

CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

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LI 礼 (old: 禮) Rituals, rites, ritual propriety. Etiquette, customs, worship, rules of proper behaviour

REN 仁 Benevolence, goodness, compassion, authoritative conduct, humanity

SHU 恕 Understanding, putting oneself in another's place

ZHONG 忠 Loyalty, dutifulness, doing one's utmost

TIAN 天 Heaven

DAO 道 Way

XIN 心 Heart, Mind, Heart-Mind

YI 義 Rightness, appropriateness

ZHI 知 Wisdom, to realize

DE 德 Morality, power, virtue, excellence

SHAN 善 Good, truly adept

XIAO 孝 Filial piety, filial conduct

Zhong and Shu are the positive and the negative sides of the same thread. Zhong consists in doing to others as we would do to ourselves and Shu in not doing to others as we would not like done to ourselves.

The early Confucian philosophers tried hard to influence the Han rulers (with success) to rule according to Confucian ethics rather than the brute force of law of the Qin dynasty. These philosophers pointed out to the Han rulers that the Qin dynasty, for its military power, strict laws and harsh punishments, lasted a very short time. They attributed this to the fact, while it might be legitimate to use force to overthrow a previous dynasty, in order to preserve one's dynasty, the government must be based on ethics. Two influential Confucian Han philosophers, Lu Jia and Jia Yi, maintained that, while seizing power depends on violence, keeping power depends on rule by morality. They therefore said that the ideal government should be based on ethical principles.

These philosophers began the interpretation (some would say the twisting) of natural laws, such as that of Yin and Yang, in ethical ways.

Confucius constantly harked back to the Zhou dynasty deeming its rulers as perfect examples of Confucian qualities of *Ren*, *Yi* and especially *Li*. He considered the Zhou dynasty a golden age from the social and political point of view and attributed the chaos that prevailed during the Warring States Period to the disintegration of the Zhou dynasty.

Reality was quite different and, in all probability, Confucius idealized the Zhou dynasty. The “Hymns of Zhou” a collection of poems singing the praises of Zhou rulers for vanquishing the “darkness of Shang”: “*Glorious is the kind’s army; he reared it up out of darkness.*” Shang records reveal a different story. Research shows that the accusations of wickedness of the last Shang kings are false. In fact, the last Shang king was an ethical person who was very attentive to performing the rituals that Confucius admired so much.

The Zhou altered the truth of history for their own political motives.

The concept of Mandate of Heaven (*Tian Ming*) was essential to the Chinese imperial political system. According to this belief, the ruler maintained a sacred relationship with “Heaven” which granted him the right to his authority. The ruler had to act for the benefit of the people. If he failed, Heaven would appoint another ruler to overthrow and replace him. The Zhou used the idea of the Mandate of Heaven to justify their conquest. The Duke of Zhou repeatedly reminded the people of Shang that Heaven had bestowed its Mandate to him. The position of the king as the mediator between Heaven and Earth was already established during the Shang dynasty and that is why the Zhou insisted on it. Beginning with the Zhou dynasty, the position of the ruler was further sanctioned with the title of “Son of Heaven” *Tian Zi*.

For example, Lu Jia says this of Yin-Yang: “*Yang Qi is generated by benevolence (ren) and the regulation of Yin is descended by righteousness (yi)...Heaven and Earth come together with benevolence, the 8 Trigrams follow one another with righteousness.*”

In my opinion, this is a gross distortion of the phenomena of Yin and Yang which are natural phenomena and qualities which have nothing to do with ethics concepts.

These philosophers also distorted Daoist concepts giving them a Confucian twist. In the Daoist classics, the Dao is undivided, immanent and ineffable, free of moral judgment and intention; and De is a person’s potency to act according to Dao, being free from conscious judgment and desire. Lu Jia revived the Confucian interpretation of these concepts redefining Dao as the highest moral principle of human conduct and De as the moral quality to realize such a principle.

Lu Jia’s theory pioneered the job of constraining political power with a moral cosmology which engaged scholars for generations.