sense of mission, see Fu 1993.

the humanist rationalization of Chunqiu intellectual history. In the following, I shall provide a sketch of Chunqiu intellectual history with a focus on the collapse of the supernatural realm.

### 1.2 The Collapse of the Supernatural Realm in the Chunqiu Period

As Fu points out, during Western Zhou (c. 1045-771 BCE) period, the acquisition of Heaven's Will is not simply through the communication with Heaven by Son of Heaven who cultivates his virtue (*de*), but determined by a combination of three factors, i.e., virtues of Son of Heaven, divination, and human affairs.<sup>19</sup> When it came to Chunqiu period, as Chen suggests, Heaven was no longer allowed as an admissible explanation for a divine order and was transformed to mean the natural heaven and an impersonal moral order.<sup>20</sup> Human history, on the other hand, was upheld as revealing the guiding principles for actions in human affairs.

In the Chunqiu period, *realpolitik* gradually replaced belief in Heaven and deities as the provider of models for order in this world, especially inter-state relationships. Heaven was only invoked to justify *de facto* success out of power struggles.<sup>21</sup> Wai-yee Li rightly observes that in the *Zuozhuan*, "Heaven is recurrently used to justify various policies, especially aggression and appeasement."<sup>22</sup> Human affairs, on the other hand, took precedence over Heaven in comprehending social experience, as shown in the oft-cited saying of the prominent Chunqiu minister Zichan: "The Way of Heaven is far away, while the Way of men is near at hand."<sup>23</sup> Adding to the dissolution of the credibility of Heaven is the subordination of deities to men.<sup>24</sup> While politicians may piously or insincerely invoked Heaven and deities, in practice a state would be vanquished and further discredited by the historiographer of the *Zuozhuan* for solely relying on the protection from Heaven or deities.<sup>25</sup>

Without conviction in Heaven and the supernatural realm in general, Chunqiu thinkers learnt about broad historical trends from historical lessons, which, according to Chen, represents the emergence of historical reasoning and contributes to the humanist rationalization. Indeed, until Chunqiu period, all great thinkers worshipped Heaven because it determined the historical development. This relationship between Heaven and history was reversed by Chunqiu thinkers who insisted that Heaven's Will was only revealed in history. It then became a relatively simple step to link Heaven's Will to an impersonal historical law, a task completed by Confucius.

### 1.3 Heaven in the *Analects*

No single Chunqiu thought determined the content of Confucius' idea. But Chunqiu intellectual background did set limits and give permission to certain conceptions and not

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<sup>19</sup> Fu 1985: 42-43.

<sup>20</sup> Chen 2017: 81-99.

<sup>21</sup> Fu 1985: 77.

<sup>22</sup> Li 2007: 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Zuozhuan* Zhao 18.3, cf. Durrant et al. 2016: 1553.

<sup>24</sup> *Zuozhuan* Huan 6.2.

<sup>25</sup> The destroy of the state of Yu by the state of Jin is a case in point. *Zuozhuan* Xi 5.2.

others of Confucius. For instance, the downplay of supernatural realm is manifested in Confucius' refusal to discuss ghosts, deities, and other supernatural phenomena.<sup>26</sup> More relevant here is that the diverse meanings of Heaven in Chunqiu period are reflected in the *Analects*.

Accounts of Heaven denoting the natural heaven, the fate, and the impersonal order can all be found in the *Analects*. For instance, Heaven is found to mean the natural heaven:

Confucius said: "Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and myriad things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?"<sup>27</sup>

As a natural heaven, it does not show any intent in the natural phenomena of the cycle of seasons and the production of things.

Elsewhere, heaven is used interchangeably with fate (*ming*). For instance, Confucius bemoaned the death of his favorite disciple Yan Hui and said: "Heaven has devastated me. Heaven has devastated me."<sup>28</sup> When his another disciple Boniu was seriously sick, Confucius gave a similar sigh, only invoking fate (*ming*) this time: "It is the fate that let him die."<sup>29</sup>

Heaven, as the ultimate guardian of moral justice, is also observable in the *Analects*: "He who has offended against Heaven has no god to whom he can offer prayers."<sup>30</sup> Heaven is depicted as being unable to be propitiated if offended, suggesting that Heaven embodies the eternal principles of justice.

Besides these meanings of Heaven inherited from preexisting beliefs, Confucius connected Heaven's Will with the impersonal historical process. This connection, reassuring people in the tumultuous Chunqiu period of the existence of order, serves to avoid the uncertainties caused by the collapse of the transcendental realm. The impersonal historical process was not Heaven-given, but revealing itself in history. Heaven's Will, rather than divinely implanted, was used to mean the impersonal historical development of culture. To better understand this point, we need to recognize that Confucius got to know Heaven's Will through historical study rather than mysterious communication with Heaven.

#### 1.4 Confucius' knowledge of Heaven's Will

Confucius explicitly declared that he had acquired the knowledge of Heaven's Will at the age of fifty:

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<sup>26</sup> *Analects* 7.21.

<sup>27</sup> *Analects* 17.19.

<sup>28</sup> *Analects* 11.9.

<sup>29</sup> *Analects* 6.10.

<sup>30</sup> *Analects* 3.13.



At fifteen I set my heart on study...at fifty I knew Heaven's Will...<sup>31</sup>

Three points are worth highlighting. First, Confucius did know Heaven's Will. Second, this knowledge of Heaven's Will was acquired through a subsequent process that is sustained by learning. It tells us clearly that Confucius' knowledge of Heaven's Will is a learning-based achievement, not resulting from a mysterious communication with Heaven.

The third point concerning the content of learning does not seem very clear in the passage itself due to an omitted object and thus understood variously. Some scholars think that the omitted object should be moral cultivation. Julia Ching, for instance, translates the first sentence as "At fifteen I set my heart on learning [to be a sage]."<sup>32</sup> Again, this translation shows the influence of Neo-Confucianism which regards learning as a practice for self-cultivation.<sup>33</sup>

More promising is to search for the omitted object in the *Analects* itself. Curiosity about what Confucius had learnt is not a later issue, for another passage in the *Analects* records a Gongsun Chao who asked Confucius' disciple, Zigong, the same question:

Gongsun Chao asked Zigong: "What did Confucius study?" Zigong replied: "The cultural pattern of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou does not fall to the ground. It depends on humans to recognize the cultural pattern. Worthy men recognize the prominent part of it while unworthy men recognize the trivial part. Nowhere does the cultural pattern of Kings Wen and King Wu not exist. What does Confucius not study? Yet there is no part of the cultural pattern that he constantly clings to."<sup>34</sup>

This passage provides incontrovertible evidence that the content of Confucius' learning is the cultural pattern of Kings Wen and Wu. Even though the cultural pattern does not prevail, it still persists and depends on humans to pinpoint the outstanding part. Confucius is portrayed as being able to appreciate the "prominent part" of the cultural pattern. Confucius' self-characterization as loving antiquity also suggests that he strove to be comprehensive in learning past cultures. We are thus able to draw the conclusion that the omitted object of what Confucius studied is the culture and it is through his study of past cultures that Confucius got to know Heaven's Will. Therefore, Confucius set his heart on studying the culture at fifteen to finally got to know Heaven's Will at fifty. This is to repudiate the view that Confucius' knowledge of Heaven's Will is acquired through mysterious communication between him and Heaven.

Furthermore, Heaven's Will does not refer to the command given by Heaven, but the impersonal historical law that culture is to persist in human history. For Confucius, human history had been and would be eminently a *cultural* history. Confucius'

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<sup>31</sup> *Analects* 2.4.

<sup>32</sup> Ching 1986: 63-80.

<sup>33</sup> For the study of learning as a self-cultivation practice in Neo-Confucianism, see Tylor 1990.

<sup>34</sup> *Analects* 19.22

perception of past was the evolution of human society into the perfect cultural spirit and following adaptations of the cultural spirit.

Those who first advance to ritual and music are the primitive people; those who later advance to ritual and music are the gentlemen. If I were to implement ritual and music, I would follow those who first advance to ritual and music.<sup>35</sup>

The culture, here represented by ritual and music, is conceived of as a result of the natural development of the primitive people. After the formation of the culture, gentlemen later need only to study and internalize it in order to advance to the cultural status. The transitions of the first three Chinese dynasties, namely the (mythical) Xia (c. 2000-1600 BCE), the Shang (c. 1600-c. 1045 BCE), and the Zhou dynasties, are characterized by Confucius as the history of a continuous, renovating process with the later dynasty building up on the previous dynasty: “The Zhou culture draws on its two previous dynasties.”<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the present was perceived by Confucius to be adaptations of the cultural spirit that drew on past cultural practices fit for the particular time:

Yan Yuan asked about how to govern a state. Confucius said: “Adopt the calendar of Xia; ride the chariots of Shang; wear the caps of Zhou; apply the music of Shao and Wu; dispense with the music of Zheng and keep away rhetoric men. The music of Zheng is excessive; rhetoric men are dangerous.”<sup>37</sup>

The past cultural patterns, including that of Zhou, are presented here as constituting a repertoire of cultural practices resulting from the manifestations of the ideal culture in various historical periods, each with its peculiar merits. The present should be able to identify the meritorious aspects for contemporary utilization.

Confucius held a firm position that the durability of the cultural core enabled him to predict the future:

Zizhang asked: “Is it possible to know about three hundred years later?” Confucius said: “Shang inherited from the rituals of Xia; its adoption and disposal of Xia’s rituals is knowable. Zhou inherited from the rituals of Shang; its adoption and disposal of Shang’s rituals is knowable. That which follows the rituals of Zhou, even after three thousand years, is knowable.”<sup>38</sup>

The future is predictable in that it centers around the cultural core. Confucius did not simply assert; rather, he made the prediction about the future based on his observation of the past. Confucius’ logic can be easily translated as induction-deduction

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<sup>35</sup> *Analects* 11.1.

<sup>36</sup> *Analects* 3.14.

<sup>37</sup> *Analects* 15.11.

<sup>38</sup> *Analects* 2.23.

thinking. In terms of induction, Confucius drew the conclusion of the persistence of the cultural core upon observing the transitions between the past three dynasties. From the enduring validity of the cultural core, he further deduced that the future history would be concerned with the cultural core adaptable to contemporary situations.

The above discussions have shown that in Confucius' view, the cultural core originated from the natural evolution of human society and not only had the past been manifestations of the cultural pattern, the future would be its adaptations as well. The cultural core is not Heaven-given and its persistence is not moved by any spiritual force. Through historical study of past cultural patterns, Confucius came to recognize this impersonal historical process of the development of culture. I have also pointed out that Confucius got to know Heaven's Will through historical study. It is not hard to see through this parallel that Confucius equated Heaven's Will with the impersonal historical law. As a receiver and transmitter of the culture, Confucius prided himself in living in harmony with it and thus exhibited his deep conviction of the persistence of the culture in dangerous situations:

Confucius was besieged in the city of Kuang. He said: "After King Wen had died, isn't that the culture was received by me? If Heaven had planned to destroy the culture, later generations would not have had a chance to engage in it; had Heaven not planned to destroy the culture, what could men of Kuang do to me?"<sup>39</sup>

In face of a life-threatening situation, Confucius made an appeal to Heaven. At first sight, the message here is, however, not unambiguous in that Heaven has the alternative to destroy the culture. Nevertheless, if we recall Confucius' explicit declaration that he knew Heaven's Will, we can see that the passage rather conveys a clear message in a more compelling manner. Rather than questioning Heaven's Will or contradicting his own announcement about the knowledge of Heaven's Will, Confucius employed a rhetorical question here to confirm his belief that the persistence of the culture is ultimately destined to persist so that men of Kuang could not cause damage to him as the receiver and transmitter of the culture. It is compelling because, given the fact that Confucius had survived the siege, the rhetorical question invites from its reader spontaneous agreement with this belief.

The same message is conveyed in the same manner in a different setting in which Confucius invoked fate instead of Heaven:

Gongbo Liao tattled on Zilu to Jisun. Zifu Jingbo told this to Confucius and said: "Jisun has had been bewitched by Gongbo Liao, but I'm still capable of having Gongbo Liao executed in the market." Confucius said: "Whether the culture will prevail, it is fated; whether the culture will perish, it is fated. What

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<sup>39</sup> *Analects* 9.5.

could Gongbo Liao do to what has been fated?”<sup>40</sup>

In a situation where his disciple was verbally attacked and faced with ensuing danger, Confucius refused to strike back, but invoked the fated persistence of the culture. Again, the rhetorical question reinforces the belief of the endurance of the culture and endows it with an impersonal certainty by connecting it with fate. Confucius, by bringing into contrast the ephemeral incident with the ultimate order, disclosed his far-sighted vision. More than one time, Confucius is recorded in the *Analects* to speak of the necessity for a superior man to strive upwards toward the cultural order.<sup>41</sup> Confucius professed to be able to perceive the ultimate cultural order through the study of mundane affairs.<sup>42</sup> His ability to view transitory incidents through the perspective of the ultimate cultural order is corroborated here by the appeal to Heaven and fate in unfavorable situations. The perceptible temporal threats were downplayed since they would not affect the endurance of the ultimate cultural order.

As discussed above, Heaven and fate are often overrated as possessing a conscious mind that are capable of determine the course of the cultural pattern and that Confucius had a special communication with. However, Heaven and fate are not the subjects with which the two above passages are concerned. Heaven and fate are themselves elements of discourses that aim at articulating the belief of the persistence of the culture. In other words, Heaven and fate were invoked because of their rhetorical force in connoting the order and the inevitability. Confucius did not use Heaven and fate to depict a deliberative cosmic or spiritual entity that could dominate the culture; rather, he spoke of Heaven and fate as enhancing the features of order and certainty of the culture. The persistence of the culture emerges as an impersonal historical law; it is unaffected by contingent incidents, nor is it determined by a spiritual authority.

### 1.5 Summary

Heaven lost its credibility as the guardian of the transcendental order of human society in the Chunqiu period. The resulting turmoil in the intellectual world inspired Confucius to seek order in human history and elevated the persistence of the culture in history as an impersonal process. Heaven's Will was ascribed the new meaning of the impersonal historical process of cultural development.

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<sup>40</sup> *Analects* 14.36.

<sup>41</sup> *Analects* 14.23.

<sup>42</sup> *Analects* 14.35.

## 2. History and Authority

In search of an order, Confucius did not embrace the divine Heaven of Western Zhou. The unworkability of Heaven in Chunqiu intellectual history does not allow Confucius to ground his idea in Heaven. Truth, no longer sent down from Heaven, was revealed in history itself. Just like Confucius who were able to identify the prominent part of the cultural patterns of Kings Wen and Wu when the world was not in order, humans, instead of consulting Heaven, simply need the discernment to recognize the culture immanent in history. History replaced Heaven as the authority that held power over humans.

To further understand the authority of history, this section explicates Confucius' vision of history in more details. I argue first that in Confucius' perception, history was more than a repository of knowledge, but an integrated vision of facts and values. Next, Confucius' conception of history as a developmental process will be discussed, and it will be suggested that the developmental process consists of two classes of messages, that is, invariant cultural spirit and variant cultural practices. Finally, I will discuss how Confucius' historical account was invested with authority in early Confucianism.

### 2.1 History as an Integrated Vision of Facts and Values

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Confucius construed human history as eminently a cultural history. The natural development of primitive society evolved into the ideal form of civilization in which culture and nature achieved a perfect harmony. Though the ideal form was hard to maintain by later history, it was believed by Confucius that history revolved around the culture. As noted, the transitions between the first three Chinese dynasties were portrayed as a renovating process of cultures. In the sense that history was thought to revolve around culture, Confucius perceived history as intrinsically embedded with values. History was elevated to the authoritative status because the embedded values would illuminate the present and the future.

On the other hand, the values embedded within the past exerted a selective influence to determine whether historical facts would be preserved or discarded in historical memory. One passage in the *Analects* is illustrative:

Duke Ai asked Zaiwo about [what timber should be used for] the altar of the God of the Earth. Zaiwo replied: "Kings of Xia used pines; men of Shang used cypresses; men of Zhou used chestnuts, saying that chestnuts would elicit fearful reverence from commoners." Confucius heard of this and said: "Things finished are not to be commented on; things done are not to be remonstrated against; the past is not to be criticized."<sup>43</sup>

This passage demonstrates that tradition was important in early Confucianism as Zaiwo enumerated traditional practices to be picked out for the present policy-making.

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<sup>43</sup> *Analects* 3.21.

But the passage does not end with Zaiwo's enumeration. Confucius' comments were added to offer a more nuanced attitude towards the importance of tradition. Zhou's use of chestnuts was censured because the Chinese character *li* 栗 for chestnut also means trembling with fear. In this sense, Zaiwo did not simply describe historical facts when listing the past practices of three dynasties. As made explicit by Confucius, the practices were themselves not value-free. Confucius discerned the sense of censure in Zaiwo's depiction of the use of chestnuts by the Zhou with the implication of eliciting fear from people. Rather than denying the historical fact, Confucius provided a more practical attitude in treating flawed traditional practices, that is, not dwelling on criticism of the flaws.

As mentioned, Confucius was attributed the acumen in recognizing the prominent part of the cultural pattern of Kings Wen and Wu as the object of his study. To not dwell on criticism of the past ensues the ability to identify the worthy antecedents for the present. In this light, Confucius' historical vision and attitude towards history become clear. In the sense that Cultural practices could not be implemented by someone who did not have a thought in his head, history was to be seen as encoded with intentions and values. Confucius encouraged humans to develop the power of discernment so as to look beyond the facts and to speculate about the intentions that lied behind them. More than simply presenting knowledge of the past, history was attributed a didactic function to instruct the present. Therefore, when present policies were to be made by drawing on tradition, past practices were to be investigated in terms of their social implications.

Since implicit intentions and values in historical facts relied on humans to make them explicit, human agency was emphasized by Confucius. History as an integration of values and facts did contain clues that gave human beings a general orientation for the future. But it was the obligation of humans to address the motives and intentions present in historical facts.

## 2.2 History as a Developmental Process

Unlike the Greeks and Romans who thought that "history concerned persons, things, or events but did not exhibit overarching meanings or pattern,"<sup>44</sup> early Confucians perceived history as a developmental process in which historical circumstances particularized the cultural spirit (*Dao*) because concrete cultural practices were constantly reshaped by specific times. For Confucius, the historical development carried two elements, namely the abstract cultural spirit and concrete cultural practices. While the cultural spirit remains invariant and immanent throughout history, concrete cultural practices are subject to revision to accommodate the specific needs of particular times.

Confucius' perception of history as a developmental process is manifest in his portrayal of Chunqiu history as the unfolding of political patterns:

"When the world is in order (*you dao*), it is the kings Son of Heaven who creates ritual and music and determine military actions. When the world is not in order,

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<sup>44</sup> Appleby et al. 1994: 56-57.

it is the overlords who create ritual and music and determine military actions. When overlords dominate [on ritual and music and military actions], their reign would be likely lost after ten generations. When ministers of overlords dominate, their reign would be likely lost after five generations. When functionaries of ministers dominate, their reign would be likely lost after three generations. When the world is in order, commoners would not gossip about politics.”<sup>45</sup>

Given the fact that Chunqiu history did exhibit a downward shift of power from the Zhou kings to overlords, from overlords to ministers, and from ministers to functionaries,<sup>46</sup> this passage likely reflects Confucius’ attempt at summing up years of chaos in the Chunqiu period. By categorizing Chunqiu politics into four patterns and further associating them with order, Confucius created a conceptual framework of reading the world. Though the passage presents a sequent degeneration of Chunqiu history, it would be misguided to think that Confucius held the pessimistic view that history represented a devolution from an ideal order. Insofar as the four political patterns were presented as an alternation between order (*Dao*) and disorder, the distinctions of the four patterns serve to reinforce the central importance of *Dao*. With the graded degeneration from *Dao* in mind, Confucius articulated the path of ascending to *Dao*:

Confucius said, “The state of Qi, by one single transformation, would become a state like that of Lu. The state of Lu, by one single transformation, would attain to *Dao*.”<sup>47</sup>

At first glance, Confucius seems to have said conflicting things in the two passages. The historical development was depicted as a devolution from *Dao* in one passage and as an evolution towards *Dao* in the other. However, to take Confucius’ view of historical development as either devolution or evolution misses the point. To understand Confucius’ view of historical development, it is necessary to recognize the importance of *Dao* as the abstract cultural spirit that was believed by Confucius to remain invariant and immanent in the entire human history. The cultural spirit endured even in the tumultuous Chunqiu history, as shown by Confucius’ discernment of the cultural pattern of Kings Wen and Wu. While the abstract cultural spirit remains invariant, the particular arrangements prescribed by the cultural spirit are and ought to be shaped by specific historical circumstances. Insofar as historical development contains the invariant cultural spirit and variant cultural practices, the developmental process is to be seen as the manifestations of the cultural spirit from the perspective of *Dao*, and as humans’ striving towards *Dao* from the perspective of humans.

In the sense that Confucius advocated the promotion of the prevalence of the

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<sup>45</sup> *Analects* 16.2.

<sup>46</sup> Pines 2002: 136-163.

<sup>47</sup> *Analects* 6.24.

cultural spirit, we are able to repudiate the view that regards Confucius as a traditionalist. This view construes early Confucianism as political and ritualist conservatism, contending that Confucius insisted on following inherited political and ritual forms to restore the Zhou culture.<sup>48</sup> This view mistakenly takes the Zhou culture as Confucius' ideal. As a matter of fact, Confucius upheld that the achieved ideal was the perfect balance and harmony of culture and nature as a result of the natural development of primitive people. The Zhou culture, along cultures of other periods, was simply one manifestation of the achieved ideal.

What the cultural spirit means is manifest in Confucius' portrayal of the achieved ideal. The cultural spirit was not equivalent to any specific set of cultural practices—like that of the Zhou culture, nor did it refer to any abstract values. Rather, as Confucius presented, the cultural spirit was concerned with a perfect harmony of culture (*wen*) and nature (*zhi*):

If nature surpasses culture, a person is primitive; if culture surpasses nature, a person is fussy. Only with well-proportioned culture and nature will a person become a superior man.<sup>49</sup>

Confucius upheld that excess of either of the two elements would cause civilization to stray from the ideal. While specific cultures varied with occasions and eras, the cultural spirit was treated as the absolute standard that transcends the particularities of times. On the other hand, although the cultural spirit remained immune to the real effects of time, it was not fully realized in historical periods. For Confucius, the Zhou culture was not perfection, as shown by the unworthy practice of using chestnuts for the altar of God of Earth. That the cultural spirit was not fully actualized in the three dynasties is also indicated by the idea that each dynasty embodies one dominating value, that is, the Xia dynasty embodied the value of loyalty (*zhong*), the Yin dynasty the value of reverence (*jing*), and the Zhou dynasty the value of refinement (*wen*). The three dynasties reified some, not all, aspects of the cultural spirit. The three dynasties were admired because they represented effective ways of carrying on the cultural spirit. But they were not equivalent to the cultural spirit.

In this light, what Confucius advocated is not to replicate a body of practices from past periods, but to promote the prominence of the cultural spirit by drawing on tradition. Rather than the conformity of the present to the past, Confucius emphasized the flexibility in adjusting past practices for present use. For one thing, Confucius uttered the objection to uncritically reproduce past models: “If those who are born in the present attempt to recover the ancient cultural pattern, disasters would befall them.”<sup>50</sup> For another, the importance of flexibility in treating cultural inheritance is manifest in Confucius' attitude towards ritual change:

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<sup>48</sup> For a brief review of this view in modern times, see Kim 2017.

<sup>49</sup> *Analects* 6.18.

<sup>50</sup> *Zhongyong* 29.



Confucius said, “The linen cap is what prescribed by ritual, but now a cap is made from silk. It is economical, so I follow the common practice. Bowing below the hall is prescribed by ritual, but now the practice is to bow only after ascending it. That is arrogant. Even though I oppose the common practice, I continue to bow below the hall.”<sup>51</sup>

Confucius was not against ritual change. Apparently in this passage, Confucius aimed at addressing the issue of following inherited practices, for he juxtaposed two practices that differed from past precedents. By approving one practice and condemning the other, Confucius conveyed the message that a correct behavior was not determined by conformity with the past, but rather by social and cultural motivations that lied behind the behavior itself. It is the flexibility (*quan*) in dealing with ritual change that allows the cultural spirit to persist over time under changing conditions:

Confucius said: “There are people with whom I can study the cultural pattern, but cannot take the path of it; there are people with whom I can take the path of the cultural pattern, but cannot maintain the stance on it; there are people with whom I can maintain the stance on the cultural pattern, but cannot implement it with flexibility.”<sup>52</sup>

History became authoritative because it carried and revealed the cultural spirit and because it offered a repertoire of cultural practices to be drawn on in present policy-making. Humans need not to seek truth in other realms. Rather, they were encouraged by Confucius to develop the discernment to identify the cultural spirit and the flexibility in adjusting tradition to accommodate the present.

### 2.3 The Construction of Authority of Confucius’s Historical Account<sup>53</sup>

Confucius’ conception of history as an integration of values and facts is reflected in his historical account. When scrutinized by modern scientific discourse, Confucius’ historical narration is challenged as non-objective. For instance, the archaeologist Falkenhausen states that descriptions of realities in early Chinese texts “are likely to be rhetorically fitted to their respective authors’ agenda.”<sup>54</sup> However, to assess Confucius’ historical account by objectivity is an anachronism. Moreover, an objective relationship to historical reality has been questioned by postmodernists as the yardstick to assess

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<sup>51</sup> *Analects* 9.3.

<sup>52</sup> *Analects* 9.30.

<sup>53</sup> Confucius’ historical account refers to the historical narration in the *Analects*. But in the Confucian tradition, Confucius was believed to have authored the *Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*). Mencius attributed the authorship of the *Chunqiu* to Confucius, which was held true in traditional China. In modern times, this attribution is questioned, and the authorship of the *Chunqiu* becomes a contested issue. Nevertheless, emically speaking, the passages cited below from Sima Qian (145-86 BCE) and Mencius show how they, proclaimed to be successors of Confucius, constructed authority of the historical account allegedly attributed to Confucius. For discussion on the authorship of the *Chunqiu*, see Loewe 1993: 67-76; Nylan 2001: 253-396.

<sup>54</sup> Falkenhausen 2006: 11.

historiography in that objectivity is unattainable.<sup>55</sup> Moving beyond the challenge of historical objectivity, I suggest that early Confucianism invested authority in Confucius' historical account by first emphasizing historical factuality and second, by assuming the role of a transmitter. On the one hand, Confucius claimed to command the materials of history and endeavored to demonstrate the evidentiary status of his work. On the other hand, he sought to conceal himself behind his work so that he only transmitted, not invented, the encoded values in history. By proclaiming to be a transmitter, Confucius lent authority to his historical account not from himself as an individual, but from past traditions.

Confucius established his credentials as a historian by complying with the rules of evidence. He recognized that he could not talk about the past without documents:

Confucius said: "I can relate the ritual of Xia dynasty, but the state of Qi (the posterity of Xia) cannot sufficiently attest my words. I can relate the ritual of Shang dynasty, but the state of Song (the posterity of Shang) cannot sufficiently attest my words. This is because they do not have sufficient literature. Had they had sufficient literature, I could adduce them in support of my accounts of the rituals of Xia and Shang."<sup>56</sup>

Even though he was capable to discuss on the rituals of Xia and Yin dynasties, Confucius was bent on searching for literary evidence as a support for his conceptions. Such was the prominence of Confucius' emphasis on factuality that even Hu Shih, the leading May Fourth (1919) figure in advocating overthrowing Confucianism, had to admit that Confucius demonstrated positivism in his logic comparable to that of Auguste Comte.<sup>57</sup> However, Confucius' truth-seeking is not an end in itself to simply produce a factual account of the past. Rather, historical factuality was considered by Confucius as the effective means towards the end of making the encoded values in history more visible:

I wanted to convey [the encoded values] through abstract, conceptual language, but it would not be as profound, compelling, and clear as embodying and revealing them through past events and actions.<sup>58</sup>

Truthful record of the past is necessary for historical writing to be credible. But Confucius had his priority in mind; factuality was not put before the values. The overarching purpose of historiography was to carry on the values.<sup>59</sup> This view is more manifest in Confucius' treating historiography as a narrative comparable to poetry:

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<sup>55</sup> For further discussions on the issue of historical objectivity since modern times, see Appleby et al.: 1994.

<sup>56</sup> *Analects* 3.9.

<sup>57</sup> Hu 1928: 22-52.

<sup>58</sup> *Shiji* 130, cf. Durrant et al. 2016: LXIX, with modifications.

<sup>59</sup> Masayuki Sato characterizes East Asian historiography as normative as opposed to western historiography as cognitive. The concept of normative historiography is instructive in understanding Confucius' conception of historiography. Sato 2002: 128-141.

After the way of King had perished, poetry died away. After poetry died away, annals were produced. The *Sheng* of the state of Jin, the *Taowu* of the state of Chu, and the *Chunqiu* of the state of Lu belonged to a same category. The events they recorded were concerned with Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and their style was historiography. Confucius said: “I dared to adopt the encoded values [in the poetry to compose the *Chunqiu*].”<sup>60</sup>

Confucius’ emphasis on factuality in history writing indicates his awareness of the difference between historiography and poetry as narrative conventions. But here the change of the style of narrative from poetry to historiography was assigned a cultural and political significance. While poetry was believed to be the narrative form to embody King’s Way, annals, designated by different names, such as *Sheng*, *Taowu*, and *Chunqiu* in different states, became the narrative form to represent the inferior Way of hegemons. Nevertheless, in Confucius’ view, the deterioration in the real world did not compromise the workability of the values in history. To vindicate the working of the values in the degenerate Way of hegemons, Confucius was said to adopt the values embodied by poetry as the principle to recompose the *Chunqiu*.

By historical narration, Confucius thus achieved to demonstrate the effectiveness of the values in an adverse historical period. Confucius lent authority to his account by emphasizing his compliance with historical factuality. Confucius also invested his account with authority by arguing that the values were not imposed by himself, but inherited from past. He simply had the discernment to discover the values immanent in history. In this sense, Confucius’ self-characterization as “a transmitter, not an inventor” should be understood as a strong argument for the authority of his historical account:

Confucius said: “I transmit and do not invent (*zuo*). Being faithful to and loving the past, I dare to compare myself to Old Peng.”<sup>61</sup>

Scholars often read this passage as Confucius displaying his modesty and then set out to identify Confucius’ innovations.<sup>62</sup> Such reading misses Confucius’ message. We need to understand what Confucius claimed to have not done (*zuo*). It must have been understood by Confucius that to transmit was to narrate and to narrate was to encode an ideology. But the encoded ideology was not to be reduced to the value judgment of an individual whose personal authority was not enough to certify the validity of the ideology. Therefore, what Confucius claimed to have not done refers to the encoded ideology in his historical account. In this sense, Confucius’ historical account gained authority not from himself as an individual, but from what he received, discovered, and transmitted, namely, the entire history. Indeed, Confucius did not attempt to seek

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<sup>60</sup> *Mencius* 4B.49.

<sup>61</sup> *Analects* 7.1.

<sup>62</sup> For example, in his work devoted to the study of artifice and creation in early China, Puett asserts that “the passage is a statement of modesty.” Puett 2001:40. Most often, Confucius is attributed to create the concept of benevolence (*ren*) and innovate the egalitarian education. See, among others, Mote 1971: 33-51.

authority in himself. Rather, self was to be overcome:

Confucius has overcome four fallacies. Never be speculative. Never be self-assertive. Never be opinionated. Never be self-centered.<sup>63</sup>

By minimalizing himself, Confucius actually strove to sanctify the encoded ideology by grounding it in the impersonal past development. Thus, Confucius attempted to vest authority in his historical account by proclaiming to comply with facts and by ascribing the encoded values to the past, rather than himself.

#### 2.4 Summary

For Confucius, order was not sent down from a divine Heaven, but revealed itself in history. History, perceived to be an integrated vision of values and facts, exhibited a developmental process with the invariant cultural spirit accompanied by variant cultural practices suitable for particular times. Humans were not to search for order from a divine Heaven, but instructed to foster the discernment to identify the cultural spirit in history in order to promote its prevalence. Confucius constructed authority in his historical account by emphasizing historical facts and by grounding the encoded values in past traditions.

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<sup>63</sup> *Analects* 9.4.

### 3. The meaning of humans in history

The meaning of humans is often searched in religious salvation. In contrast, Confucius focused on this world rather than a spiritual realm in seeking existential meaning. Historical fame was prized in early Confucianism. As Confucius said, “A gentleman is apprehensive that his name would not be notable after death.”<sup>64</sup> The transitory human existence is offset by securing a noteworthy place in history after death.

History thus holds power for humans in that no one can avoid historical evaluation. I will first discuss the notion of immortality through historical fame and its manifestations in early Confucianism. Next, I call attention to the evaluative aspect of the crucial notion of *ren* that has often been overlooked. Distinct from the view that takes *ren* as the culminating virtue of self-cultivation, I argue that *ren* is used by Confucius to evaluate the impact of individuals in a community and in history. Finally, Confucius’ evaluations of Guan Zhong in the *Analects*, seemingly contradictory and thus unsettled, will be rendered consistent within the frame of reference celebrating historical impact over personal morality.

#### 3.1 Immortality of Historical Fame

With the collapse of the spiritual realm, Chunqiu thinkers articulated the view that the meaning of humans was to be sought in history by propounding the new notion of immortality in history. A passage from the *Zuozhuan* reads:

At the very top there is establishing virtue; next there is establishing merit; next there is establishing words. When these were not discarded, even after a long time, this is what is known as immortality. As for things like preserving a clan name and receiving a family name in such a way as to maintain one’s ancestral temple, with no interruptions in the sacrifices for generations—there is no state that lacks these. Great examples of emolument cannot be referred to as immortality.<sup>65</sup>

The key point here is the contrast between two forms of immortality. The long lineage of a family that could be traced back to the earliest recorded times is denied the claim to immortality. A new notion of immortality, grounded in historical commemoration, was put forward. Immortality thus consisted in being remembered in history through great virtues, merits, and words that would remain “standing” after death. It should be noted that the continuation of a family not simply denotes the preservation of a lineage name, but carries religious implication in that ancestral spirits of the family would have progeny to offer sacrifice. Therefore, it is both the continuation of a family and the ancestral spirits that were denied the claim to immortality. Instead, one must make this-worldly contributions such as establishing virtues, merits, and words in order

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<sup>64</sup> *Analects* 15.20.

<sup>65</sup> *Zuozhuan* Lord Xiang 24.2, cf. Schaberg 2001: 260.

to win a fame that would survive in history. It is worth special mentioning that establishing virtues is considered the most superior form among the three achievements of gaining immortality. The superiority of virtues over merits and words should tell us that establishing virtues do not simply refer to self-cultivation of virtues to be a good person, but denotes social impact of virtues. By establishing virtues, an individual becomes an exemplar inspiring emulation from others. It is the social effect of the virtues, rather than simply being a virtuous person, that wins the historical renown. In other words, immortality of fame in history is socially, rather than individually, focused.

The historical fame gained through social contributions thus replaced the narrow conservation of a family and ancestral sacrifice as the notion of immortality. This notion was carried on by early Confucianism in which establishing virtues, merits, and words became the goal to be sought and historical figures were to be evaluated accordingly. Confucius held those who had established virtues in high regard. In a laudatory comment on Taibo, a legendary figure of the state of Wu who gave up rulership, he hinted at the causation between virtues and historical commemoration:

Confucius said: “Taibo truly lived up to the highest virtue. He refused the position of king three times. Up till now, people still cannot find words that match his virtues.”<sup>66</sup>

Taibo was remembered because of his virtue of yielding the kingship, a virtue that could not be fully praised in words. The virtue of yielding was elevated by Confucius to the highest status. In another passage, Confucius explained this elevation of yielding:

Confucius said: “He who can govern a state with the virtue of yielding would encounter no difficulties; if he cannot govern a state with the virtue of yielding, what can he do with ritual?”<sup>67</sup>

The virtue of yielding is praiseworthy because it was believed to be fundamental to govern a state and practice ritual. That is to say, the virtue of yielding is of social significance. Taibo, of whom we have scant knowledge about his life, nonetheless survived in historical memory for embodying the virtue of yielding. Ascribing Taibo’s posthumous reputation to his embodiment of the virtue of yielding, Confucius championed the Chunqiu belief in establishing virtues as a way to attain immortality in history. Apparently, the elevation of Taibo and the virtue of yielding was to be read as exhortations to emulate Taibo in seeking existential meaning in history.

In this sense, we can understand why the *Analects* abounds in evaluations of historical figures and be able to make sense of the simple listing of names that were to be commemorated by their virtues. Besides Taibo who embodied the virtue of yielding, Confucius and his disciples also discussed on historical figures that were commemorated

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<sup>66</sup> *Analects* 8.1.

<sup>67</sup> *Analects* 4.13.

by loyalty, benevolence, accomplished in culture, and refusing to take office in a corrupted state. It is noteworthy that Confucius recognized the tremendous effect on society exerted by those who withdrew from society. A passage in the *Analects* lists the names of those who withdrew from society, including Boyi and Shuqi.<sup>68</sup> We know little about these two figures than that they made a stand on behalf of virtue and starved to death.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Confucius told us they were remembered until his time because of their virtues:

Lord Jing of Qi had four thousand horses, yet when he died, he had no virtue that people could remark on. Boyi and Shuqi starved to death on the Shouyang Mountain, but they are still extolled by people today. “Wealth is truly unimportant; what matters is outstanding virtue.” This is what it refers to.<sup>70</sup>

The key question of the passage is what is historically good and laudable. To be commemorated in history, it is not enough that one holds a high position and enormous wealth. To the contrary, one without a position and wealth can survive in historical memory by exemplifying relevant virtues, as in the case of Boyi and Shuqi. In the sense that those who withdraw from society provide a model for others of how to live in a disordered world, they are socially oriented by indicating discontent with their society. This indicates that even in a corrupted society, humans could still seek the existential meaning by establishing virtue to survive in historical memory.

Aside from establishing virtues, early Confucianism also exhibits the desire to establish merits as the means to acquire historical fame. More than one time, Confucius expressed his desire to serve in a government. For instance, Confucius said, “If a state employs me, it will be in order after one year. In three years, it will prosper.”<sup>71</sup> Confucius was well aware of the fact that the world was not in order and his effort was not enough to improve the situation, but he persevered in promoting the actualization of the cultural order. Even at his own time, Confucius was recognized as whom “knew that he would not succeed yet kept pursuing his ideal.”<sup>72</sup> Confucius explained his perseverance when challenged by a proto-Daoist recluse:

Confucius was playing a musical stone in the state of Wei. A man carrying a basket passed from his door and said, “The chimes are infused with intent.” Shortly afterwards he added, “How obstinate the sound is! If no one understands you, let it go. It is said ‘Cross the deep water with clothes on and the shallow water with clothes rolled up.’” Confucius responded, “What he said is true. But it is the consideration of the end of my life that makes it hard for me

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<sup>68</sup> *Analects* 18.8.

<sup>69</sup> For further discussion on Boyi and Shuqi, see Vervoorn 1983: 1-22.

<sup>70</sup> *Analects* 16.12.

<sup>71</sup> *Analects* 13.10.

<sup>72</sup> *Analects* 14.38.

to choose his path.”<sup>73</sup>

Confucius did not object to withdrawing from a corrupted society, but he himself chose to endeavor to reform the world because he was deeply concerned with his posthumous reputation. As already cited, Confucius maintained that “A gentleman is apprehensive that his name would not be notable after death.” Since Confucius also sympathized with those who withdrew from society, he was often found in a dilemma as to whether getting involved with society or withdrawing from society. Given the fact that Confucius once considered withdrawing from society,<sup>74</sup> his decision to get involved in his age was a deliberate one. Confucius made this decision out of his aspiration to establish substantial merits in this world and thus to enhance his posthumous reputation. Such was the intensity of his wish to contribute to the improvement of his age that Confucius even accepted office from rebels and was confident that he could transform the fiefs of the rebels.<sup>75</sup>

The same eagerness to establish merits is also characteristic of Mencius, which he presented as his lifelong concern:

A gentleman has only lifelong concern, no momentary worries. As to the concern, it is this: “Shun is a man. I am also a man. Shun has set up rules in the world that has been handed down to later generations. But I am still nothing but an average man. This is what is worth worrying about. What shall I do then? I ought to be a man like Shun.”<sup>76</sup>

Shun, the ideal king, achieved an enduring posthumous fame thanks to his contributions to his age. The concern for posthumous honors provides the impetus for Mencius to emulate the revered Shun and establish merits.

Establishing words as the means to obtain posthumous fame is assigned no less importance than establishing virtues and merits in early Confucianism. Confucius believed that virtuous people must have instructive words and one had to learn the established words in order to comprehend humans. The worth of establishing words is demonstrated by Confucius himself who was believed to have established words in the Confucian Five Classics and the *Analects* and was endowed with a glorious posthumous title, namely the uncrowned king (*suwang*), later in Han dynasty.<sup>77</sup>

A meaningful life in early Confucianism is not sought in a religious manner. Posthumous fame was presented as the answer to existential meaning. This idea was strengthened by granting a posthumous title to the deceased, an institution originated around the founding of Zhou dynasty.<sup>78</sup> Three ways, namely establishing virtues, merits,

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<sup>73</sup> *Analects* 14.39.

<sup>74</sup> *Analects* 5.7.

<sup>75</sup> *Analects* 17.5, 7.

<sup>76</sup> *Mencius* 4B.56.

<sup>77</sup> Nylan 2001: 265.

<sup>78</sup> Peng 1999: 3-11.



and words, were pursued to acquire posthumous fame, offering prescriptions for how humans ought to proceed. In keeping with the social and historical orientation of the three ways, *ren*, a/the central concept in Confucianism, is found to serve more as an evaluative category to assess social contributions than as an ethical term describing moral propensity of a person.

### 3.2 *Ren* as an Evaluative Category to Assess Social Contributions

Although scholars of the *Analects* disagree on how the term *ren* should be translated<sup>79</sup>, it is generally agreed that *ren* is a/the central concept of the philosophy of Confucius.<sup>80</sup> Taken as an ethical term, *ren* is thought to have two dimensions; namely a particular virtue and a general virtue that encompasses all other virtues.<sup>81</sup> In any case, *ren* is believed to be the highest ideal of moral cultivation and a virtue that individuals acquire innately through self-cultivation.

In this sense, the *Analects* is read as an exhortation to become a moral person. It is true that many passages in the *Analects* emphasize self-cultivation. However, it is misguided to take self-cultivation as the end of Confucius' teachings. As a matter of fact, self-cultivation has always been the means towards the end of affecting a community. When Confucius spoke of a *ren* person, he referred not to the person's moral character so much as the person's social impact. This aspect of *ren*, namely *ren* as an evaluative category to assess social contributions, has long been neglected.

In early Confucianism, the meaning of humans is located in establishing social achievements as the way to obtain posthumous fame. It is not an individual as a moral agent, but an individual with social impact, that survives in historical commemoration. A *ren* person is remembered in history not simply because of the person's moral qualification, but more of the person's the social impact. *Ren* as an evaluative category to assess social contributions means that only after an individual demonstrates positive effect on a community will he be qualified as a *ren* person.

Below I first argue that Confucius' main objective is not simply to produce a well-behaved person through cultivation, but to contribute to society. Next, I contend contrary to the view taking *ren* as an innate virtue, *ren* is used by Confucius to describe a person who has contributed to society. Finally, I discuss Confucius' seemingly contradictory evaluations of Guan Zhong, which will be made sense based on the understanding of *ren* as an evaluative category to assess social contributions.

#### 3.2.1 "Cultivate Oneself to Bring Peace to People"

Confucius has been understood as a thinker who concentrated on ethics, exhorting

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<sup>79</sup> Li Chenyang notes that "scholars have translated 'jen' [*ren*] by many terms" containing the connotation of "benevolence, love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion..." Li 1999: 96.

<sup>80</sup> Tu Wei-ming suggests that "It seems that the best way to approach the concept of *jen* [*ren*] is to regard it first of all as the virtue of the highest order in the value system of Confucianism." Tu 1979: 6. Tu also asserts that "to realize humanity (*ren*) as the ultimate value of human existence eventually became the spiritual self-definition of a Confucian." Tu 1985: 3.

<sup>81</sup> Wing-tsit Chan contends that *ren*, subsuming other specific virtues, occupies the central position in the hierarchy of Confucian ethics. Chan 1955: 295-319.

people to cultivate various virtues and maintain them innately. Early Confucianism has thus been interpreted as being primarily focused on encouraging people to engage in self-cultivation to become a better person. This interpretation of moral cultivation as the central objective of Confucius, however, is due to Zhu Xi's readings of the *Analects*, as shown by Gardner's study on Zhu Xi's thought.<sup>82</sup> Actually, in the *Analects*, self-cultivation is presented as preparation for getting actively involved in society. Overemphasis on self-cultivation has meant that comparatively little attention has been paid to the fact that self-cultivation is not the objective in itself, but the means of the end to prepare a person to contribute to society.

To begin with, Confucius' notion of self does not mean an individual self, but a relational self. Ames rightly observes that Confucius "locates person gerundively as the embodied, social activity of thinking and feeling within the manifold of relations that constitutes family, community, and the natural environment."<sup>83</sup> The notion of a relational self ensues that self-cultivation has social implications in that a good-mannered person would and should inspire other people to emulate. Mencius best conveys this message by the phrase "to engage others to perform good deeds."<sup>84</sup> It is not enough to perform good deeds by oneself; a gentleman should also help the related community to engage in the same practice. This understanding of the social dimension of self-cultivation allows us to understand Confucius' emphasis on filial piety (*xiao*) and brotherly love (*ti*) as the foundations of a *ren* person.<sup>85</sup> To perform filial piety and brotherly love is thought to produce a harmonious family as a small community, which would further, together with other families, create a harmonious society. Indeed, Confucius held a strong position of the social implications of self-cultivation that he equated performing filial piety and brotherly love with undertaking political activities:

Someone asked Confucius, "why do you not participate in politics?" Confucius said, "It is said in the *Documents* that 'The most important thing is to perform filial piety and brotherly love, which will affect politics.' To perform filial piety and brotherly love is to participate in politics. Why is it necessary to serve a state in order to participate in politics?"<sup>86</sup>

The cultivation of filial piety and brotherly love is emphasized by Confucius not because it trains moral agents, but because it exerts an equal effect on society as direct participation in politics.

Not only did Confucius highlight the social dimension of self-cultivation, but he also explicitly stated the view that self-cultivation served as the means towards the end to influence society. As Confucius said, "it is humans that enlarge the cultural order (*dao*),

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<sup>82</sup> Gardner 2003. Van Norden also finds "Zhu Xi argues explicitly that all virtues are, ultimately, manifestations of benevolence." Van Norden 2007: 43.

<sup>83</sup> Ames 2011: 213.

<sup>84</sup> *Mencius* 2A. 8.

<sup>85</sup> *Analects* 1.2.

<sup>86</sup> *Analects* 2.21.

not the cultural order that enlarges humans.”<sup>87</sup> The overarching purpose is not to draw on the cultural order to cultivate a virtuous person; rather, the ultimate objective is to promote the cultural order. Confucius also unequivocally stated that self-cultivation was the requisite to contribute to society:

Zilu asked about gentleman. Confucius said, “Cultivating oneself to be respectful [in handling all kinds of affairs].” Zilu said, “Is that all?” Confucius said, “Cultivating oneself to bring harmony to others around you.” Zilu said, “Is that all?” Confucius said, “Cultivating oneself to bring harmony to all the people. Cultivating oneself to bring harmony to all people [is an objective that] even Yao and Shun found it hard to achieve.”<sup>88</sup>

The gentleman in this conversation emerges as intrinsically involving of a social orientation. To be distinguished as a gentleman, it is not enough to cultivate oneself to become a well-rounded person. One must have dealt with affairs respectfully or exerted a positive effect on a community or the whole world to be qualified as a gentleman. Indeed, Confucius adhered strongly to the view that self-cultivation should not be reduced to the moral perfection of an individual; instead, it should be a communitarian behavior. Repeatedly, Confucius stressed that one should think of others when cultivating oneself: “He who wants to stand should help others stand.”<sup>89</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Social Dimension of *Ren*

Without taking the social dimension of *ren* into account, we would be hard pressed to make sense of a few passages in the *Analects*:

Confucius said, “If there were an ideal king (*wang zhe*), he must govern thirty years to achieve *ren*.”<sup>90</sup>

Confucius said, “There are superior men who are not *ren*, yet there are no inferior men who are *ren*.”<sup>91</sup>

The two passages are often ignored in the study of *ren* because they obviously defy the view that takes *ren* to be the perfection of human nature through self-effort which everyone has the potential to achieve.<sup>92</sup> Only if we reintegrate the social dimension into the notion of *ren* will the two passages make sense. An ideal king will be qualified as *ren* only after thirty years when his effect on the world becomes perceptible and patent. A superior man, even with high personal morality, would not be distinguished as *ren* if he does not make any contribution to society. In other words, a *ren* person does not refer

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<sup>87</sup> *Analects* 15.29.

<sup>88</sup> *Analects* 14.42.

<sup>89</sup> *Analects* 5.30.

<sup>90</sup> *Analects* 13.12.

<sup>91</sup> *Analects* 14.6.

<sup>92</sup> Chung-ying Cheng, for instance, maintains that “All human beings are capable of practicing *ren*.” Cheng 1997: 522.

to a person who innately possesses *ren*, but a person who has exerted a tremendous effect on society.

One passage of the *Analects* contains the basis for understanding *ren* as an evaluative category to assess a person's social impact, showing engagement with the world as necessary conditions for *ren*:

Zizhang asked Confucius about *ren*. Confucius said, "He who can make five things prevail in the world is a *ren* person." Zizhang asked, "what are the five things?" Confucius said, "They are respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness and generosity. If a man is respectful, he will not be treated with insolence. If he is tolerant he will win over the multitude. If he is trustworthy in word, his fellow men will entrust him with responsibility. If he is quick, he will achieve results. If he is generous, he is competent to command others."<sup>93</sup>

This passage is often invoked as evidence for the view that *ren*, as a general virtue, encompasses other specific virtues. However, a closer inspection tells us that *ren* and the five virtues belong to different categories. It is revealing that a *ren* person is not one who can perform the five virtues himself, but who can enforce the five virtues upon the people in the world.<sup>94</sup> While the five virtues refer to the dispositional features of a person, *ren* denotes the effect that all the people in the world possess the five virtues. In other words, the five virtues are used to describe the moral character of a person, but *ren* is used to assess the social effect of a person's practice of these virtues. The necessary condition for being distinguished as a *ren* person is that the cultivation and practice of virtues produce positive social effects. In this light, the distinction between *ren* and specific virtues is not one involving hierarchy, but one between outward effect and inward character. It is in this sense of *ren* being outwardly beneficial to society that Confucius considered *ren* a stage towards sagehood:

Zigong asked, "If there is a person who can extensively bestow benefits to the people and be capable of help the multitude, how is that? Is that qualified to be *ren*?" Confucius said, "It is more than *ren*; it must be called sagehood. Even [sage-rulers like] Yao and Shun found it hard to achieve this. As to a *ren* person, wishing to establish himself he establishes others, wishing to distinguish himself he distinguishes others. To be able to know others' aspirations based on one's own aspirations is the method of obtaining *ren*."<sup>95</sup>

There are two relevant points in this passage. First, Zigong's question indicates that

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<sup>93</sup> *Analects* 17.6.

<sup>94</sup> Here Chinese is more conspicuous and illustrative: the text is 能行五者於天下為仁矣, instead of 能行五者為仁矣.

<sup>95</sup> *Analects* 6.30.

it is a shared knowledge between him and Confucius that a *ren* person is who contributes to society. Second, Zigong's description about the person's accomplishments was so superb that hardly anyone could achieve. Therefore, Confucius disapproved it being called *ren*, but sagehood. The difference between *ren* and sagehood is of significance in understanding the transformation that Confucius has brought about. In the Chunqiu period, *ren* was applied primarily to aristocrats who held official positions in a state.<sup>96</sup> Zigong's question seems to show that he assumed that only those in office could influence society. In contrast, Confucius redefined *ren* in a more down-to-earth manner in that *ren* was accessible to anyone who would think of others based on one's own aspirations. Unlike sagehood as a fixed standard measuring the most superb accomplishments of a sage-ruler, *ren* is more fluid and exhibits a varied degree of actualization as it is attainable by anyone who influences others. One need not hold office to contribute to society. Instead, one could be qualified as a *ren* person as long as he affects his family, friends, and people around him. To the extent that anyone who is able to think of others can become a *ren* person, Confucius upheld that it was not difficult to achieve *ren*:

Confucius said, "Is *ren* far away? As long as we want it, *ren* will come."<sup>97</sup>

For Confucius, *ren* is easily attainable by the simple mental desire to will it. This is only understandable in conjunction with the method of achieving *ren*, that is, to think of others' aspirations based on one's own. In the sense that *ren*, by definition, is considerate to others,<sup>98</sup> one thinks of others when willing *ren*.

On the other hand, despite the easy attainability of *ren*, Confucius almost never called anyone a *ren* person.<sup>99</sup> For instance, when asked whether the two officials, Ziwen and Chen Weizi, could be considered *ren*, Confucius recognized the personal virtues embodied in their behaviors, yet refused to call them *ren* persons. Zi Wen was appointed three times as the minister of the state of Chu without manifesting any sign of delight, and three times dismissed from office without showing any sign of displeasure. Every time, he informed the new minister of the governmental affairs. Being able to not let personal emotions interfere in public affairs, Ziwen was praised by Confucius as being loyal. The other official, Chen Wenzi, left the state of Qi because the minister Cuizi of Qi murdered the lord, but when he went to other states, he found that ministers there behaved like Cuizi and therefore again left these states. Not serving in a state governed by a rebellious minister, Chen Weizi, according to Confucius, deserved of an unblemished reputation. When asked whether the two officials could be called *ren*, Confucius countered with a rhetorical question: "I don't know. Where do they attain *ren*?"

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<sup>96</sup> Pines 2002: 184-187.

<sup>97</sup> *Analects* 7.29.

<sup>98</sup> It is often pointed out that *ren* literally means two people since the character *ren* contains the two graphs referring respectively to man and two.

<sup>99</sup> Only Guan Zhong was given the praise of *ren* in the *Analects* (see below).

The rhetorical question indicates that in Confucius' perception, the information about the two officials presented to him was not relevant to the question of whether they were *ren* persons. Confucius was not reluctant to identify the virtues the two officials embodied, but exhibited a bit of surprise when asked whether their behaviors counted as *ren*. Taking the social dimension of *ren* into account, Confucius' surprise at the question is understandable. For Confucius, the information about the two officials presented to him concerns only individualistic behaviors and thus is evaluated by ethical terms. *Ren*, on the other hand, is an evaluative category to assess communitarian effect. In this light, the question to judge whether the two officials were *ren* persons based on their individualist behaviors is out of place.

That Confucius' perception of *ren* as an evaluative category to assess communitarian effect is also clearly shown in his reluctance to call his disciples *ren* persons:

Mengwu Bo asked, "Is Zilu a *ren* person?" Confucius said, "I don't know." Mengwu Bo asked again. Confucius said, "In a state of one thousand chariots, Zilu is capable of managing the military levies. As to whether he will be *ren* or not, I have no idea." Mengwu Bo then asked, "How about Ran Qiu?" Confucius said, "In a fiefdom of one thousand or hundred families, Qiu is capable of being serving as the chief functionary. As to whether he will be *ren* or not, I have no idea." Mengwu Bo then asked, "How about Gongsun Chi?" Confucius said, "In the court, Chi, well-dressed, is capable of conversing with visitors and guests. As to whether he will be *ren* or not, I have no idea."<sup>100</sup>

Confucius neither asserted nor denied that his disciples were *ren* persons; he simply admitted that he did not know. The question then arises is that why Confucius, who apparently knew well his disciples' capabilities, did not give a straightforward answer to the question whether his disciples were *ren* persons or not. Confucius would have been able to give a yes or no answer if *ren* were a virtue that could be cultivated and possessed. Responding to the question whether his disciples were *ren*, Confucius did not talk about the everyday performances of his disciples' moral cultivation, but about official positions that provided the potential to make contributions to a community. This attests to the validity of the thesis that *ren* was not considered to be a virtue. Instead, Confucius spoke of the governmental positions that his disciples were capable to hold. This is because that to hold governmental positions ensues affecting the society, which would be judged as *ren* or not.

### 3.3 The Case of Guan Zhong

Guan Zhong was the minister of the state of Qi who assisted Lord Huan of Qi (r. 685-643 BCE) in becoming the first hegemon (*ba*) in the Chunqiu period.<sup>101</sup> In the

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<sup>100</sup> *Analects* 5.8.

<sup>101</sup> For a general introduction to Chunqiu history, see Hsu 1999: 545-586.

*Analects*, Confucius seems to have said conflicting things about Guan Zhong. Most important, the conflict is between ritual (*li*) and *ren*, the two most important concepts of Confucius. On the one hand, Guan Zhong was condemned for not knowing ritual. On the other hand, Guan Zhong was the only person in the *Analects* that Confucius believed to deserve the epithet of *ren*. While the relation between *ren* and ritual has generated considerable scholarship, the contradiction between *ren* and ritual in Confucius' evaluations of Guan Zhong remains unsolved. With the understanding of the social dimension of *ren*, this thesis is able to make sense of the seemingly inconsistent evaluations, which can only be rendered consistent in the frame of reference celebrating social contributions over personal virtues. Confucius was talking about Guan Zhong's personal character when he criticized him for not knowing ritual, but Confucius referred to Guan Zhong's contributions in maintaining the cultural order when he praised him as *ren*.

The *Analects* contains the passage in which Guan Zhong was denounced as not knowing ritual:

Confucius said, "Small indeed was Guan Zhong's vision." Someone asked, "Was Guan Zhong simple [in handling official affairs]? Confucius said, "Guan Zhong had three official mansions where his subordinates assumed no double duties. How could Guan Zhong be simple?" The person then asked, "Then did Guan Zhong know ritual?" Confucius said, "The lords of states have a screen intercepting the view at their gates. Guan Zhong likewise set up a screen at his gate. The lords of states on any friendly meeting between two of them, have a stand on which to place their cups. Guan Zhong likewise set up a stand. If Guan Zhong knew ritual, who does not know ritual?"<sup>102</sup>

For Confucius, Guan Zhong deserved censure for two things, namely not streamlining the bureaucracy and appropriation of the lords' ritual. Here Confucius evaluated Guan Zhong in terms of his personal conduct. However, Confucius elevated Guan Zhong as a *ren* person when considering his historical impact:

Zilu asked, "When Lord Huan of Qi killed the prince Jiu, Shao Hu committed suicide for the prince, but Guan Zhong did not. Is Guan Zhong not a *ren* person?" Confucius said, "Lord Huan was able to summon all the overlords not by military force. It was thanks to Guan Zhong's merits. This is his *ren*! This is his *ren*!"<sup>103</sup>

Zigong said, "Is Guan Zhong not a *ren* person?" When Lord Huan of Qi killed the prince Jiu, Guan Zhong did not commit suicide for the prince and yet served as the minister for Lord Huan." Confucius said, "With Guan Zhong as the

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<sup>102</sup> *Analects* 3.22.

<sup>103</sup> *Analects* 14.16.

minister, Lord Huan had become the hegemon of all the overlords and united and stabilized all under Heaven. If not for Guan Zhong, we would have degenerated into barbarians, with our hair unbound and the left side of our robes untied. Should you think that he ought to have behaved like ordinary men who are so obstinately trustworthy in word that they killed themselves in a hidden valley so that no one knows?”<sup>104</sup>

The contrast between Guan Zhong and average men who are trustworthy in words is especially telling of Confucius’ reference to the historical impact of Guan Zhong. This is also corroborated by Confucius’ conception of personal morality, such as trustworthiness, as subordinate to being influential to society. In a passage, being uncritically trustworthy was only recognized as an inferior man.<sup>105</sup> The prestige of social impact over that of personal morality is further generalized by the contrast between great virtues (*da de*) and small virtues (*xiao de*):

Zixia said, “When a person does not transgress the boundary line in great virtues, it is alright that he may fail to meet the requirements in small virtues.”<sup>106</sup>

Great virtues refer to the beneficial effect on society of a person, by which a person is evaluated and commemorated in history. Small virtues, denoting personal morality, are not as important and could be transgressed. This makes it clear that Confucius’ seemingly contradictory comments on Guan Zhong were made according to the emphasis of great virtues over small virtues. Though Guan Zhong was condemned for personal morality, his historical contributions were so great that he deserved of praise in historical memory.

### 3.4 Summary

In seeking the existential meaning, early Confucianism advocated securing posthumous fame in history, which was to be acquired by establishing virtues, merits, and words in this world. In the sense that this-worldly achievements are socially focused, *ren* is used as an evaluative category, more than an ethical term, to assess a person’s historical contributions. This thesis is attested by Confucius’ evaluations of Guan Zhong, the only *ren* person in the *Analects*.

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<sup>104</sup> *Analects* 14.17.

<sup>105</sup> *Analects* 13.20.

<sup>106</sup> *Analects* 19.11.



## Conclusion

In this thesis, I argue against the view that takes individual cultivation as the primary concern and union with Heaven as the ultimate end in early Confucianism. I propose that with the collapse of Heaven in the Chunqiu period, Confucius endorsed history as the authority, for history revealed a normative order for society. History also held authority over humans because it was in history that humans sought for existential meaning.

In this light, I propound new interpretations of some of the most important concepts in early Confucianism. In the first chapter, distinct from the view that takes Heaven's Will as commands sent down by Heaven to Confucius, I interpret Heaven's Will as an impersonal historical process referring to the persistence of the cultural core in history. In the second chapter, I investigate Confucius' perception of history as an integration of values and facts and as a developmental process consisting of the invariant cultural spirit and variant cultural practices, repudiating the objection of Confucius' historical account as non-objective and the view that takes Confucius as a traditionalist. In the third chapter, I call into attention the notion of *ren* as an evaluative category to assess historical contributions and make sense of Confucius' seemingly contradictory evaluations of Guan Zhong in the frame of reference celebrating outward contributions over inward cultivation.

Confucianism has come in many forms and become a commonplace term not only in academic study, but in politics and media as well. With this thesis, I hope to demonstrate the necessity and possibility to read early Confucianism without being influenced by other variations of Confucianism.

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