

Confucius' Elitism: The Concepts of *junzi* and *xiaoren* Revisited

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Revival of interest in Confucianism is one of the most fascinating cultural developments in China in recent years. The General Secretary of Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi Jinping 习近平 (b. 1953) personally attends Confucius-related events, such as the commemorative ceremony of the 2,565th anniversary of Confucius' birth (2014), and pays a visit to Confucius' temple in Qufu (2013). "Confucius Institutes" are spreading rapidly throughout the world as a – deeply contested – hallmark of China's "soft power." Confucius-related *Instructions to Disciples and Sons* (*Dizi gui* 弟子規) are proudly taught in Sunday schools in Confucian temples as far as Urumchi, and are inscribed on the walls of primary schools and residential communities from Beijing to Sichuan. Even if superficial, these phenomena do testify to unequivocal change in Confucius' place in the People's Republic of China (PRC). For not a few observers, the "re-Confucianization" of Chinese society – a development that would have been entirely unthinkable a few decades ago – appears now (2017) as a distinct possibility (e.g., Hammond and Richey 2015).

To be sure, the so-called Confucian revival is a highly heterogeneous phenomenon, whose participants differ markedly in terms of their ideological and political agendas, and in their understanding of Confucianism and of its current relevance. Among both academic and non-academic adherents of this movement the differences are huge. Some are members and supporters of the CPC, and some are its bitter foes; some want to reconcile Confucianism with Western democratic ideas, while others hope that it will provide an alternative to Western liberal democracy; some look at Confucianism as a possible repository of universal values, while others are primarily interested in filling the cultural void in China itself; some turn to Confucianism only as a source of general inspiration, while others are searching in its legacy for viable political models to mend or replace the current sociopolitical system.¹ This heterogeneity of approaches reminds one of similar cleavages among self-proclaimed "Confucians" throughout the imperial millennia; yet now the differences are even stronger due to the pressing need to make

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the thinker's legacy compatible with modern political, social, and cultural values. Attaining this compatibility is singularly challenging task for current revivalists.

One of the many contestable issues that arise from the attempts to reconcile Confucian legacy with the demands of modernity is the attitude toward Confucian elitism. While some consider this elitism to be a blessed remedy to Western democracy's excessive emphasis on political equality, as exemplified in the "one person, one vote" system (Bell 2015), others view it as one of "the more reprehensible aspects of Confucian political philosophy and the historical practice" (Tan 2009, 544). This lively discussion is primarily conducted by philosophers and political scientists, who analyze Confucian thought through the prism of modern Western values and political practices. In what follows, I want to propose a different perspective, that of an historian. My goal is to contextualize Confucius' elitism in a contemporaneous sociopolitical and intellectual situation, to distinguish between novel and traditional aspects of his views of the elite's belonging, and to analyze the possible impact of Confucius' ideas on subsequent conceptualizations of social and political hierarchy in late pre-imperial (i.e., pre-221 BCE) and imperial China. I hope that my approach, while remaining decidedly within the framework of historical discussion, will be of some interest also to colleagues who focus on the contemporary value of Confucius' ideas.

My analysis will revolve around two central concepts in Confucius' ethical and social thought: that of a "noble man" (*junzi* 君子), and of a "petty man" (*xiaoren* 小人). Both are among the key terms in the *Analects*: the first is mentioned 109 times, and the second twenty-four times. By comparing the usages of both terms in the *Analects* with earlier texts, primarily the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Commentary* or *Zuo Tradition*), I hope to demonstrate that Confucius revolutionized the usage of the former term, expanding it to include members of his own *shi* 士 stratum. By Confucius' time, this stratum, originally the lowest segment of nobility, had begun its transformation into a broader elite, and membership was primarily determined by one's qualities rather than pedigree (see more below). As I shall argue, Confucius contributed to this process by allowing a more flexible conceptualization of the elite membership than had been common before. This flexibility, coupled with persistently rigid emphasis on sociopolitical hierarchy, eventually became the effective recipe for preserving highly stratified society, on the one hand, and maintaining potential for social mobility, on the other. This legacy made the Chinese social structure incomparably more flexible than the European *ancien régime* against which the notion of equality emerged as one of the fundamental ideas of Occidental modernity.

Background: Noble and Petty Men of the Aristocratic Age

The original meaning of the term *junzi* 君子 is commonly deduced from its components (*jun*, "ruler"; *zi*, "son") as "the ruler's sons" (e.g., Hsu 1965, 158–59; Wang Ya and Liu Dongsheng 2012, 18). This popular translation may be correct, but it should be remembered that the term *zi* is polysemantic: it may refer not only to the son but to social status (Gassmann 2007, 5–6), and also act as an honorific suffix; in the latter case, the meaning of *junzi* will be "a lord-like person." Whatever the correct interpretation, there is no doubt that the term initially was related to one's pedigree. This connotation is

obvious in its earliest appearances, for example, in the Western Zhou segments of the *Classic of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經). For instance, the term “hundreds of noble men” 百君子 in the “Shao gao” 召誥 chapter of the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu* 18: 400) clearly refers to many lords (possibly minor regional leaders) who joined to protect the Zhou Mandate. A similar pure social meaning is discernible in the usage of another term, which normally refers to an antipode of a *junzi*, that is, *xiaoren*. For instance, when the “Wu yi” 無逸 (“Against idleness”) chapter of the *Classic of Documents* says about King Zujia 祖甲 of Shang that “it was not appropriate that he becomes a king; hence he spent a long time as one of the lower people” (不義惟王，舊為小人), *xiaoren* clearly refers to the low status and not to inferior morality of Zujia (*Shangshu* 21: 432). In that chapter the terms *xiaoren* and *xiaomin* 小民 (“lowly people,” “commoners”) appear to be interchangeable (Pines 2017), and both refer purely to one’s social belonging rather than the lack of morality.

That said, already in the early Zhou texts we can observe certain valorization of the term *junzi*. In the *Classic of Poems* (*Shi jing* 詩經), for instance, the term *junzi* is ubiquitous (it appears 184 times). It is a common referrer to a noble (often a ruler); but at times it is also indicative of one’s personal qualities. *Junzi* is praised for his stature, for his appearance, and for being “the parent of the people,” “the refuge of the people,” and “the support of the people.”² It is in the *Poems* that we observe the seeds of the “ethicization” of the term *junzi*. Much like the European “noble,” the term started expanding from a pure pedigree designation to a referrer of one’s fine qualities. For instance, in the “Lu ming” 鹿鳴 ode (Mao 161), *junzi* is said to be the pattern and the source of emulation for the people (*Maoshi* 9: 406); in “Zhan lu” 湛露 (Mao 174), he is associated with “fine virtue” 令德 and “fine decorum” 令儀 (*Maoshi* 10: 421). Although these ethical undertones are relatively rare in the *Poems*, their long-term impact on re-conceptualization of the term *junzi* should not be neglected.

When we move closer to Confucius’ lifetime, that is, to the Spring and Autumn period (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE), the term *junzi* is still primarily used as a *terminus technicus* for the nobles; but one can notice subtle changes in comparison with the earlier usages. First, the social scope of the *junzi* referents expands to encompass medium-ranked nobles, while simultaneously the term becomes less prestigious: hence, it is no longer applicable to the rulers. Second, its pedigree-related focus notwithstanding, the association of *junzi* with fine moral qualities becomes more explicit than before.

The social content of the term *junzi* is easily observable in contemporaneous bronze inscriptions. For instance when a donor of the Jing shi tianwang-zhong 敬事天王鐘 (a sixth-century BCE Chu 楚 vessel) declares that he will “respectfully serve Heaven’s King, reaching to my uncles and elder brothers, so as to let noble men rejoice” 敬事天王，至于父兄，以樂君子, the term “noble men” clearly refers to the donor’s aristocratic peers (*Xichuan Xiasi* 1991: 85). Similarly, in a slightly earlier inscription on Jin Jiang-ding 晉姜鼎, the donor’s promise to “pacify, be mild, tranquilize, and embrace the noble men from afar and from nearby” 用康柔綏懷遠邇君子 (*Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* No. 2826) evidently employs *junzi* as a designation for minor lords who were subordinate or allied with the state of Jin 晉. In both cases, there are no observable moral undertones.

A more complex view of *junzi* comes from the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, our major source for the Spring and Autumn period history. As is well known, the reliability of the *Zuo zhuan*, particularly with regard to the intellectual life of the Spring and Autumn period, is hotly

contested (Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002; Li Wai-ye 2007): the question is whether the text reflects an intellectual milieu that predates or postdates Confucius. It is not my intention here to reopen these debates; I want only to point out that insofar as the term *junzi* is concerned, its usage in the *Zuo zhuan* differs markedly from that in the *Analectis* and in later texts. This difference, namely, clear inapplicability of the term *junzi* to persons of a lowly *shi* 士 status may be indicative of the relative earliness of the *Zuo zhuan*; it also highlights the novelty of Confucius' interpretation of this term.

The *Zuo zhuan* abounds with references to *junzi* as primarily or exclusively a pedigree-related designation. For instance, at times the text replaces the ubiquitous term "several gentlemen/nobles" (*er san zi* 二三子) with "several noble men" (*er san junzi* 二三君子) (*Zuo*, Zhao 16: 1380); the context clearly indicates that only pedigree makes the referents eligible to the *junzi* status (cf. Gassmann 2007, 3–4). Elsewhere, the text cites a Jin commander who, in 597 BCE, praised the good social order in the state of Chu 楚 in following words:

Noble and petty men are distinguished by differences in badge and clothing. The esteemed enjoy constant honor, whereas the humble have degrees of authority.

(*Zuo*, Xuan 12: 725)

"Noble and petty men" here definitely refer to social status without any implications regarding moral qualities of these persons. This usage recurs throughout the *Zuo zhuan* speeches (*Zuo*, Xuan 17: 774; Cheng 3: 816; Xiang 9: 968; Zhao 26: 1473; Ai 7: 1644). Yet on other occasions we can observe a certain correlation between moral and social interpretation of the "noble" and "petty" men designation. For instance, in two similar speeches, a Jin and a Lu 魯 noble explain the differences in the attitudes of the elite and commoners in their countries to rival polities. In both cases, "petty men" are depicted as somewhat simple-minded and unsophisticated, while the "noble men" display better understanding of interstate relations, and hence are more broad-minded. The distinction between the two groups is social, intellectual, and, to a certain extent, cultural and moral as well, although they are by no means treated as antipodes (*Zuo* Xi 15: 366; Xi 26: 439–440; and Pines 2002, 166–67, for further discussion).

This moral interpretation of the term *junzi* becomes more pronounced in the latter half of the *Zuo zhuan*. There often we often encounter comments on an individual statesman that he is a *junzi*. The designation does not indicate a social status, which was after all obvious to speakers and their audience, but refers to behavior appropriate to the *junzi*. For instance, a Qin 秦 dignitary is praised by a Lu courtier as *junzi* because of his unexpected refinement (*Zuo*, Wen 12: 589); a Chu noble, imprisoned by the Jin army, deserves this designation because his speech demonstrated "benevolence, trustworthiness, loyalty and cleverness" (*Zuo*, Cheng 9: 845); the famous Zheng 鄭 leader, Zichan 子產 (d. 522 BCE) is lauded as a "*junzi* of vast understanding," due to his extraordinary knowledge (*Zuo*, Xiang 30: 1173; Zhao 1: 1221), and so forth (*Zuo*, Zhao 2: 1228; Zhao 8: 1301; Ai 20: 1717).

Whenever a person of an obviously noble rank is referred to as *junzi* this means that the pedigree alone may not suffice to acquire this respected status. This understanding becomes clearer when we focus on the usage of the term *xiaoren* in the *Zuo zhuan*. Aside from being a referrer to commoners, this term acquires in the *Zuo zhuan* a new meaning of "a mean person": a noble, whose impaired morality or intelligence annul his normative

junzi status. For instance, in 542 BCE, the nominal head of the government of Zheng, Han Hu 罕虎 (d. 529 BCE), told his deputy, Zichan that:

I, Hu, am not perspicacious. I heard that the noble man is concerned with understanding the great and the distant, [whereas] the petty man is concerned with understanding the minor and the near. I am but a petty man. The garment that fits my body, I know and am careful of, while the great office and the great settlements that protect my body, I regard as distant and am slack about.

(*Zuo*, Xiang 31: 1193)

Han Hu, who headed one of the major aristocratic lineages in Zheng, was nominally superior to Zichan; hence, his self-definition as a “petty man” had nothing to do with his rank, but pertained to intellectual and moral deficiency. Similarly, in 526 BCE, Zichan opined that should the visiting Jin leader display avarice, he would lose his status of a *junzi* and descend to the position of a petty man (*Zuo*, Zhao 16: 1379). Thus, while a person’s status was inborn, it could be lost were a noble to abandon proper behavioral norms.

The danger of losing a *junzi* status was not theoretical. Powerful as they were, aristocrats of the Spring and Autumn period were never entirely secure in their position; every aristocratic lineage was under constant threat. Even after several generations of dominating the state apparatus, a lineage of most respectable pedigree could be eliminated by the ruler, by rival lineages, or by its own rebellious retainers. Numerous cases scattered throughout the *Zuo zhuan* demonstrate how stupidity, short-sightedness, excessive avarice, licentiousness, and similar misbehavior of the lineage’s head could cause its downfall.³ Against this backdrop we can assume that not a few nobles were prone to re-conceptualize their status as reflecting less the merits of their ancestors and more their individual attainments. This may explain among other things the marked decrease in references to meritorious ancestors in the bronze inscriptions of the Spring and Autumn period (Mattos 1997, 86–87; cf. Falkenhausen 1988, 654; 2006, 293–97).

The status anxiety of the Spring and Autumn period aristocrats was probably the major reason behind their re-evaluation of the nature of *junzi* belonging. It is not accidental that the usage of the term increases as the time passes. Thus, in the first 153 years of the *Zuo zhuan* narrative (722–569 BCE, approximately one half of the text) the term *junzi* appears in sixteen passages only, while in the last century of the narrative (568–468 BCE) it occurs in no less than thirty-seven passages: a more than twofold increase.⁴ The increasing usage of the term is paralleled by a stronger emphasis on the qualities that turn a man into *junzi*; but the fundamental meaning of the term as a social status definition remains dominant. Hence, among more than seventy instances of the usage of this term in the *Zuo zhuan*, I could not find a single one in which it was applied to a person of a *shi* status. This is the major peculiarity of the *junzi* usage in the *Zuo zhuan*. Whenever a referent of this term can be identified, he will forever be a member of upper or middle nobility.

This peculiarity is the major dividing line between the *Zuo zhuan* and other texts that were composed during the subsequent Warring States period. In all of the later texts the term *shi* is valorized: *shi* is a possessor of a variety of fine qualities; he is an aspiring or an acting member of the ruling elite (Pines 2009, 115–35). In the *Zuo zhuan*, in distinction, *shi* is purely a technical and non-prestigious designation of the lowest segment of

nobility. While *shi* could at times make a remarkable career (Hsu 1965, 34–37; Pines 2009, 247 n.6), normally they remained at the margins of the ruling elite. The *Zuo zhuan* neither refers to members of the *shi* stratum as possessors of superior wisdom (actually they are not cited at all in the text as pronouncers of ideologically important speeches), nor does it pay any attention to their aspirations, moral qualities, or norms of their conduct. In general, the members of this stratum are of no interest to the *Zuo zhuan* authors: neither political nor ethical pronouncements in the text seem relevant to the *shi*. It is against this backdrop that we can recognize the true magnitude of change initiated by Confucius and his circle. By reinterpreting the term *junzi* as related to the *shi* stratum Confucius contributed toward profound change in the nature of social hierarchy in China for millennia to come.

The *Analects*: *Shi* as Noble Men

Even a cursory reading of the *Analects* suffices to demonstrate that, first, the term *junzi* is of utmost importance to Confucius and his disciples, and, second, that this term is defined overwhelmingly as an ethical designation. The *Analects* is the earliest text in which the term *junzi* itself becomes an object of inquiry as is demonstrated by the disciples' repeated requests to define who the "noble man" is (*Lunyu* 2.13, 12.4, 14.42). The Master's answers – just like the rest of his pronouncements related to *junzi* – focus on the appropriate behavior of the noble man. The noble man is the one who is fully committed to righteousness (*yi* 義) (*Lunyu* 4.10). He "makes righteousness into his nature; implements it through ritual, speaks about it modestly and accomplishes it through trustworthiness" (*Lunyu* 15.18). He does not, "even for the space of a single meal, deviate from benevolence" (*Lunyu* 4.5). His "substance" (*zhi* 質) and "refinement" (*wen* 文) are well balanced (*Lunyu* 6.18). He "demands neither eating his full, nor dwelling at peace; he is perspicacious at undertakings and serious at his words; he approaches those who possess the way and rectifies himself thereby" (*Lunyu* 1.14). He is the one who is ashamed to have his words outstrip his deeds (*Lunyu* 14.27). He is benevolent, wise, and courageous (*Lunyu* 14.28).

Many of the above features of the noble man correspond to the moral self-image of the Spring and Autumn period aristocrats as reflected in the *Zuo zhuan* (for which, see Pines 2002, 171–80). Yet in the *Analects* we encounter novel departures as well, of which the emphasis on self-cultivation and learning figures prominently.⁵ Learning is emphasized already in the first sentence of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 1.1) and is repeatedly associated with the figure of the noble man (*Lunyu* 1.8, 1.14, 6.27, 17.4). It is only through learning that the noble man can ensure high position (*Lunyu* 15.32). This emphasis on learning and self-examination (*Lunyu* 12.4) is not accidental. It suggests that the noble men of whom the *Analects* speak were not those who could rely on pedigree alone; rather, they had to cultivate themselves in order to attain high status.

The connection between self-cultivation, moral self-realization, and political success is emphasized in one of the ideologically most important paragraphs of the *Analects*:

Zilu 子路 (542–480 BCE) asked about the noble man.
The Master said: "Rectify yourself to be reverent."

- [Zilu] asked: “Is that all?”
 [The Master] said: “Rectify yourself to bring peace to others.”
 [Zilu] asked: “Is that all?”
 [The Master] said: “Rectify yourself to bring peace to the hundred clans. To rectify yourself thereby bringing peace to the hundred clans: even Yao and Shun considered this difficult!” (*Lunyu* 14.42)

Self-rectification can lead to three outcomes. At minimum, the noble man will be “reverent” (*jing* 敬), which means internalizing one of the hallmarks of ritually correct behavior. “Reverence,” directed as it is toward one’s superiors (either humans or deities) is normally associated with a relatively inferior status. The next stage, “bringing peace to others,” apparently refers to occupying a position of authority, although the scope of this authority is not defined. Yet the noble men should aim even higher, at “pacifying the hundred clans,” meaning attaining a position of supreme power, on a par with legendary rulers Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. This goal is difficult, almost unattainable, but it bespeaks of extraordinary high aspirations of the noble man.

Insofar as the ultimate goal of self-realization is in the political sphere, the similarities of Confucius’ noble man and a Spring and Autumn period aristocrat are strongly pronounced. This aristocratic context is explicit when Confucius praises the Zheng leader, Zichan, as a model noble man. Zichan (who was hailed as a noble man in the *Zuo zhuan* as well, see above) is praised for being respectful in his behavior, reverent toward superiors, kind in nourishing the people, and righteous in employing them (*Lunyu* 5.16). This statement may indeed suggest, as pointed by Gassmann (2007, 8), that Confucius viewed “noble men” as co-equal with members of hereditary nobility. That noble men belong to the highest echelons of power is suggested also by a few other statements, which identify *junzi* as the source of the people’s inspiration. “When a noble man is keen [in serving] his kin, the people are aroused to benevolence. When he does not discard old [acquaintances], the people are not negligent” (*Lunyu* 8.2). “The noble man’s transgressions are like solar and lunar eclipses. When he transgresses all the people see it; when he reforms, all the people look up at him” (*Lunyu* 19.21). These and similar statements (e.g., *Lunyu* 12.19) resemble the panegyrics to the noble man in the *Classic of Poetry* and imply an extraordinarily high-positioned personality, if not the ruler himself then at least somebody very close to the apex of power.

Yet other statements in the *Analects* indicate a much humbler position of the noble man. For instance, Confucius’ disciple, Zengzi 曾子 (502–435 BCE), defines the noble man as the one who “can be entrusted a six *chi*-tall (c. 132 cm) orphan, or a hundred-*li*-squared state” (*Lunyu* 8.6). The upper level of this equation is very lofty indeed: a hundred *li* squared was the size of an average polity of the time, and under certain circumstances it could serve as a springboard for establishing a new universal dynasty. Yet the lower level of being in charge of an orphan suggests a humbler position: perhaps a retainer who should faithfully serve an orphaned head of a noble house. That most “noble men” occupied a relatively low status is suggested by the *Analects*’ recommendation to them “not to think beyond their position” (*Lunyu* 14.26; cf. 8.14). It seems that despite their high aspirations, most *junzi* – or most of those who thought of themselves as *junzi* – were positioned frustratingly low and therefore had to be reminded to refrain from excessively assertive posture that could alienate their superiors.

That self-realization in a political sphere was a tough task for most noble men is suggested also by the strongly pronounced status anxiety in the *Analects*. Already in the first, and arguably the most famous, of the text's paragraphs, Confucius is cited as saying: "One who is not resentful even when not recognized by others – is not he the noble man?" (*Lunyu* 1.1). Elsewhere the Master is cited as saying that "the noble man should be troubled by the lack of ability, not by the fact that the others do not recognize him" (*Lunyu* 15.19). These statements are meant to calm those whose aspirations remained unfulfilled. Yet the norm for noble men is to seek recognition by peers and by his superiors (and potential employers). Hence "the noble man is disturbed that by the time he is due to pass away, his name is not recognized" (*Lunyu* 15.20). The quest for "name" (*ming* 名, a broad term that may refer to repute, status, rank, and so on) is natural for the noble man (*Lunyu* 4.5; cf. *Lunyu* 9.23).⁶ The fact that this quest is frequently thwarted indicates that the text's addressees were the people who lacked career security: not the high nobles but the *shi*. Recall that Confucius himself, insofar as we can judge from the *Analects* and from his much belated biography in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), was repeatedly frustrated in his attempts to secure high position for himself.

The identity between *shi* and noble men becomes clearer when we explore the nature of the term *shi* in the *Analects*. This is the first text in which the term *shi* itself becomes an object of inquiry, and it is treated in a way similar to the term *junzi*: namely, primarily as an ethical and not hereditary designation. Time and again Confucius is asked by his disciples, who can be called *shi*, and the answers strongly resemble his discussions of the "noble men." *Shi* are "people with aspirations" (*zhi* 志), and these aspirations, just as those of the Master himself, are directed at the Way, namely, at the ideal of moral and political order (*Lunyu* 4.9). A *shi* "is straight by nature and is fond of righteousness, examines [the people's] words and observes their expression; he is mindful of being modest" (*Lunyu* 12.20). He is the person who "has a sense of shame" in his conduct, and "will not disgrace his ruler's orders when dispatched to the four directions"; or, minimally, he is a person, who is renowned for his filiality and fraternal behavior; or, at least, is a trustworthy and resolute man (*Lunyu* 13.20). *Shi* is "decisive, kind and gentle" with friends and relatives (*Lunyu* 13.28). And, most importantly, he is a person wholly dedicated to his high mission: "Shi who is addicted to leisure is not worthy of being considered *shi*" (*Lunyu* 14.2).

All these statements correspond neatly to the self-image of the "noble men." This is not incidental, of course: rather, for Confucius and his disciples the two terms apparently became interchangeable, so that the term *shi* was valorized just as the term *junzi*. This valorization is clearly observable in a few statements of Confucius' disciples. For instance, Zizhang 子張 (503–? BCE) defines a *shi* as a person who "sacrifices his life when facing danger, thinks of righteousness when facing [possible] gains" (*Lunyu* 19.1). Zengzi affirms the *shi* moral leadership in even stronger terms:

A *shi* cannot but be strong and resolute, as his task is heavy and his way is long. He considers benevolence as his task – is not it heavy? He stops only after death – is not [his way] long?
(*Lunyu* 8.7)

Zengzi's definition, one of the classic *shi*-related statements in pre-imperial literature, reflects the strong sense of self-respect by the members of the newly rising stratum, who

accepted their mission to improve governance above and public *mores* below, and who considered themselves spiritual leaders of the society. It is indicative of a spirit of the *Analects* in general. The *shi* is no longer a designation of a petty noble: rather, it is a proud self-appellation of an elite member, a person who may suffer from temporary hardships, but who is destined to rise to the position of moral if not political authority. Not all the noble men belong to the *shi* stratum, but all the *shi* had the potential to become noble men.

This understanding allows us to fully appreciate the revolutionary character of the *Analects*. Behind manifold similarities with the aristocratic discourse as reflected in the *Zuo zhuan* we discover a fundamental change of emphasis. The *shi* stratum, which was politically and intellectually marginal prior to Confucius, moves in the *Analects* to the center of discussions about morality, ethics, and potentially politics as well. Ironically, the Spring and Autumn period aristocrats, who imbued the term *junzi* with ethical meaning, may not have anticipated that this would be utilized to assault their hereditary privileges. The moment Confucius and his disciples started claiming *shi* eligibility to the “noble men” status, those who theretofore monopolized this designation could find no convincing arguments to withstand the *shi* assault. The new age belonged to the new men.

Noble versus Petty Men: Social and Ethical Hierarchies

Confucius’ reinterpretation of the term *junzi* as encompassing the *shi* stratum was conducive to the increasing social mobility in the Warring States period; but one should not hasten to deduce that his goal was to dismantle the pedigree-based aristocratic order. On the contrary, the Master was a renowned defender of social hierarchy, especially in his capacity as the teacher and promulgator of ritual rules (*li* 禮), the essence of which was the preservation of social gradations (Pines 2000). Ethical thought in the *Analects* is intrinsically linked with maintenance of social hierarchy as well. To analyze this linkage we shall turn now to what may be the singularly most important aspect of the *junzi*-related discourse in the text, namely, the juxtaposition of noble and petty men. This juxtaposition, which is prominent already in the *Zuo zhuan*, becomes even more important when we turn to the *Analects*.

On no fewer than fifteen instances does Confucius compare the noble and the petty man, and this comparison is essential for clarifying the qualities of the former. “The noble man is demanding of himself; the petty man is demanding of the others” (*Lunyu* 15.21). “The noble man is harmonious and not conformist; the petty man is conformist and not harmonious” (*Lunyu* 13.23).⁷ “The noble man is relaxed and not haughty; the petty man is haughty and not relaxed” (*Lunyu* 13.26). The noble man is motivated by righteousness, while the petty man is motivated by benefit (*Lunyu* 4.16). The noble man cherishes virtue and contemplates punishments; the petty man cherishes land and contemplates [the superior’s] kindness (*Lunyu* 4.11). “The noble man is relaxed, the petty man is agitated” (*Lunyu* 7.37). The noble man is fearful of Heaven’s decree, of the grandees, and of the sages’ words, while “the petty man does not understand Heaven’s decree and is not fearful; he derides the grandees and ridicules the sages’ words” (*Lunyu* 16.8). In distinction from the noble man, the petty man cannot face hardship, cannot undertake great tasks; is difficult to employ (*Lunyu* 15.2, 15.34, 13.25).

All the above statements clearly indicate that in the *Analects* the *xiaoren* – much like the *junzi* – is primarily an ethical definition. This identification is supported by a few statements in the *Analects* that warn Confucius' disciples of crossing the line from noble to petty men. Confucius advises Zixia to be “a noble man Ru [儒, here perhaps referring to a ritual specialist], not a petty man Ru” (*Lunyu* 6.13). Clearly, the dividing line between the two types of Ru was not social but exclusively moral. Similarly, when Confucius identifies an insufficiently cultivated *shi* as behaving in a petty man fashion (*Lunyu* 13.20), he clearly hints at moral weakness rather than at a sudden change of social status. Elsewhere, the social and moral meanings can mix together. Thus, when Confucius calls his disciple Fan Chi 樊遲 “a petty man” for asking a menial's questions about farming and gardening, he hints both at the low status of the jobs to which Fan Chi referred and to Fan Chi's lack of understanding of the *junzi* social role (*Lunyu* 13.4). It is this lack of understanding that turned Fan Chi from a noble man into a petty man. These instances in which the negative social meaning of “petty man” is used to deride one's impaired morality or impaired understanding reminds the cases from the *Zuo zhuan* surveyed above.

Yet aside from predominantly moral usages of the term *xiaoren*, the *Analects* presents not a few cases of employing this term as a pure social reference to lower strata without identifiable moral undertones. Let us look, for instance, at Confucius' saying: “When a noble man studies the Way he loves (or cares for) the others; when a petty man studies the Way he is easily employable” (*Lunyu* 17.4). Here the context is unequivocal: even if a petty man embraces the way of self-cultivation, he will never transcend his lowly social status; forever will he remain in the position of the others' servitor. Otherwise, learning – normally, a secure way to become a noble man – would have changed the petty man's career; but this does not happen here, indicating that there were natural limits to a petty man's advancement. A similar identity between the “petty men” and lower social strata explains a few cases in which Confucius and his disciples juxtapose the noble man not with petty men but with peasants (*Lunyu* 15.32, 13.4) or artisans (*Lunyu* 19.7). It seems that by the very fact of their low social status the latter were identified as “petty men,” and their occupation could be used as a synonym to the term *xiaoren*. Elsewhere, the social meaning of the term *xiaoren* becomes even clearer:

The Master said: “There are noble men who are not benevolent; but there had never been a benevolent petty man.”

(*Lunyu* 14.6)

The Master said: “Only women and petty men are difficult to nourish. When you let them close, they are unruly; when you shun them, they resent.”

(*Lunyu* 17.25)

Both sayings aroused heated exegetical polemics, as traditional commentators and modern scholars alike sought ways to interpret them in less social- or gender-biased ways (see Zhou Guozheng 2011, for the first; Li Chenyang 2000, 3–4; Goldin 2000, 139–140, for the second; q.v. for further references). Yet in my view both statements are straightforward enough. In the first, the designation of noble and petty men clearly focuses on their social belonging (otherwise those noble men who are not benevolent should be relegated down to the position of “petty men,” which is not the case). In the second, pairing the petty men with women may indicate that the former's status is

inborn and unchangeable just as the latter's.⁸ These statements clearly indicate that reducing "noble" and "petty" men designations to ethical definitions only is untenable. For Confucius and his disciples both social and ethical meanings were equally important: it is the interaction between them that turns *Analects* into a sophisticated text that is able both to advocate maintenance of hierarchic social order and to subtly modify this order.

Throughout the twentieth century and beyond scholars in China and the West have repeatedly debated whether Confucius' ideal of the *junzi* is truly universal, or is it limited to upper social strata alone (see the summary in Brindley 2009, 47–49, q.v. for further references). Much of these debates derive from modern sensitivities: the answer is of high importance for the issue of Confucius' compatibility with the modern world, predicated as it is on the axiom of equality among human beings. The above discussion suffices to demonstrate that both sides of the debate – that is, those who believe in Confucian universalism, and those who consider the *Analects* to be focused on the members of upper strata or on the *shi* stratum alone – can find appropriate citations to bolster their arguments. The noble–petty men pair may at times be used exclusively in the context of the referents' morality and intelligence, while in other passages it will appear as predominantly or exclusively a social designation. The question is how to reconcile these differences. The answer will help not just in elucidating Confucius' original message but also in clarifying the long-term impact of his views.

Scholars put forward different strategies for dealing with supposed inconsistencies in the *Analects*. Some, like Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), used sophisticated exegesis to restore what they perceived as consistent Confucian view.⁹ Others attribute contradictory statements to differences among the lineages of Confucius' followers who contributed to the formation of the *Analects* (e.g., Brindley 2009, 53). Yet another approach, which I favor, rejects excessive preoccupation with ideological consistency. Within a broadly defined framework of Confucius' thought, differences of emphases are inevitable. The Master could change his opinion or modify his statements when facing different audiences or in different circumstances (cf. Goldin 2005). If so, then social and ethical interpretations of *junzi* and *xiaoren* terms may be complementary rather than contradictory: due to his moral superiority *junzi* should join the ranks of the ruling elite; while the petty men should forever remain below. This interpretation, if correct, may explain how the *Analects* served the needs of the *shi* stratum. The Master not just contributed toward the upward mobility of the *shi*, but also resolutely distinguished them from the commoners.

Understanding that the *Analects* were written by the *shi* and for the *shi* would allow us to avoid manifold anachronistic readings of the text, which are particularly common among the scholars who seek to discover universalistic messages in the text. For instance, many scholars have opined that Confucius' promise to teach everybody who presents him with a bundle of a dried meat (*Lunyu* 7.7) represents the Master's transcending of class distinctions. This is patently wrong: a gift of bundled meat was related to the rules of intercourse among the nobles; it could be employed by a *shi*, but surely not by peasants and artisans.¹⁰ This observation is applicable to the entire ethical and political thought in the *Analects*. Confucius taught the *shi*, he prepared his ethical doctrines for the *shi*, and he was concerned with the *shi* political role. The commoners should be the object of the ruler's munificence (*Lunyu* 12.7, 12.9, 13.6); they should be transformed by the moralizing effect of the noble man's virtue (*Lunyu* 12.19, 13.20); they deserve education, which as noted above will make them better employable by the

superiors (*Lunyu* 13.6, 13.29, 17.4). Yet the idea that they will turn *en masse* into noble men was probably as inconceivable for Confucius as the idea of female emancipation.

In light of the above discussion we may summarize Confucius' views of noble and petty men. The distinction between the two is *both* moral and social. Normally, a petty man is a commoner; yet an elite member whose morality and intelligence are impaired may well deserve this designation as well. The connection between the two was summarized by Erica Brindley:

According to this interpretation, the moral notion of *xiao ren* serves primarily a pedagogical purpose in the text, as a threat and negative foil for aspiring *junzi*, or men of the *shi* and aristocratic classes. As such, it serves to motivate the *shi* audience of Confucius' teachings toward the *junzi* ideal, and it is not directed at those who would already be considered *xiao ren* in a social sense.

(Brindley 2009, 57)

I concur with Brindley in her emphasis on the overarching importance of the social meaning of the terms *xiaoren* and *junzi* for understanding the message of the *Analects*. Yet Brindley misses some of the text's complexity by placing "shi and aristocratic classes" under the same category. As the discussion in the previous section has shown, Confucius was not just concerned with upholding social hierarchy. Rather, his ethical reinterpretation of the term *junzi* was instrumental for allowing upward mobility of the members of the *shi* stratum. In the final analysis, his ideas were conducive both to the maintenance of the hierarchic order and to allowing greater mobility within this order. To clarify this point, I want to address briefly the impact of Confucius' views of noble and petty men ideas in the period immediately following his lifetime, namely, the post-aristocratic age of the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE). This discussion in turn may allow us to assess certain aspects of Confucius' lasting legacy and his potential relevance to our age.

After Confucius: Who is a Real *junzi*?

The century that passed after Confucius' death witnessed the demise of the hereditary aristocracy and the unstoppable rise of the *shi* to the apex of political power in most of the states that comprised the Chinese world. The major reason for this change was political: as ministerial lineages decimated each other in internecine struggles or were crushed due to unsuccessful rebellions, the rulers found it expedient to fill the void at the top of government apparatus with members of the *shi* stratum who lacked independent power bases and were less prone to threaten their sovereigns. Moreover, as the state apparatus expanded in the wake of manifold economic and military developments (for which, see Lewis 1990), this offered additional employment opportunities for the *shi*. Concomitant intellectual changes were further conducive to the rise of the *shi*. Confucius, as we noted above, contributed to this development by creating a *shi*-centered ethical discourse and enhancing the *shi* self-confidence and the prestige of this stratum in general. Slightly later, Mozi 墨子 (c. 460–390 BCE) and his associates put forward the idea of "elevating the worthy" (*shang xian* 尚賢), openly challenging the

pedigree-based aristocratic order. By the fourth century BCE the major determinant of one's career was no longer one's birth but one's merits. The hereditary aristocracy, which lost its political, economic, and ideological hegemony, was eventually absorbed by the expanding *shi* stratum (Pines 2009, 119–24; 2013).

The rise of the *shi* was paralleled by deep changes in the nature of the *shi* belonging. While in the Spring and Autumn period this term referred primarily to minor siblings of aristocratic lineages who comprised the lowest segment of nobility, in the Warring States period it may refer to a much broader group: elite and sub-elite, acting and aspiring officials. In the texts of that age, the term *shi* encompasses scholars and warriors, former nobles and successful upstarts from the bottom of the society; it may refer to intellectual and moral leaders, but also to persons engaged in a variety of menial tasks, such as commerce, artisanship, or farming (Liu Zehua 2004, 1–14). In these new conditions, as many thinkers vied to redefine the nature of elite belonging, Confucius' concept of a "noble man" attained new importance.

To be sure, not all the thinkers of the Warring States period remained preoccupied with the *junzi* definition. In a variety of texts not associated with Confucius and his disciples, this term appears mostly in a narrow sense of an "elite member." For instance, Mozi repeatedly addresses "*shi* and noble men," or "kings, dukes, grandees, *shi* and noble men" as a common denomination of the upper strata. These invocations are purely social; neither *shi* nor *junzi* appear in the *Mozi* as morally or intellectually superior to the rest of society. Similar neutral invocations of the term *junzi* characterize its rare appearances in the *Laozi* 老子 and the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjunshu* 商君書),¹¹ as well as in slightly later *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Han Feizi* 韓非子. In the two latter texts ethical definition of *junzi* does recur from time to time, but mostly in the context of references to the ideas of Confucius and his associates. In the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the major pre-imperial compendium (c. 240 BCE), ethical usages of the term *junzi* are more frequent, especially in the chapters which were authored by followers of Confucius, or those that invoke directly views of Confucius and his disciples. Yet overall, even in this text, the importance of the term *junzi* remains limited; the true focus of the authors' adoration are *shi* in general (Pines 2009, 133–35).

It is the highly valorized usage of the term *junzi* that distinguishes most texts of the Confucian lore from those penned by other thinkers. Aside from a few occurrences of socially restricted usage of *junzi* as "noblemen,"¹² most Confucian texts emphatically emphasize the moral and intellectual superiority of *junzi* over the rest of society. Moral characteristics of the noble men in these texts normally follow the framework outlined in the *Analects*, but social ramifications of this usage differ. While in the *Analects* the Master was primary concerned with proving the *shi* eligibility to the noble men's status, in many of the Warring States period Confucian text the focus is on distinguishing the truly superior *junzi* from the bulk of the *shi*.

This new goal is most visible in a series of texts that focus on the ways to determine the true quality of a *junzi*. Some of these texts, such as the "Zengzi Established Undertakings" ("Zengzi li shi" 曾子立事) chapter of the *Da Dai liji* 大戴禮記 focus on moral self-cultivation of the "noble men"; others, such as the "Appointments Explained" ("Guan ren jie" 官人解) chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 and the parallel "Appointments of King Wen" ("Wen Wang guan ren" 文王官人) chapter from the *Da Dai Liji* are concerned with diagnosing a potential employee's fitness for office; yet the essence of

both groups of texts, as insightfully noticed by Matthias Richter (2005; 2012) is quite similar. A series of observances and tests should explore the noble man's sincerity, his will, external expressions of his feelings, his countenance, his hidden motivations, and the match between his words and deeds.¹³ The noble man is expected to be loyal and filial, benevolent and knowledgeable, modest and trustworthy, compliant and virtuous, righteous and observant of rituals. Only such a man would deserve a *junzi* status; the term is used exclusively as an ethical definition and its social content is downplayed. One's behavior, not one's position, determines one's worth.

It is not incidental perhaps that the above texts that focus on discerning the true value of the *junzi* are basically devoid of the juxtaposition of noble and petty men.¹⁴ The *shi* authors of these texts neither faced an uphill battle against hereditary aristocrats who monopolized high offices, nor did they have to prove their distinctions from the commoners below. Rather, their competition was against their peers. The goal was to convince the employers that only one segment within the expanding *shi* elite deserved the noble man status and, by inference, deserved appointment to top positions within the state hierarchy. The term *junzi*, which elsewhere buttressed the differences between the elite and the commoners, was used by the authors of "characterological" (Richter 2012) texts to fine-tune distinctions within the elite. The term's hierarchical dimensions remained fully visible, but the precise nature of hierarchy could be adapted to different contexts and different social needs.

Among the texts that develop Confucius' concept of the noble man, *Xunzi* 荀子 is particularly interesting. *Xunzi*'s prominence in the world of thought of the Warring States is well known (Goldin 1999; 2011, 67–98; Sato 2003; 2013), but what makes his case specifically relevant for our discussion is my assertion that *Xunzi* was the one who truly realized the full potential of Confucius' interplay between the social and ethical aspect of the "noble man–petty man" dichotomy. *Xunzi*'s adaptation of this dichotomy to the social realities of the Warring States period allowed him both to solidify social hierarchy and to allow social mobility. Arguably, it was *Xunzi*'s interpretation of Confucius' legacy that influenced social realities in China for millennia to come.

Xunzi is a staunch elitist. He is the one who revitalized the idea of ritual norms serving as the foundation of social hierarchy (Pines 2000, 34–40); he is the one to repeatedly emphasize the essential difference between the ruling elites and the ruled. The elites comprise noble men: those who had overcome their intrinsic greed and selfishness, internalized ritual norms, and who dedicated themselves to moral cultivation. The noble men stand at the center of *Xunzi*'s social, political, and ethical thought much as they do in the *Analects*. Sometimes they are depicted in terms appropriate to the monarch: "the noble man ... patterns Heaven and Earth. The noble man stands in trinity with Heaven and Earth, regulates the myriad things; he is the father and mother of the people" (*Xunzi*, "Wang zhi" V.9: 163). The noble man's leadership is essential for the society's proper functioning.

The noble man's antipode is the petty man. Covetous, short-sighted, calamitous, and potentially rebellious, he should be reined in by punishments and not by ritual norms, which are appropriate exclusively to the noble men. The juxtaposition between these two archetypes stands at the heart of *Xunzi*'s social, political, and ethical thought much as is the case in the *Analects*. Yet *Xunzi* is much more ready than Confucius to acknowledge

that the differences between the two are not related to one's pedigree. To the contrary, class differences can be transcended:

Although a man is the descendant of kings, lords, *shi* and nobles, if he does not observe the norms of ritual and propriety, he must be relegated to the status of the commoner; although he is a descendant of a commoner, if he accumulates learning of the texts, rectifies his behavior, and is able to observe the norms of ritual and propriety – then he must be elevated to the rank of high ministers, *shi* and nobles.

(*Xunzi*, “Wang zhi” 王制 V.9: 148–149)

This unequivocal support of almost limitless social mobility (even a king's descendant may become a commoner, although a commoner cannot become a king) reflects the realities of Xunzi's life. By the late Warring States period it was possible – at least in some states, like Qin – that a commoner and even a bond-servant could attain aristocratic rank, while a descendant of the ruling house would remain unranked (see Pines et al. 2014, 24–26). But how to combine this mobility with the strictly pronounced social hierarchy advocated by Xunzi? Here the thinker comes up with a brilliant solution. He explains that the gap between the noble man and the petty men is relative: their inborn nature is the same (*Xunzi*, “Xing'e” XVII.23: 441). Any man can attain the supreme level of development: everyone – even a commoner on the muddy road (*tu zhi ren* 塗之人) – who cultivates himself may become a sage like the legendary Thearch Yu 禹; he can even stand in trinity with Heaven and Earth (*Xunzi*, “Xing'e” XVII.23: 443). Why does this normally not happen then? Xunzi clarifies:

A petty man can become a noble man, but he is indisposed to become a noble man; a noble man can become a petty man, but he is indisposed to become a petty man. It is not impossible for petty and noble men to turn into each other, but they do not turn into each other. It is possible, but cannot be enforced on them.

(*Xunzi*, “Xing'e” XVII.23: 443)

The noble men and petty men are bestowed by similar inborn qualities; it is just that the first are willing to overcome their badness and attain a higher stage of development, while the latter are indisposed to do so. This clear statement goes much further in terms of relativization of social divisions than *Analects* do, but it does not depart from the fundamental parameters of Confucius' message. It is self-cultivation alone that turns an individual into a noble man; those who discard it would forever remain petty men and would not be eligible for high social position. Social hierarchy that reflects different levels of self-cultivation of the individuals is morally justified and should cause no resentment. Insofar as petty men are not denied the chance of becoming noble men but simply forsake it, they cannot blame anybody but themselves for their inferior status. This is the essence of Xunzi's message, which, in my eyes, is directly related to Confucius' legacy. Society should remain strictly stratified, but this should be stratification based on moral and intellectual qualities, not the birthright.

Epilogue: Flexible Hierarchy as a Remedy to Excessive Equality?

In an earlier study I explored the trajectory of popular rebellions that plagued Chinese society throughout the imperial millennia. I noticed that many rebellions started with putting forward overtly egalitarian slogans, such as “Level the noble and the base,

equalize the rich and the poor"; yet whenever the rebels succeeded in establishing their rule, they were quick to abandon these slogans and re-establish the traditional hierarchic order, even if in a modified form. Back then I explained this peculiarity primarily through the prism of social analysis: insofar as some members of elite were eager to join the rebellion, they served as agents of the rebels' gradual acculturation into traditional Chinese political culture with its strictly pronounced hierarchies (Pines 2012, 134–61). In light of the previous discussion, I want to shift explanation from the social to the ideological realm.

The major peculiarity of Confucius' reinterpretation of the term *junzi* was his ability to combine ethical and social definitions of this term into an organic whole. A noble man attained his status due to his moral cultivation; but once recognized as a noble man he was supposed to join the ruling elite, and remain clearly differentiated from the uncouth commoners, the petty men. Society should remain strictly hierarchical, but this hierarchy would not be based on pedigree alone, as was the case prior to Confucius and during his lifetime, but on the members' individual qualities. The subsequent developments of the Warring States period validated Confucius' expectations to a certain extent. Society remained stratified, but it also became increasingly mobile allowing ambitious persons from below to join the ranks of the elite.

Throughout the Warring States period the nature of the *junzi* belonging remained contested, but in the imperial period the Confucian ethical interpretation clearly overshadowed the erstwhile equation of noble men with hereditary nobility. During the imperial millennia actual composition of the ruling elite changed repeatedly: periods of ossification and even of recreation of hereditary nobility (most notably under the Northern Wei 北魏 [386–534] dynasty since 495 and under its successor regimes), alternated with periods of relative openness and broad access to power (e.g., in the early Song 宋 [960–1279] dynasty). Yet changes notwithstanding, the common meritocratic discourse remained intact: even when an elite member owed his position to pedigree, declaratively he was expected to possess superior qualities which made him eligible for a high office. Meritocracy was not always the rule, but meritocratic discourse that postulated the officials' need to be morally and intellectually superior to the commoners remained dominant throughout most of the imperial era.

The discourse of moral and intellectual superiority of the elite may be viewed by some as just a smokescreen for continuous domination of the minority over the majority, but this should not necessarily be the case. Aside from serving the needs of the ruling elite, this discourse generated an ongoing search for the ways in which the best of the best could be incorporated into officialdom. Practical means varied from a rudimentary recommendation-cum-examination system under the Han dynasty (206/202–220 BCE), to the so-called "local ranks" (*xiang pin* 鄉品) system in the third–sixth centuries CE (Grafflin 1990, 145–55), to sophisticated parallel systems of selection and promotion exams under the Tang 唐 (618–907) (Herbert 1988), to a mature examination system during much of the second millennium CE (Elman 2000). Some of these systems allowed fairer competition, while others were carefully designed so as to prevent outsiders from ascending to the top positions; but each was declaratively built to ensure that the officialdom will be staffed by "noble men" of proven abilities.

This idea that the right to rule should be granted to a morally upright and knowledgeable persons was rooted in Confucius' view of *junzi*, depicted above. It may be

considered one of Confucius' greatest contributions to Chinese civilization. Although the realities on the ground were often at odds with his lofty ideals, the insistence, however superficial, that power holders should be intelligent and morally upright had far-reaching consequences. It contributed, even if indirectly, toward bettering the quality of Chinese officials, and, more importantly, it bolstered the legitimacy of the imperial political system. Although this system never became fully meritocratic nor was it fair in terms of access to government positions, it fared better than most other pre-modern political systems worldwide.

To clarify the latter point, recall the situation in pre-modern Europe, for example, in France under the *ancien régime*. Before 1789, one's access to political power was severely constricted by one's social belonging, religious creed, race, and gender. The overt unfairness of this system explains the emergence of the ideal of equality as one of the fundamental tenets of the French Revolution. While in the course of the Revolution the proliferation of this ideal faced ups and downs (Israel 2014), in the long term this concept, especially insofar as political equality is concerned, became "a cornerstone of modern civilization" (Li Chenyang 2012, 295). One of its major political manifestations nowadays is the "one person, one vote" system, which, albeit fair, falls behind meritocratic ideals in its ability to guarantee the quality of the leaders. It is not surprising then that for at least some current political scientists the Confucian meritocracy-oriented political culture appears as more appealing than the Western equality-based alternative (Bell 2015).

I am not in a position to enter debates among the political scientists about merits and demerits of "one person, one vote" system; nor do I think that the traditional Chinese model poses a viable alternative to the current Western system. However, one cannot but think that in comparison with the excessive rigidity of the social and political stratification under the *ancien régime* in France and under parallel systems elsewhere in Europe, the Chinese system of flexible hierarchy appears as more viable, more adjustable to changing social circumstances, more effective in terms of ensuring the leaders' quality, and, at least insofar as the male half of society is concerned, also a fairer alternative. Confucius' indirect contribution to the formation of this system – through his subtle ethical reinterpretation of the key terms of social hierarchy – is undeniable. His ideal of a government run by moral and intelligent "noble men" was never realized in full. Yet even the quest for attaining this ideal normally generates better results in terms of the officials' qualities than any system that acquiesces to mediocrities in command, whether their justification for holding power be related to their pedigree or to the amount of ballots received. Whether or not Confucius' ideals are implementable nowadays is debatable; but at the very least they deserve a note by political scientists, and not just by historians.

Notes

- 1 Among Western political scientists, the most active promoter of interest in traditional Chinese thought is Daniel Bell (see, e.g., Bell 2008). Among the most prolific expatriate Chinese promoters of the Confucian revival, one must mention Tu Wei-ming (Du Weiming 杜維明) and Yü Ying-shih (Yu Yingshi 余英時); cf. Yu Yingshi (2005) and Tu Wei-ming (2010). For

- views of current promoters of the Confucian revival in China, see, for example, Yan Xuetong (2011); Bai Tongdong (2012); Jiang Qing (2013). Several volumes of *Contemporary Chinese Thought* and other journals have explored the phenomenon of the “Confucian revival” in China.
- 2 *Maoshi* 17:496–497 (“Quan a” 卷阿; Mao 251); cited from Waley (1996, 254).
 - 3 In 586 BCE, Zhao Ying’s 趙嬰 illicit relations with his aunt resulted in his fleeing into exile, destroying his branch of the Zhao lineage. In 584 BCE, a complicated love affair brought about the destruction of Qu Wuchen’s 屈巫臣 kin in the state of Chu. Excessive drinking habits reportedly contributed toward aggravating conflicts that led to the destruction of the Liang 良 lineage in Zheng in 543 BCE, the decimation of the Han 罕 lineage there in 535 BCE, and the destruction of the Gao 高 and Luan 欒 lineages in Qi 齊 in 532 BCE, to mention only a few.
 - 4 I have not counted the narrator’s and Confucius’ remarks, as well as those occurrences in which *junzi* is mentioned exclusively in a quotation from the *Classic of Poems*.
 - 5 In the *Zuo zhuan*, by contrast, learning and self-cultivation remain marginal in discussions of the elite’s self image. For a rare exception to this rule, see *Zuo*, Zhao 18: 1398.
 - 6 Confucius’ quest for fame distressed some later thinkers, such as Xu Gan 徐幹 (170–218), as well as some modern scholars (e.g., Makeham 1993, who elaborates on Xu Gan’s views). Surely, the Master should have focused on “inner happiness” rather than on something as “dubious” as his reputation (Roetz 1993, 181–83). I am not convinced by these attempts to diminish the importance of fame for Confucius. The Master did want to attain a fine reputation, just as he wanted to attain an official position; it is just that these goals were to remain subordinate to moral and ethical considerations. For a broader context of Confucius’ views of “name,” see Pines (forthcoming).
 - 7 For *tong* 同 as “conformism” (being a yes man), as juxtaposed with *he* 和 (being harmonious, which allows also criticizing one’s superiors), the *locus classicus* is Yan Ying’s 晏嬰 (d. 500 BCE) speech in the *Zuo zhuan* (*Zuo*, Zhao 20: 1419–1420).
 - 8 Confucius’ attitudes toward women were recently subjected to a heated debate (briefly summarized in Goldin 2011, 115–20, q.v. for further references). Whatever the debaters’ positions are, it is clear that in Confucius’ eyes, women were not supposed to become *junzi*. Goldin notes: “I have never come across an ancient text in which a woman is described as a noble man [i.e., *junzi*, YP]” (Goldin 2011, 116). The only possible exception to this rule is a passage in the [Old] *Biographies of Model Women* which says that if women are able to yield to each other they merit the designation of *junzi* (*Gu Lienü zhuan* 4.12 (“Wei zong er shun” 衛宗二順), the passage was noticed by Eric Henry).
 - 9 See, for instance, Zhu Xi’s glosses on the two “problematic” passages (*Lunyu* 14.6 and 17.25) cited above in the text (*Lunyu jizhu* in *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 7: 150 and 9: 182).
 - 10 See references to the exchange of gifts of bundled meet (*shuxiu* 束脩) as a purely aristocratic habit in *Liji* IX.3: 219 (“Tan Gong” 檀弓); XXXV.17: 939 (“Shao yi” 少儀). The examples of using the *Analects* 7.7 passage to argue for Confucius’ transcendence of social and financial hierarchies are too numerous to be cited; for recent examples, see for example, Patt-Shamir (2005, 148); Chan (2008, 128); Littlejohn (2011, 13). Kam (1984, 30–31) shows how this passage was utilized to emphasize the “progressive” nature of Confucius’ teaching in the early years of the PRC.
 - 11 In the *Laozi*, the term *junzi* appears only once (section 31), where weapons are identified as inappropriate to the noble man. In the *Book of Lord Shang*, the term appears twice in the ending sections of chapter 6 (“Suan di” 算地); in a single case (6.11) it is associated with the ruler’s high moral qualities.
 - 12 For instance, in a supposedly Warring States period commentary on the “Mourning clothes” 喪服 chapter of the *Yili* 儀禮 it is explained: “the son of the noble man means the son of the aristocrat” 君子子者，貴人之子也。(*Yili jizhu* 17.5: 522).

- 13 See *Yi Zhou shu*, “Guan ren jie” VII.58: 809–849; *Da Dai Liji*, “Wen Wang guan ren” X.72: 187–198, and the insightful discussion in Richter (2005); for “Zengzi li shi,” see *Da Dai liji* IV.49: 69–79 and Richter (2012). None of these texts can be dated with certainty, but it is conceivable that they were produced between the Warring States and the early Han period.
- 14 For a single exception in “Zengzi li shi” chapter, see *Da Dai liji* IV.49: 73.

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