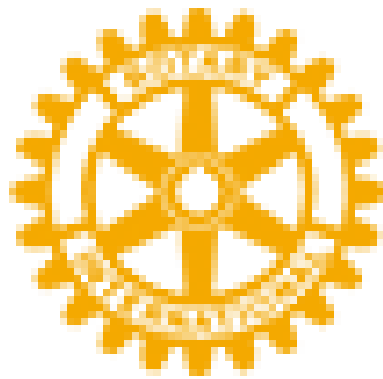


Rotary Club



Wien-Stadtpark

Confucianism, Daoism and today's China

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China in the "Axial Age" (Karl Jaspers) – the first millenium BC

Bronze Age

- No reflexion and doubts about human condition
- Emotional security of myths

Mankind emerges to reflecting about human condition

- India: Buddha
- Persia: Zarathustra
- China: "100 schools" – Kong Futsi, Laotsi
- Israel: Prophets, monotheism
- Greece: Homer, Socrates, Plato, Aristoteles

Emergence of today's cultures:

- Chinese
- Buddhism, Hinduism
- Greek-Roman-Jewish
 - Western European Christianity
 - Byzantine-Russian Christianity
 - Islamic

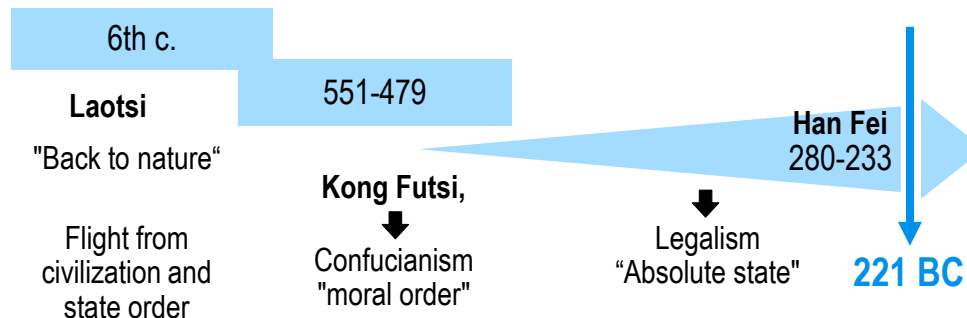
China between 771 and 221 BC

Trying to give an answer to atrocious civil wars and "fighting states"

Brake-down of feudal Western Zhen empire

771

~ 1000 local rulers started war all against all



Confucianism as "ideology" of empire

The individualistic answer: "Daoism" – Return to nature and autark village

Laotsi (6th c BC): Tao te king (Daodejing; Dao = the order of nature) – Qi Tao – Yin Yang

"Those who know don't say; those who say don't know"

"The absence of wishes leads to calm and the world will find its balance from itself"

- ✓ **Nature and agriculture are the base for a happy life**
- ✓ **Reason for all evil is civilization, the separation of the individual from nature**
- ✓ **Unfolding of individual through insignificance but freedom**

- Human individual in harmony with nature
- Avoid civilization and state
- Ideals: "hidden master", "autark village"
- Contemplation, gardening → Chinese medicine

- ➔
 - ✓ Balancing philosophical power to Confucianism: individual vs. society
 - ✓ Developed into a "religion" between 3rd and 6th c AD
 - ✓ Broad spiritual movement with influence and effect until today



The social moral answer: the rational moral philosophy of "Confucianism"

Master Kong Futsi (561-479 BC): teacher, no politician
Collection of his ideas, writings and sayings: "The Analects"

- **Achieving "order and harmony" with cruel laws is not sustainable**
- **Internalized, intrinsic moral of human beings: "humans are good by nature"**
- **State is in harmony when everybody plays his role from his intrinsic moral drive**
- **Divine mandate** of the emperor – "Charisma of virtue"
 - > Dynasty might lose divine mandate if virtue is lost
- **Harmony** due to 5 social relations in the natural order of a patriarchic family:
 - > Father-son, husband-wife, older-younger brother, emperor-officials, friend-friend
 - > reciprocal obligations!
- Power of the **education**: sets the intrinsic moral free
- Role of individuals to be accepted: *"Let the ruler be ruler, the subject subject; let the father be father, and the son son"*
- Hierarchy of 'nobles'/elites based on meritocracy: educated vs. not educated, personal integrity, virtue

The radical, shortterm answer: Absolute State of the "Legalists"

Developed from 4th c BC

Several origins, summarized in the writings of Han Fei (280-233 BC)

- **“Humans are bad by nature”**
 - **All humans are equal in front of law – no hierarchy of nobles**
 - **Ruling according to old rituals and moral rules is nonsense**
-
- Absolute ruler not based on divine moral law
 - Centrally organized state
 - Ruling with a meritocracy of officials (Destruction of old noble hierarchy)
 - Blind obedience by individuals of cruel laws
 - High rewards and cruel punishment



- ✓ Helped to end the period of "Fighting States"
- ✓ First emperor Qin
- ✓ Not sustainable due to cruelty and lack of moral base

The *integrative view* of (old?) Chinese culture

Three milleniums of search for "harmony and order":

Zhou dynasty → solution for 2x Fighting States → Cultural revolution → moral base of today's communism

Legalism:

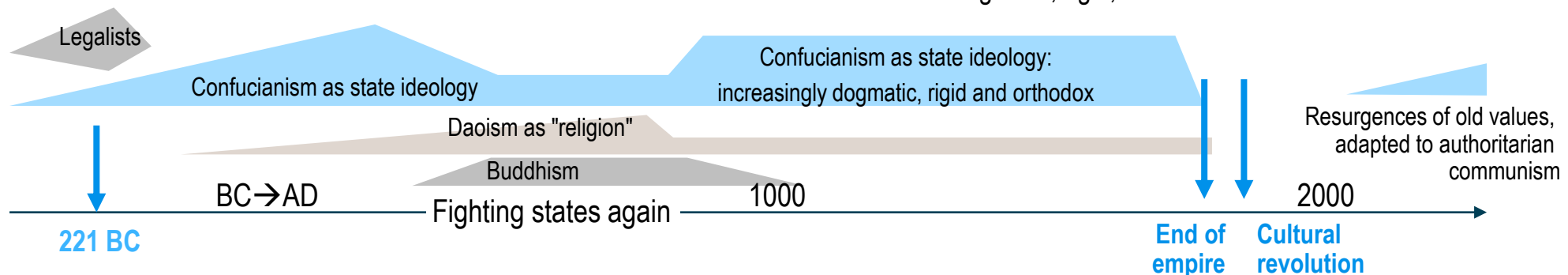
- Shortterm solution
- Elements integrated into Confucian state order

Daoism, partly with Buddhism:

- Initially flight from civilization
- Later "religion", with Buddhism
- Individual balance to nature

Confucianism:

- First peak in 2nd c BC to 2nd c AD
- Main peak in Song Dynasty (960-1279)
- >1279 also Mongols saw that ruling China is only possible with Confucianism
- Under Mandschu-Dynasty >1644: degenerated to dogmatic, rigid, orthodox



The integrative view of Chinese: acceptance of other's philosophies/religions

Different focusses depending on political situations

Also valid during He's journeys: tribute system

The voyages of Zheng He

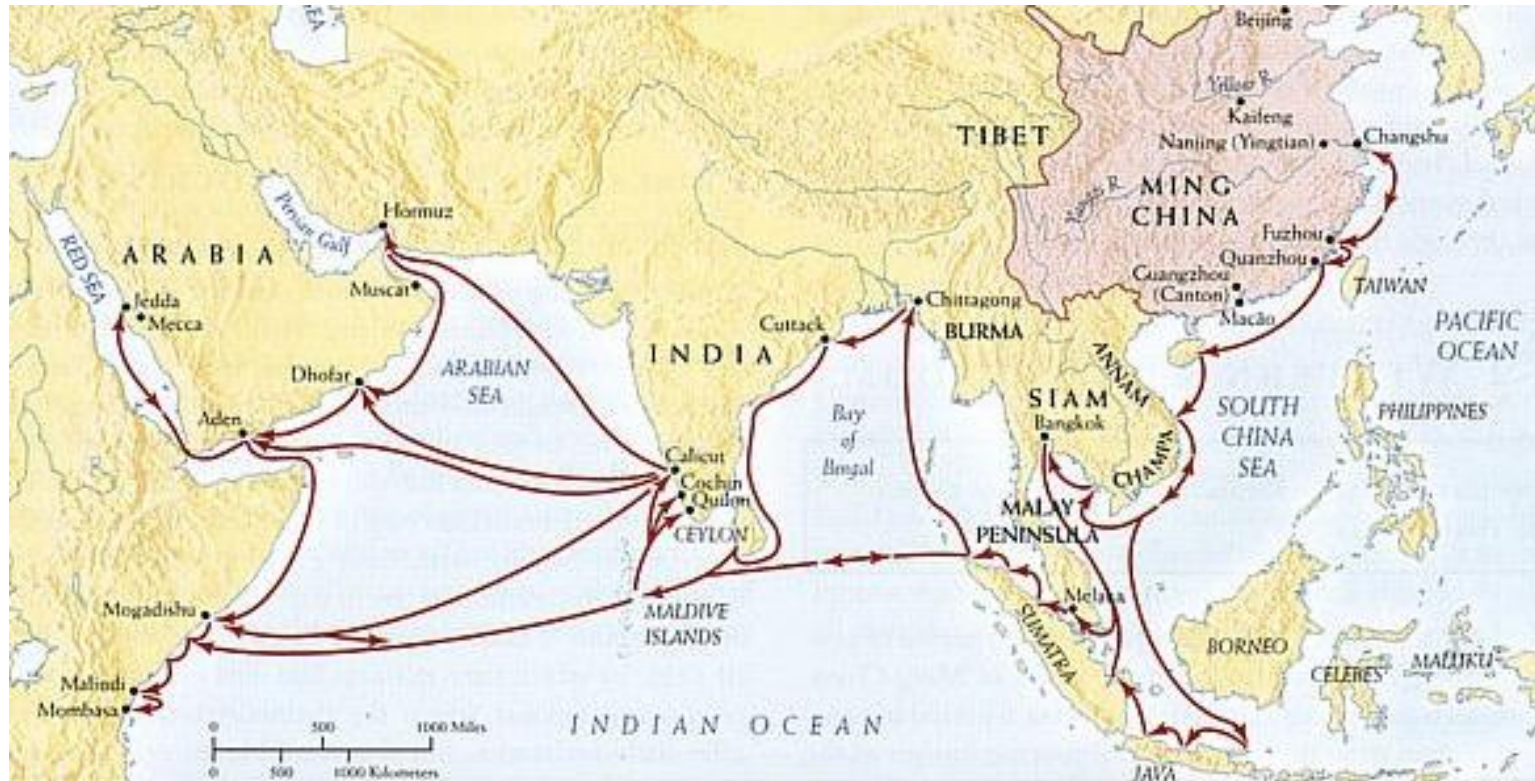
1405 – 1433: China proves to itself that it does NOT need the world

The biggest fleet of the world was build to expand the tribute system overseas:

- >310 ships (Spanish Armada: 132 ships) of wood, partyl teak
- 62 9-mast "treasure ships" (135 meters long, 55 meter broad; Columbus/Vasco: 30-40 meters) with luxury cabins and reception halls for representatives/high level guests
- 250 8-, 5-mast accompanying ships (e.g. 20 tankers only for water, for horses, troops, etc.)
- 25.000- 30.000 persons (a real city on the water) incl. 180 physicians, also interpreters, craftsmen, astrologers,



Voyages of Zheng He, 1405-1433



⇒ **7 voyages to India, Arabia, East Africa:**
By far the biggest maritime expeditions of all times

The voyages of Zheng He, 1405 - 1433


Objectives

- Show the splendor of the Chinese empire to the world
- Announce the enthronization of Yongle Dynasty – emperor Zhu Di
- Establish the Tribute Systems also overseas

The Tribute System

- Sino-centric, mutually beneficial economic relations based on Chinese rules
- Partners allowed to do trade with China after recognizing the supremacy of Chinese emperor
- Exchange of precious presents and representatives, acknowledging China's dominating role
- Existed over 2000 years primarily in East Asian region
- Shaped Asian societies over a dozen of centuries

The Great Withdrawal – a rational and ethical decision resulting in isolation for 4 centuries

- Significant financial problems due to 3 expensive parallel projects: money better spent at home for irrigation canals, roads, and heading off famine
- After Zhu Di's death, battle between Eunuchs and Mandarins for political power – mandarins prevailed
- **Return to the basic principles of Confucianism**  **Orthodox Confucian officials lead China into isolation**

Confucianism was incompatible with market economy and industrial society:

- Agriculture as base of society
- Negative attitude towards traders and private entrepreneurs
- Superior focus on education of elites (meritocracy in public administration via Mandarins)
- Highest priorities: stability of empire and society; moral example of emperor

Developments of societal values in China during the last century

- Before 1912: degenerated rigidity of orthodox Confucian structures/rituals brought down the empire
- During republican time: no significant change of societal values ("last emperor")
- Cultural Revolution (1966-1976): completely purging all remnants of tradition and capitalism – millions of deaths; tens of millions of intellectuals humiliated and "re-educated"
- Since 1978: development of a modern society – initially for basic needs and with all efforts
- 1989: Tiananmen massacre: loss of innocence of new political order and attitude
- Since appr. 2000: with increasing wealth also increasing need for individual and societal values – China-specific values to distinguish from Western societies
- 2003: Wen Jiabao (Chinese Prime Minister) in Harvard: "China's peaceful rise"
- 2004: First **Confucian Institute** in Seoul, in 2006 every six day a new Institute; in 2014: first shut-downs in the West
- Since 2014: Xi Jinping: explicit references to Confucianism as distinctive cultural difference to Western Capitalism



Today: resurgence of traditional value system ("harmony and order") under new constraints

Recent remarks of political leaders: *Communist Party as defender of Confucius's virtues*

Visit of **Xi Jinping** in Qufu, Confucius's hometown, for Confucius's 2565th birthday on Sept 24, 2014:
Conference on "Confuciansim: World Peace and Development"

"Values as spiritual world of Chinese people have always been deeply rooted in the fertile soil of China's traditional culture" ... "The Chinese Communist Party is the successor to and the promotor of fine traditional Chinese culture" ...

"... Western countries have begun to reflect, and openly or secretly, compare themselves against China's politics, economy and path..."

Xi announced policy document *"to promote traditional values, implant new social mores and a cohesive national spirit, and enhance cultural soft power."*

"... Since reform and opening up, the decadent things of the bourgeoisie and capitalism have entered, along with commodities..."

Traditional Chinese values as bulwark against foreign influences: *"I told the prime minister of Greece that your democracy is the democracy of Greece and ancient Rome, and that's your tradition. We have our own traditions."*

Confucianism – compatible with communism or democracy?

Universal and timeless core values:

- Family values – filial obedience – e.g. bowing head to ground in front of parents
- Societal relations – reciprocal obligations
- Harmony and balance – not the same as equality
- Individuals trying to do the right things effect their surrounding and at the end the society

Conflicting aspects with Western democratic values:

- Gender equality – roles of men and women highly separated: men for outside, women for inside the family
- Developed for a rural society: negative attitude towards traders and private entrepreneurs
- Meritocracy: the really best and not those who make the best impression to the majority of people
- Chinese governments and some intellectuals¹⁾: Confucianism is not compatible with Western democratic values

Other intellectuals²⁾:

- Confucius gave people the right to choose leadership and overthrow a leader who was immoral and tyrannical
- Democratic institutions (parliament, elections) are seen as natural extensions of Confucianism
- "Harmony" includes freedom of speech
- Japan and S Korea: societies, which are highly influenced by Confucianism, can be democratic



Interpretation of ancient ideas for our today's societies – like the Bible (≠ Islam)

Basic (un-answered) question on future political governance – in the West and in China

"In an information-based world, power diffusion may pose a bigger danger than power transition"

"Soft power" can handle the relations between countries and impede terrorism

(Joseph Nye in US)

Anhang

Summary: 3 moral answers to end the "fighting states"

Legalists

Humans are bad by nature

- Therefore: absolute state, absolute emperor, individuals only obey
- Cruel power of the central state, no value system

- Legally all equal in front of law (no nobles)
- Cruel punishment, high rewards
- Ruling with a meritocracy of officials
- All other philosophies prohibited

- Developed in 4th c BC and was written by Han Fei in mid of 3rd c BC
- Helped to end period of "fighting states"
- First emperor Qin (<221)

Confucianism

Humans are good by nature

- State is in harmony when everybody plays his role from intrinsic moral drive
- Emperor with mandate of the sky; personal integrity, virtue of the moral educated elite

"Let the ruler be ruler, the subject subject; let the father be father, and the son son."

- Kong Fuzi (551-479 BC)
- Restoration of traditional moral philosophy of early Zhou-Dynasty; sleeping 6 centuries
- Peak in Song Dynasty (960-1279)
- 1279 also Mongols saw that ruling China is only possible with Confucianism
- Under Mandschu-Dynasty >1644: degenerated to dogma

Daoism

Human individual in harmony w/ nature

- State not necessary, civilization is reason for all bad; individualistic philosophy
- Nature and agriculture is the base for a happy life, avoid civilization

"The absence of wishes leads to calm and the world will find its balance from itself"

- Laozi (6th c BC): Tao te king (Daodejing; Dao=the order of nature) – Qi Tao – Yin Yang
- Similar to a "religion" in 3rd-6th c AD
- Broad spiritual movement with influence and effect until today