HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 2: Confucius
Section 4: Confucian Humanism: The 禮 *Lǐ* rituals: Social Practices, Paths and History

- The content of normativity - The 禮 *lǐ*rituals
- Confucius comes during decline of the Zhou
    - On the boundary between the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC) and the Warring States (476-221 BC)
    - Confucius saw the Zhou as held together by rituals and conventions of social order
    - He noted 天 *tiān*nature:sky had not named/produced a sage ruler
- For Confucius, 禮 *lǐ*rituals forms the core of what needs to be transmitted normatively while we wait for 天 *tiān*nature:sky to produce a leader with 德 *dé*virtuosity in following 道 *dào*way
- Humans are normally transmitters of norms in the form of social practices. We learn 禮 *lǐ*ritual ritual behaviors from examples and teach it to others, in turn, also by example
- The 禮 *lǐ*rituals are understood using the metaphor of a 道 *dào*path. Exemplary behaviors are like the footprints and tracks of past practices. They are registered in memory, historical records, and ongoing social practices
- Thus, 禮 *lǐ*rituals record and enshrine people's past practice history
- The 禮 *lǐ*ritual consists of practices linked to inter-related, named roles which we play in a shared social performance
- The Master said, "Is it not pleasant to learn and regularly practice what we learn?" Analects 1.1
- The Master said, "I transmit and do not create, faithful to and favoring the past, I venture to compare myself with old Peng." Analects 7.1

- The patterns of how things were done in the past guide us as paths do
- Politically, this leads to a conception of 治 *zhi*[order] vs. 亂 *luan*[disorder], that is more like the harmonious performance of a symphony or coordinated performance of a play than merely a state of calm and peace
- 禮 *Li*[rituals] extends the path metaphor from physically marked guides to recoverable patterns in past behavior, with traces in our memories, in recorded histories and in current practices