



## In Search of Harmony

### A Sociopolitical Reconstruction of Confucius' Intellectual System

Milad Azamimaram<sup>1</sup> 

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Religions and Mysticism, Faculty of Theology, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: [miladazamimaram@ut.ac.ir](mailto:miladazamimaram@ut.ac.ir)

#### Abstract

Undoubtedly, Confucius is one of the greatest and most influential figures in the Far Eastern history of thought. Like other Eastern sages, however, he conveyed his teachings to his students orally and in the form of aphorisms and brief sayings, and he never tried to organize them into a systematic structure, as is the way of Western philosophers. This has caused serious disagreements among scholars about his role and his teachings. The author of present article argues that Confucius is, first of all, a social theorist and not a philosopher or a moral teacher or a religious leader. His central doctrine is harmony (He') and his other thoughts and teachings should be re-examined according to this doctrine. According to Confucius' thought and analysis, if first the ruling class and then the populace recognize their duties towards others (Zheng-Ming), and regard their responsibilities as a religious duty (Li), and their motivation, performing their responsibilities, be not profiteering but compassion and human-heartedness (Ren), and if they carry out their duties in a good form and appropriate way (Yi), they will be a nobleman and exemplary person (Jun-Zi) and so their society will be in order, and the Harmony will be realized.

**Keywords:** He', Li, Ren, Social Theorist, Yi, Zheng-ming.

#### Introduction

The “confused order” of Confucius's words has caused the recognition of his personality type and hence the systematic reconstruction of his teachings to be a point of controversy; so that sometimes researchers have abandoned such controversies and considered Confucius simultaneously as a “historical figure”, “spiritual leader”, “philosopher”, “political reformer”, “teacher” and a “person” (see Peimin Ni, Confucius: the Man and the Way of Gong-fu). Translated works in Persian, despite their useful and sometime good report of Confucius's teachings, have not systematically analyzed his role and have not reconstructed his teachings based on this analysis. This shortcomings motivated the author to try to investigate the socio-historical situation of Confucius (part 1-2), then take this analysis as a guide to recognize his role (part 2-2), and finally, based on this typology, to systematize his basic teachings (Part 2-3 to the end).

#### Research Findings

Zhou dynasty (1027-249 BC) was comprised of several states and each state had its own ruler. “As time went on, it was recognized that the kings of Zhou did not really have strength to control all of the conquered land, even in the form of feudalism. . Power was



constantly kept shifting hands, and war and strife were the norms of the time during the two centuries prior to Confucius' birth. Violence and intrigue characterized the political scene, and opportunism took the place of morality" (Koller, 2018: 351-352). In such circumstances, the concern of any social theorist is to find a way out from this chaotic situation: "If the world had the Way, I would not be involved in changing it" (Analects, 18: 6). Therefore, Confucius is basically and primarily a social theorist, not a philosopher or a moralist, even though his teachings have some philosophical and moral connotations. Furthermore, the reason why ancient Chinese interested in philosophy and the special quality of this philosophy, which is primarily Phronesis, is rooted in the certain social situation that prevailed during the periods of "Spring and Autumn" (481-770 BC) and "Warring States" (221-481 BC).

## Conclusion

If Confucius is a social theorist and his "ultimate concern" is society, his teachings should be reconstructed on the basis of this typology: harmony (He) is his basic teaching, and his strategy was "refining and extracting cultural resources"; hence he tried to collect, edit, interpret, and reconstruct this cultural heritage. He formulated the ideal of Jun-Zi for two reasons: first to criticize the king and populace of the time, and second to define the ideal type of a king and person. If first of all the kings and governors and in the second place, the populace follow the way of Jun-Zi, harmony will definitely return to the society: a society in which people will have different roles and will know their responsibilities (Zheng-Ming), see their roles and responsibilities as a religious ritual (Li), their intention and purpose, when acting, will not be and profiteering or benefit-seeking, but compassion and human-heartedness (Ren), and so their actions will have a good form and appropriate way (Yi).

## References

- Chan, Alan (2014). An online course under the title of "Explorations in Confucian Philosophy". Singapore: Nanyang Technological University.
- Fingarrete, Herbert (1998), *Confucius: Secular as Sacred*, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Koller, John M. (2018). *Asian Philosophies*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Routledge.
- LaFleur, Robert André (2016). *Books That Matter: The Analects of Confucius*. United States: The Teaching Company.
- Lai, Karyn (2002). *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Li, Chenyang (2014). *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony*: London & New York: Routledge.
- Ni, Peimin (2016). *Confucius: the Man and the Way of Gongfu*. London & New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ni, Peimin (2017). *Understanding the Analects of Confucius: A New Translation of Lunyu with Annotations*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Print ISSN: 2228-5563  
online ISSN: 2588-4816

## Religions and Mysticism

University of Tehran  
Faculty of Theology  
and Islamic Studies



Van Norden, Bryan W. (2002). *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Cite this article:** Azamimaram, M. (2024). In Search of Harmony: A Sociopolitical Reconstruction of Confucius' Intellectual System. *Religions and Mysticism*, 57 (1), 39-62. (in Persian)

---

**Publisher:** University of Tehran Press.

© The Author(s).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jrm.2024.371382.630497>



**Article Type:** Research Paper

**Received:** 23-Jan-2024

**Received in revised form:** 3-Feb-2024

**Accepted:** 21-Apr-2024

**Published online:** 31-Aug-2024