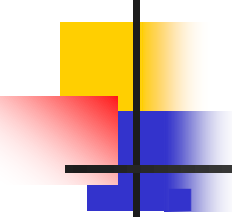


Confucian self and free will

Session 11:
The Self in Confucian ethics



The Self in dictionaries

Oxford English Dictionary:

- That which in a person is **really and intrinsically** *he* (in contradistinction to what is adventitious);
- the **ego** (often identified with the soul or mind as opposed to the body);
- a **permanent subject** of successive and varying states of consciousness'

■ **Encyclopedia of Philosophy:**

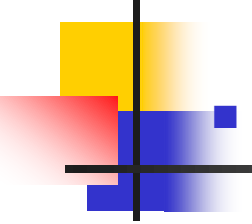
- The self 'is sometimes used to mean the whole series of a person's **inner mental states** and
- sometimes the **spiritual substance** to which the philosophers say they belong'

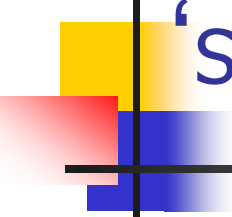


Three senses of western self

- **Metaphysical**: the self is a constant or **unchanging substance** by which each individual is identified, or
 - a distinct **entity** differentiated from and opposed to the rest of the world
- **Epistemological**: it is the **thinking interior core** either termed as the **soul** or as the **mind**, differentiated from one's physical reality (body)
 -
- **Psychological**: it is the **compound** of feeling, emotion, memory, will and knowledge.
- It is **neither the object nor the subject**, but a stream of various **consciousness** or the **sum of inner states**

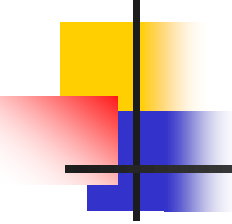
Confucian Self

- 
- The Confucian self is not substantial, but **changeable and cultivatable**, in constant transformation
 - Confucian self is not confined to the mind, but is a perfect **unity of mind and body**, with an emphasis on bodily behaviour and choice (most words for the self have a body or part of body origin)
 - Confucian self is not pure consciousness or inner state only; it is **active, motivated** by social, moral and political purposes
 - Above all, Confucian self is **relational**, and can be seen or defined only in human relations.



'Self' as pronoun in the Analects: wo, wu, yu

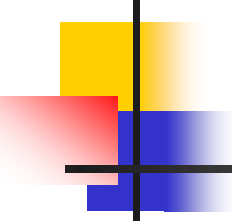
- 'what I (wo 我) do not want others to do to me (wo), I (wu 吾) have no desire to do to others' (5:12)
- 'if only someone were to employ me (wo), in a year's time, [I] would have brought things to a satisfactory state, and after three years [I] should have results to show for it' (13:10)
- 'If I (yu 予) have done anything improper, may Heaven's curse be on me' (6:28)



Zi 自 as the 'Self' (the Nose)

- The self (zi) as the subject:
 - 'Seeing some unworthy people, one (zi 自) should reflect (xing 省) on one's own self (4:17)
- The self as the object:
 - 'I have yet to meet a person capable of seeing his own faults and bringing the charge home against himself (zi) (5:27)

Confucian Self: ji as a unity of subject and object

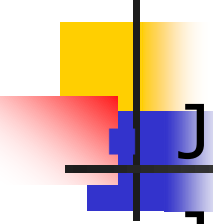


Ji 己, referring to what one is, contrasted with and yet related to others

- Ji is an initiating and motivating agent: ‘If one (ji 己) wants to establish oneself, one should also establish others; if one (ji 己) wants to perfect oneself, one should also perfect others (6:30)
- Ji is held responsible for one’s moral character: it is depended on one’s self (ji 己) to be a benevolent person (12:1)
- Ji is placed in a moral position: ‘Among those who ruled by inactivity, surely Shun may be counted. For what action did he take? He merely placed himself (ji 己) gravely and reverently with his face due south; that was all’ (15:4)

Ji in Oracle, Bronze and Seal

己 巳 𠄎 𠄎 → the self
Central Part of the body
the belly



Ji as an moral agent

- Ji is to be conquered or overcome (ke ji 克己 12:1):
- Ji is to be known (ji zhi 已知, 1:16).
 - 15:19: A gentleman is distressed by his own lack of capacity; he is never distressed at the failure of others to recognise his merits
- Ji can be improved:
 - ‘Men of antiquity studies to improve themselves (wei ji 为己); men today study to impress others’ (14:24)
- Ji is to be cultivated (14:45):
 - ‘A gentleman cultivates in himself (xiu ji 修己) the capacity to be diligent in his task; He cultivates in himself the capacity to ease the lot of the whole populace’

11-2: Confucian Self: Shen = 私 = 自己



■ **Shen**身: Originally for the body, but then referring to the self as a person

■ **Shen as the whole of one's existence and especially as the unity between mind and body:**

■ Giving up one's life (sha shen 杀身) in order to achieve benevolence (15:9)

■ 'If the ruler is correct in his own person (shen) all will go well even though he does not give orders. But if he is not correct in his own person, even he gives orders, these orders will not be followed' (13:6)

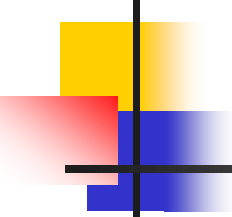
■ **Shen as the self:**

■ To be cultivated (xiu shen 修身), examined or reflected (fan shen 反身), preserved (shou shen 守身)

■ Confucius praised those 'not to lower their purpose or to allow themselves (shen) to be humiliated' (18:8)

Shen

身 𠂇 𠂇 𠂇 → The self 𠂇
(oracle) (bronze) (Seal)
The body
a body with a big belly
The pregnant woman (pregnancy)



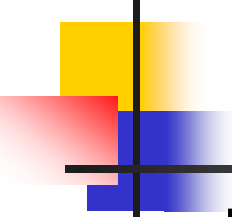
Confucian self: si as a unity of the personal and the public

- Si 私: the **private self**, refers to the inner qualities or private character or what is private to oneself
 - ‘I can talk to Yan Hui a whole day without his ever differing from me. One would think he was stupid. But if I enquire into his private self (si) when he is not with me I find that it fully demonstrates what I have taught him’ (2:9)
- Si indicates the self that is **private** but can be enquired and examined by **others**
- It is therefore open to the **public**



Zi Ji 自己: Active and passive

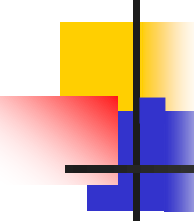
- Whatever characters used, ‘the self’ is seen in the **active activities** of thinking, perceiving, talking, choosing and acting
- It is also seen in the **passive activities** of being cultivated, being known, being obtained, and being preserved.
- Chinese :
- **This active-passive** also relates to the **engaged** and the **reflective**: the **physical** and the **self-conscious**
- Chung-ying Cheng:
- **Two sides of the self**: the temporal and the transcendent, the engaged and the reflective (126)



Moral and Social Self

- **Moral:** The self can be selfish, and must be contained; It can also be altruistic, and should be encouraged
- **Social:** It is private and particular, confined to one's own inner dimensions and independent of one's environment;
- It is also related to others—a relational concept of 'self'
- **The relational 'ego'**—self-contradictory as it may sound to be-- is typical of Confucian understanding of the self

Ontological 'Self' in the West



The self as a metaphysical entity, a substance in contrast to attributes, or 'a mode of substance'

- Self as the irreducible core (atom) within humans
 - As the substantive nature of an individual → 'I-ness'; 'mine-ness', 'myself-ness'
 - The substance of one's being, inalienable and indispensable for 'I' as the 'I'

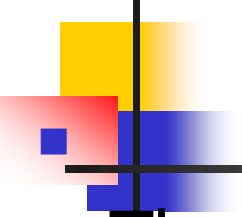
Plato or Aquinas: 'the immortal soul';

John Locke: unchanged self throughout time:

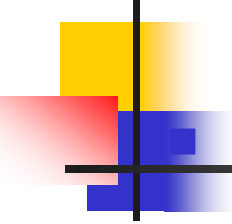
Paul Ricoeur: Locke substituted selfhood for sameness'

Kantian philosophy: Nomenal self and phenomenal ego

Attributive Self in Confucianism

- 
- Confucian self is not substantial but attributive
 - The Self is therefore a group of attributes rather than one substance
 - There is no 'independent' self in opposition to the world, nor 'substantial' being alienated from others
 - The self cannot be defined by itself, but must be defined in its relations with others, with the world.
 - While substance remains the same, attributes can change: **The self must be cultivated to mature.**

The Self as the Mind in the West



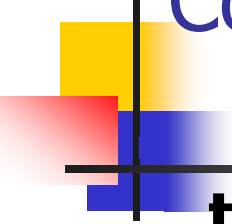
Self as substance whose essence or nature can be seen in one's mental activities: imaging, perceiving, thinking, reflecting etc

Plato: the self is the soul that can deliberate and meditate

Descartes: I as the subject of doubting presumes that the I exists and doubts—the mind, distinctive from body: 'I think, therefore I am'

■ The self is separated from the body:

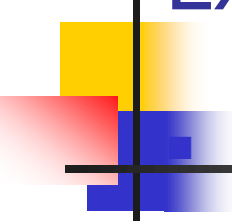
Kirstie Morrison: 'a person is an individual that, in addition to a body, has a self. Perhaps a person is composite of a self—in some sense requiring explication—and a body'



Confucian Self is not identified with xin

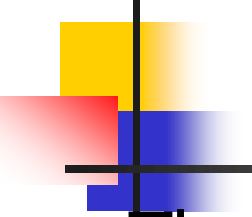
Confucian xin is a moral mind/heart, rather than the cognitive mind

- Xin presupposes the unity between inner faculties and external performances
- Xin warrants the agreement between knowledge and action
- Xin is not the same as the self. Its extension is smaller than the self: 'thinking is the faculty of the mind. By thinking...both the mind and what is revealed from thinking are what Heaven has given to me' (Mencius, 6A:15)
- **The Confucian self** is related both to **one's mind/heart** and to **one's performances**



External Significance of the Confucian Self

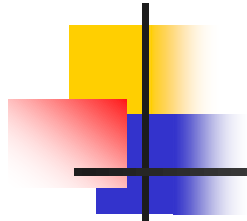
- All three characters are derived from pictographs related to the external aspects of a human being
 - **Ji** comes from a picture of the central part of the body
 - **Shen** delineates the stretching of the body
 - **Si** is derived from the private property (fields) as one's external extension
- The self can be realised in one's private life—it is the inner part of the person and can be seen through self-meditation
- It can also be expressed in one's public engagements—it is revealed in one's external activities and can be observed by others



Robert Eno

- The less emphasis on the **inner complex** of an individual must not be interpreted as ‘it is less complex within the Confucian self, nor there is no distinction between the private and the public. Rather this indicates that **the distinction between the inner self and outer is not regarded as categorical, and the person is entified in a holistic manner**’
- ----The Confucian Creation of Heaven—Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery, New York: SUNY Press, 1991, p.72

11-3. Self as Consciousness in the West

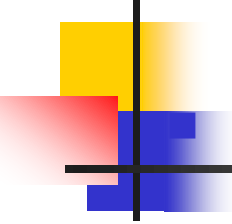


- **The self=the permanent subject** of various psychic conscious events
- It is not only **differentiated** from **the world** and from **the body**, but also independent of knowledge
- Empiricism:
- David Hume: As the **subject of inner senses** the self cannot be sensed, and is therefore not knowable.
- Thomas Nagel: argues for **an objective self that is impersonal.**



Confucian Self

- **No differentiation**
- between **consciousness** and **sub-consciousness**, or between **consciousness** and **self-consciousness**
- **Attention** to **psychological implications** of the **moral self**
- It is always **related to** its **social and moral dimensions**, to the growing process in which one's efforts of inner and outer aspects play a decisive role
- In the process the two aspects are combined and the self is formed.



Mencius and Xunzi

Mencius: What one is depends how to choose the way of life: between the two kinds of one's potentials

- Those who have chosen the great part of the body (da ti) will become great men;
- those who have chosen the small part (xiao ti) will become mean persons (xiao ren)

■ **Xunzi: Two Sides of the Human Self:**

- The social tendency and the self-regarding tendency
- The self is manifested in the transforming process from the latter to the former

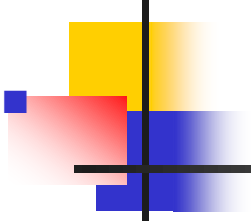


From small to great

Contrasts between the great and small parts or between the human and the pre-human are not

- the **same** as between **desire and reason**, between **flesh and spirit**, between the **'law of my members'** and the **'law of my mind'**
- **Human self** must be established **in relations** rather than through **inner struggles**
 - 'Confucius and his followers had not experienced the type of anguished psychic struggles that are so central to the Western experience of selfhood' (Fingarette, pp. 134-136)
- **Confucian self** is a **changing process** in **self-cultivation (xiu shen)**, both internally and externally.

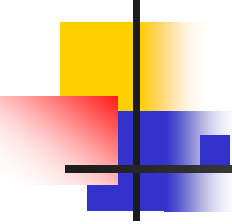
Sacred Self from Within



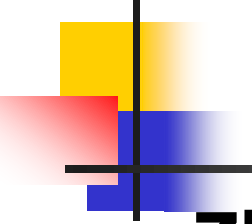
To complete one's self is to follow natural law

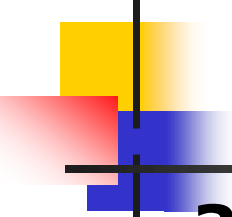
- The self is not only related to one's **commitment** to **society** but also to one's **ultimate concern** about **human destiny**
- Following **natural law** is to follow one's **own nature**, and follow one's own nature is to **complete one's self**
- To complete one's self is to **understand one's destiny**
- To understand one's destiny is to **understand other people's destiny**
- This is to **understand Heaven and to serve Heaven** (7A:1)
- This is a full realisation of the sacred potential within one's self

Sacred and Secular

- 
- The **sacred** is **not far away** from the **secular**; and
 - The **self** is the **starting point** for a **moral society** and **moral government**
 - ‘Hence the question of how to conceive a human self for the purpose of meeting the needs of constructing a great society and a just government remains a core question’ for Confucian ethics.
 - ----Chung-ying Cheng, p.124

11-4: 'Will' in Confucius

- 
- **Zhi 志 as noun:** The will of the self that can make a choice or decision in one's mind (zhi has a radical of mind)
 - **Will:** not yielding their wills (18:8)
 - **Intension:** 'When his father is alive you can only observe his intentions', 1:11;
 - **Wish:** 'I suggest each of you tell me what you wish to be' (5:26);
 - **Purpose:** 'extending your learning and hold fast to your purpose (zhi)' (19:6)



Willing to be

Zhi as verb: the power of making choice and decision: Confucius ‘set his mind (zhi)’ on learning at 15 years old (2:4);

- **Zhi is an inalienable part of the self:** ‘You may rob the three armies of their commander-in-chief, but you cannot deprive the humblest peasant of his will (zhi) (9:26)
- What one will to do would make a difference in consequences: ‘If one sets his heart on benevolence, one would not dislike others’ (4:4)



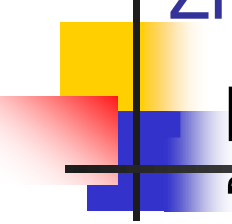
'zhi' is to choose

- **Zhi is to make a choice** among values, between good and bad, noble and mean, great and small
- **Zhi is the self-conscious active power** of decision making and choice making towards a goal
- **Zhi is independent**, can make its own choice, can choose to follow the dao or not to do so
- Although the possibilities already embedded in one's self, **it is still an open choice** between the great and small parts, between desire and ideal
- Therefore the **zhi (will) is free**



Zhi = practical reason?

- As **zhi is to sift among possibilities** and to **make a choice among values**, it is practical by nature
- **It requires a deliberate force:** ‘to set one’s mind on’ the way (for Confucius) and to set one’s mind on high principles (benevolence and righteousness, Mencius 7A:33)
- **It is based on reflection or understanding of the self and the values**, it is therefore rational
- **Zhi is to command:** ‘The will (zhi) is commander over qi (the bodily force) where the qi is that which fills the body. Where the will (zhi) arrives there the qi halts. Hence it is said ‘Take hold of your will and do not abuse your qi’ (3A:2)



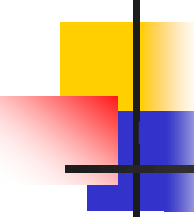
Zhi as the Moral Will can be Cultivated

Like the xin, **one's zhi can also be cultivated:**

‘If Heaven is to endow a large responsibility on a person, he would first make his heart/mind and his will (zhi) suffer... (6B:15);

- **The more hardship one experiences the more likely one has a strong will** that can be set on the Dao
- Xunzi talks about ‘making one’s will strong qiang zhi’ (22:1)
- **A strong will** can uphold his vision and conviction and reject temptation and diversion, while **a weak will** is less likely able to do so.

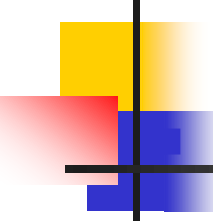
Is zhi free?



Confucius: **it seems zhi is free**, and can make its own choice. It can be swayed (huo zhi 惑志 14:38); ‘It is by dwelling in seclusion that they seek the fulfillment of their aims (zhi)’ (16:11)

- For Mencius, **one’s will can be changed** by the teaching of the sage: ‘The sage is teacher to a hundred generations...Hence hearing of the way of Po Yi, a covetous man will be purged of his covetousness and a weak man will become resolute (li zhi 立志)’ (14B:15)
- **The will appears to be ‘intention’** (yi 意), which is subject to **cultivation to be ‘sincere’** (Great Learning). As sincere intention, the will has freedom to make a choice—to choose the right and to make one’s heart-mind upright.

Free Will and Human Nature

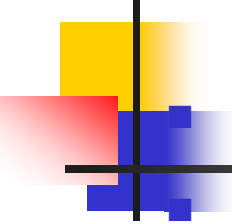


The sage and I are of the same kind(6A:7):

in moral potential, reasoning ability and rightness, and It indicates that **all people are born with** the same potentials (xin, zhi) and the **same nature**

- **Why some people become sages while others ordinary?**
- **The sage has first found this common element** in his heart while others have not yet.
- The **will plays a role** here too: 'Hold on to it and it will remain; let go of it and it will disappear' (6A:8)

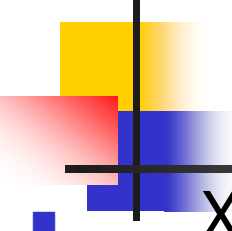
Mind and free will



Human self has a nature that is innately good.

However, this will is initial and can be easily diverted or weakened in a bad environment. Hence the necessity of trials and cultivation

- Heart/mind reflects on matters and helps the will to be strong, which is a cultivation. With the cultivated will one is set free from the world and the strength of the will has made one free
- This is what Mencius said about 'Great man': he cannot be bent by force, corrupted by wealth and position (3B:2). He can choose death over life if life is found unworthy of living

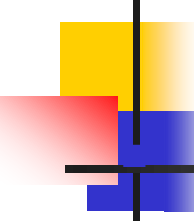


Evil nature and free will

- Xunzi believes **humans are born with an evil nature**
- This nature will lead one to strive for satisfaction of its desires, which would lead to chaos
- There are sages and sagely teachings which teach people to be restricted by rites and cultivated by education. Hence virtue are human made.
- In this process, human nature is rectified and cultivated to become virtuous, in which the will plays a decisive role

The important of Confucian

Self in Spiritual Transcendence



Confucianism is sometimes described as a kind of secular humanism on the grounds that it does not pay sufficient attention to the spiritual dimension

Confucianism is first concerned with life rather than death and with humans rather than with spirits.

However, it does not follow that the Confucian understanding of the self is totally preoccupied with secularity and temporality.

For many Confucians, the self is endowed with a transcendent 'spirit', which if fully developed would enable one to be a co-ordinate of the world,

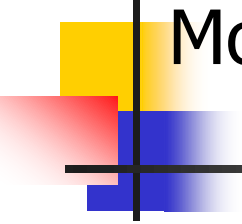
To become a guardian of natural and social processes, and a partner in the creative transformation of Heaven and Earth

Moral Power and the Self Moral Cultivation



This is considered a person's own responsibility, because whether or not one would be such a person depends on oneself, not on others.

- Self-cultivation is understood as the fundamental path to the spiritual transformation of one's character.
- By the interaction between the macrocosm and microcosm, the transformation of one's own character is believed to fulfil the transformation of the cosmos and society.



Moral Cultivation and Search in One's Own Mind

- For Confucians, it is more urgent to start working on one's own nature by engaging self-cultivation than to blame others or external circumstances for one's failure.
- The Confucian discourse on the self probe at a deeper level into each individual's moral psychology.
- They hold individuals to be responsible for their own future and encourage them to search in their own heart/mind for the resource of becoming good,
- believing that 'seek and you will get it; let go and you will lose it. Thus seeking is of use to getting and what is sought is within yourself' (Mengzi, 7A:3).