

## LECTURE 2

# Philosophy of Ancient India and China



Key terms include IPA pronunciation in brackets, e.g., Upanishads [ʊˈpæniːʃədz].

# Roadmap

Today we follow a comparative path: from Indian ideas of cosmic order and liberation to Chinese ideas of harmony and naturalness.

- Ancient Indian Philosophy
  - 1. Metaphysical origins: ritual → cosmic order (Rta ['ri:tə]) → Karma ['kɑ:rmə]
  - 2. Orthodoxy (Astika ['ʌstɪkə]): the path of the Vedas
  - 3. Heterodoxy (Nastika ['nʌstɪkə]): radical protest
- Ancient Chinese Philosophy
  - 1. Cosmos as a living organism; social harmony as a primary goal
  - 2. Confucianism: ethics as architecture of the soul and state
  - 3. Daoism: the path of nature (Dao [daʊ])

# Two Questions, Two Civilizations

## A helpful “lens”:

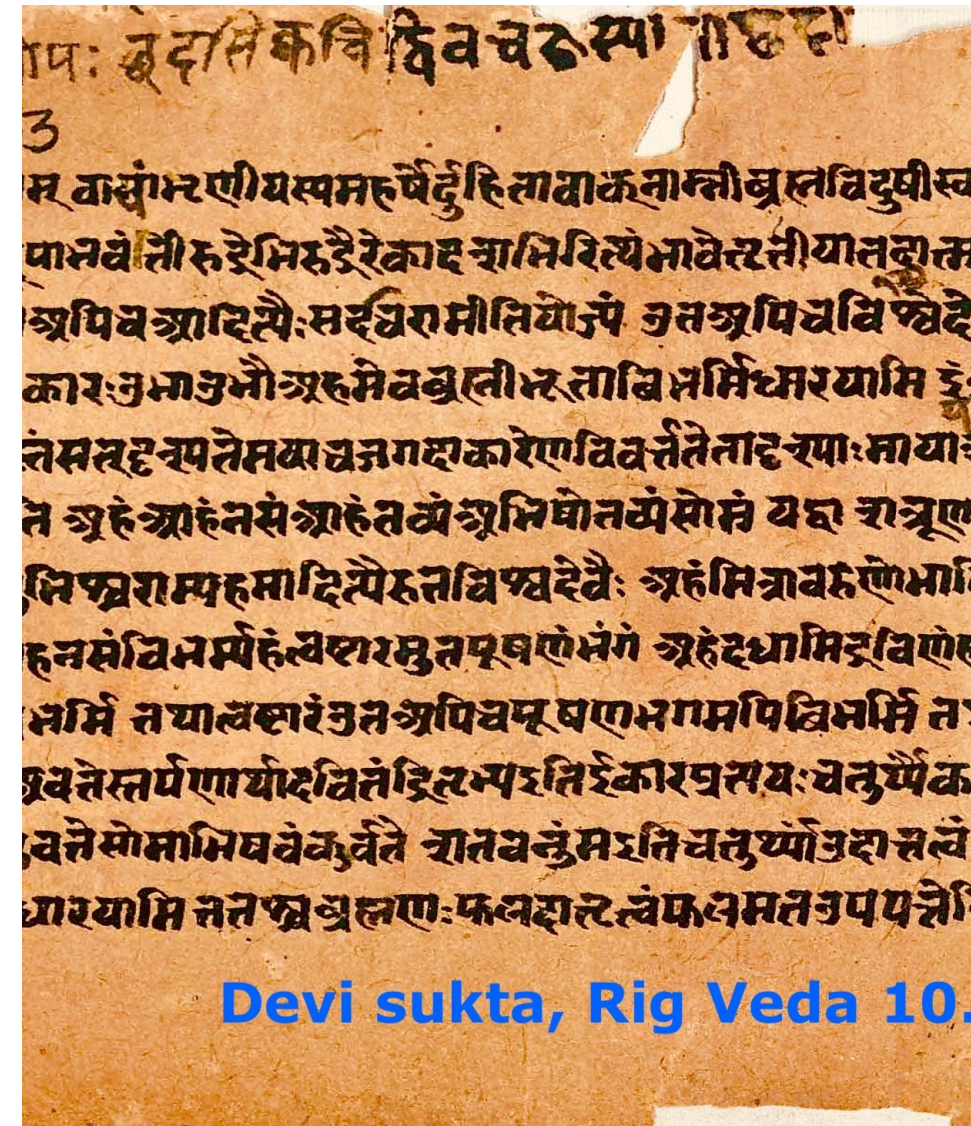
- India tends to frame philosophy as liberation (Moksha ['moʊkʃə]) from the cycle of rebirth (Samsara [sʌm'sɑ:rə]).
- China tends to frame philosophy as harmony: within the person, the family, and the state.
- Both treat the cosmos as intelligible: India emphasizes causal necessity; China emphasizes correlative balance.
- Both link knowledge to transformation (ethical, existential, or political).

## Key comparative axis

- Order: Rta ['ri:tə] / Dao [daʊ]
- Self: Atman ['ɑ:tmən] / Junzi ['dʒʊn'dzɪ]
- Method: knowledge / ritual / non-action

# India I: Vedic Foundations (15th–10th c. BCE)

- Early Indian thought is inseparable from practice: sacrifice (yajña [jʌdʒ'njɑː]) is a “technology” to sustain harmony.
- Gods (Indra ['indrə], Agni ['ʌgni], Varuna [və'ru:nə]) are partners in maintaining worldly equilibrium.
- The Vedas (Veda ['veɪdə]) are not only hymns but a cultural “operating system” of ritual, memory, and order.
- A key shift begins inside this worldview: from many divine “wills” to an impersonal, universal order.



# From Rta ['ri:tə] to Karma ['kɑ:rmə]

## The discovery of cosmic order changes how the world is interpreted:

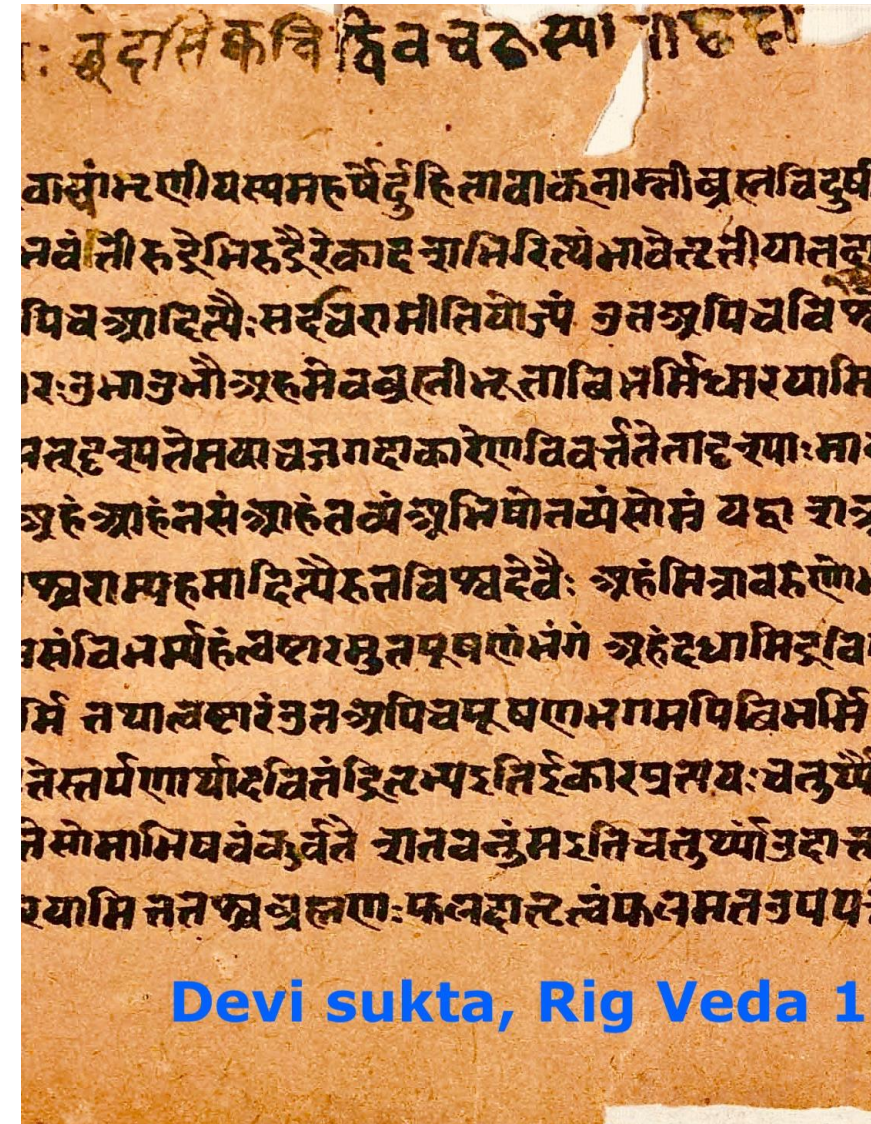
- Rta ['ri:tə] (Cosmic Order) is the “invisible thread” governing nature and morality alike.
- Reality becomes intelligible: not random events, but causal necessity.
- This seeds Karma ['kɑ:rmə]: actions have consequences woven into the fabric of the world.
- Intellectual movement: from influencing order externally (ritual fire) → understanding order internally (reason).
- This shift prepares the Upanishads [ʊ'pæni,jædz] and later philosophical schools (Darshanas [dɑ:r'ʃɑ:nəz]).

# The Vedas (Veda ['veɪdə]): A Philosophical Starting Point

- The Vedas are “heard” revelation (śruti ['ʃru:ti]) and a template for knowledge, ritual, and social order.
- They preserve a worldview where cosmos and community must stay aligned.
- Philosophical question emerges: is order maintained by negotiating with gods—or by understanding reality’s structure?
- The later tradition increasingly treats ritual as symbolic and knowledge as salvific.
- This opens the way to interior practices and metaphysics: the self (Atman ['ɑ:tman]) becomes a site of inquiry.

# The Upanishads [ʊ'pæniˌjædz]: Interiorization of Spirit

- Shift of focus: macrocosm → microcosm; philosophy becomes deep self-knowledge.
- Sacrifice is “internalized”: the altar’s fire becomes the “fire of knowledge.”
- New central aim: realize absolute unity rather than manage divine favors.
- Philosophy becomes existential: truth is liberation, not merely theory.



# Brahman ['brɑ:mən] and Atman ['ɑ:tmən]

**Core intuition: Brahman (ultimate reality) and Atman (deepest Self) are one.**

- Brahman ['brɑ:mən]: the objective foundation of the universe (ground of being).
- Atman ['ɑ:tmən]: the subjective “I” beyond roles, feelings, and change.
- The identity claim reframes knowledge: to know reality is to know oneself.
- Ethics and practice follow: remove what hides this identity rather than “add” beliefs.

# Maya ['mɑ:jɑ:] and Avidya [ə'vɪdʒɑ:]

## Why do we suffer if reality is one?

- Maya ['mɑ:jɑ:]: the “veil” of appearance that makes the many seem ultimately real.
- Avidya [ə'vɪdʒɑ:]: ignorance—not lack of information, but existential misrecognition.
- We mistake temporary identities (body, status, emotions) for the Self (Atman ['ɑ:təmən]).
- Therefore suffering is not divine punishment; it is a consequence of mis-seeing reality.
- Philosophical practice aims at “uncovering” rather than constructing the truth.

# Moksha ['moʊkʃə] and Samsara [sʌm'sɑ:rə]

- Samsara [sʌm'sɑ:rə]: the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
- Moksha ['moʊkʃə]: liberation—release from Samsara through insight and discipline.
- The Upanishadic move makes liberation primarily a matter of knowledge (vidya ['vidjɑ:]).
- Later schools disagree on method: ritual, reason, meditation, devotion, or radical critique.



# The Shramana Movement ['ʃrʌmənə] (c. 6th c. BCE)

**A “great schism”: truth moves from priestly monopoly to personal practice.**

- Shramana ['ʃrʌmənə] = one who pursues spiritual effort outside caste ritualism.
- Wandering philosophers treat experience (asceticism, meditation) as the criterion of truth.
- Central conflict: What binds us—ritual order, or ignorance and attachment?
- This context gives rise to the “heterodox” critiques: Buddhism and Jainism.

# Astika ['ʌstɪkə] vs Nastika ['nʌstɪkə]

## Orthodoxy: Astika ['ʌstɪkə]

- Accept Vedic authority (śruti ['ʃru:ti]).
- Develop systematic schools (Darshanas [dɑ:r'ʃɑ:nəz]).
- Often retain ritual, but reinterpret it philosophically.

## Heterodoxy: Nastika ['nʌstɪkə]

- Reject Vedic authority as the final word.
- Emphasize direct insight, ethics, and liberation.
- Includes Buddhism, Jainism, and materialist critiques.

# The Six Darshanas [dɑːrˈʃɑːnəz] (Astika Schools)

**Darshana** ['dɑːrʃənə] literally means “view” or “way of seeing.”

- Nyaya ['nɑːjə] — logic and valid knowledge (pramāṇa [prʌˈmɑːnə]).
- Vaisheshika [vaɪˈʃeɪʃɪkə] — categories of reality; atomism.
- Samkhya ['sɑːŋkjə] — dualism of consciousness and nature.
- Yoga ['joʊgə] — practical discipline for liberation.
- Mimamsa [mɪˈmɑːmsɑː] — interpretation of Vedic ritual and duty.
- Vedanta [veɪˈdɑːntə] — “end of the Vedas”; metaphysics of ultimate reality.

# Nyaya ['nɑːjə]: Reasoning and Proof

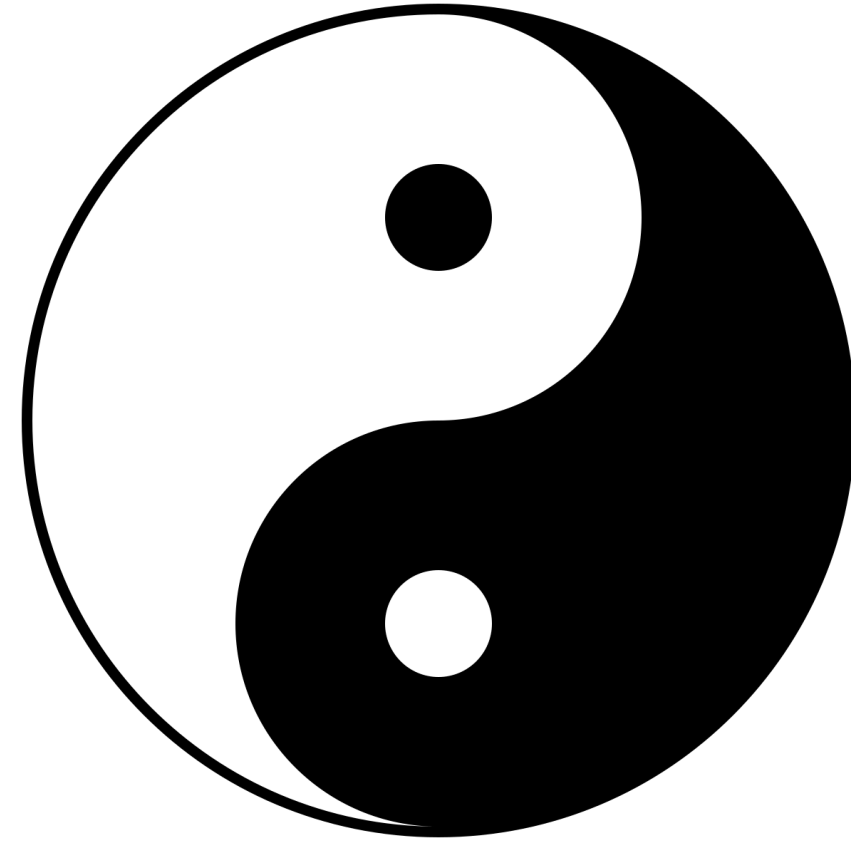
- Goal: remove ignorance by establishing reliable knowledge (pramāṇa [prɑ'mɑ:nə]).
- Classical pramāṇas: perception, inference, comparison, testimony.
- Argumentation becomes a spiritual tool: correct thinking supports liberation.
- Nyaya develops rules for debate, fallacies, and the structure of inference.
- This rational discipline influences later Indian epistemology and theology.

# Vaisheshika [vaɪˈʃeɪʃɪkə]: Categories and Atomism

- Asks: what kinds of “things” exist? Builds a taxonomy of reality.
- Often associated with atomism: complex objects arise from simple constituents.
- Explains change and causality without needing arbitrary divine interventions.
- Pairs naturally with Nyaya: epistemology + ontology form a system.
- Philosophical payoff: the world is structured, not capricious.

# Samkhya ['sɑːŋkjə]: Purusha [pʊ'rʊʃə] & Prakriti [prʌ'krɪti]

- Samkhya offers a strict dualism: consciousness (Purusha [pʊ'rʊʃə]) vs nature/matter (Prakriti [prʌ'krɪti]).
- Suffering arises from confusing the two (mistaking mental nature for the Self).
- Liberation is discriminative knowledge: seeing Purusha as distinct and untouched.
- This metaphysical map shapes later Yoga and much of Indian psychology.



# Yoga ['joʊgə]: Practice as Philosophy

**Yoga emphasizes disciplined transformation of mind and attention.**

- Builds on Samkhya's map but focuses on method: how to “still” mental fluctuations.
- Core idea: liberation requires training, not only argument.
- Key practices: ethical restraints, observances, posture, breath, concentration, meditation.
- Goal: stable insight that dissolves confusion between Purusha [pʊ'rʊʃə] and Prakriti [prʌ'krɪti].

# Mimamsa [mɪ'mɑːmsɑː]: Duty, Ritual, Interpretation

- Mimamsa treats the Vedas as authoritative and asks: how should we act?
- Develops sophisticated hermeneutics (rules of textual interpretation).
- Ritual becomes rationalized: not magical bargaining, but a lawful moral-cosmic procedure.
- Shows an important Indian theme: practice (dharma ['dɑːrmə]) is inseparable from meaning.

## Vedanta [veɪˈdʌːntə]: “End of the Vedas”

# Nastika ['nʌstɪkə] Paths: Radical Protest

**When ritual authority is questioned, new experiments in truth appear:**

- Buddhism challenges metaphysical selfhood and reframes liberation as ending craving.
- Jainism radicalizes non-violence (Ahimsa [ə'hɪmsə:]) and disciplined purification.
- Charvaka/Lokayata [tʃɑ:r'vɑ:kə] / [loʊkɑ:'jɑ:tə] rejects afterlife metaphysics and focuses on the empirical.
- Common trait: truth must be lived and tested—not inherited by birth.

# Charvaka / Lokayata [tʃɑːr'vɑːkə] / [loʊkɑː'jɑːtə]

- A materialist critique: prioritize perception and the tangible world.
- Skeptical toward ritual authority, invisible realms, and metaphysical speculation.
- Ethical implication: focus on flourishing “here and now” rather than future rebirths.
- Even as a minority view, it forces other schools to sharpen arguments and evidence standards.

# Jainism: Ahimsa [ə'hɪmsɑː] and Purification

- Core ethic: Ahimsa [ə'hɪmsɑː] (non-violence) as the highest discipline.
- Karma is treated as “subtle matter” binding the soul (jīva ['dʒi:və]).
- Liberation requires rigorous self-control, ascetic practice, and truthfulness.
- Anekantavada [ˌneɪkɑːntə'vɑːdə]: reality is multi-sided; avoid dogmatic absolutism.



# Buddhism: Diagnosis of Suffering (Dukkha ['du:kə])

- Buddhism begins with an existential diagnosis, not a cosmology.
- Dukkha ['du:kə]: pervasive unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence.
- Cause: craving and attachment (tṛṣṇā [tɾɪʃ'na:]).
- Path: the Middle Way—avoid extremes of indulgence and self-torture.
- Ethics, meditation, and wisdom work together; insight is practical and transformative.



# Buddhism: Anatta [ʌ'na:tə] and Nirvana [nɪr'vɑ:nə]

- Anatta [ʌ'na:tə] (no permanent self): the “I” is a process, not an essence.
- Reality is interdependent (dependent origination): conditions produce conditions.
- Liberation is Nirvana [nɪr'vɑ:nə]: the cessation of craving and the end of Dukkha ['du:kə].
- This is not annihilation but freedom from compulsive reactivity.
- Buddhist critique reshapes Indian debates on self, knowledge, and liberation.

# Transition: From Liberation to Harmony

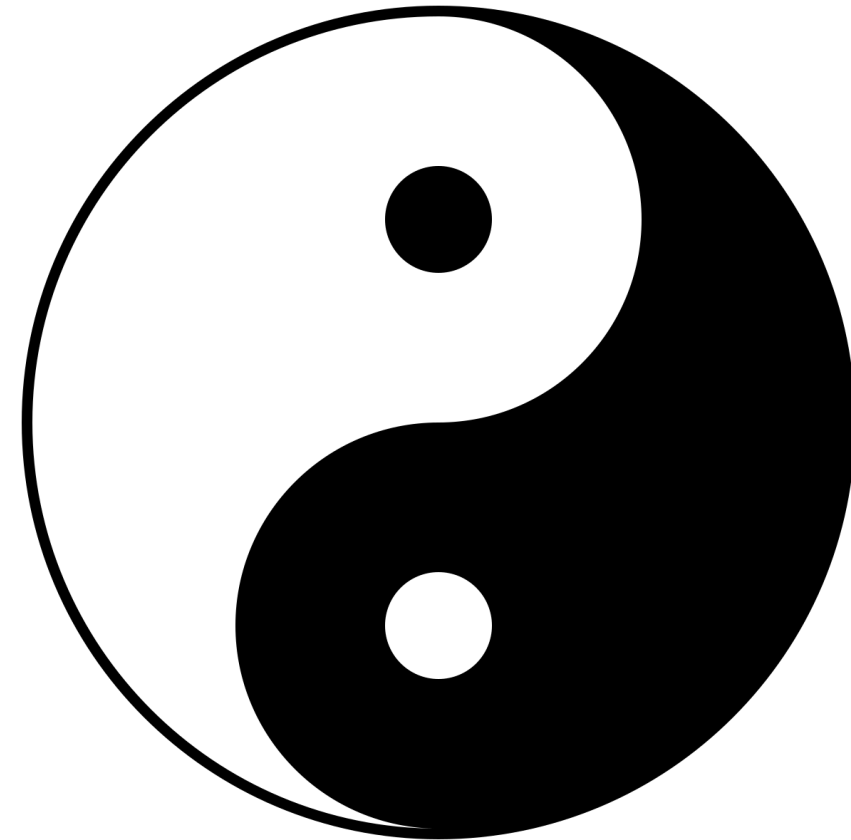
**India asks: “How do I become free?”**

**China asks: “How do we live well together?”**

Next: a cosmology of balance (Yin–Yang), and two answers to chaos: Confucianism and Daoism.

# China I: The Cosmos as a Living Organism

- Chinese thought often starts with correlation, not creation: patterns link heaven, earth, and society.
- Cosmic order is dynamic and cyclical, not a once-for-all blueprint.
- Human life is embedded in relationships; ethics is “cosmology applied.”
- Key background: periods of warfare drive the urgent search for stable harmony.



# Core Concepts: Dao [daʊ], Qi [tʃi:], Yin [jɪn], Yang [jɑ:ŋ]

## Dao [daʊ]

The “Way”: the underlying course of nature and reality—beyond rigid naming.

## Qi [tʃi:]

Vital energy / breath: the dynamic stuff of life, health, and transformation.

## Yin [jɪn] – Yang [jɑ:ŋ]

Complementary opposites: dark/light, receptive/active, rest/motion—mutually entailing.

These concepts do not separate “nature” from “ethics”: harmony is both cosmic and social.

- A good life = aligning conduct with patterns of Dao [daʊ].
- Political order is measured by its resonance with the wider order.
- Extreme imbalance (too much Yang [jɑ:ŋ] or Yin [jɪn]) is a sign of disorder.

# Tian [tjen] and Ming [mɪŋ]: Moralized Cosmos

- Tian [tjen] (“Heaven”) can mean sky, cosmic order, and moral authority.
- Ming [mɪŋ] (“Mandate / destiny”) links legitimacy to virtue and right conduct.
- When rulers lose virtue, disorder follows; governance is an ethical practice.
- This background sets the stage for Confucian political ethics and ritual.

# Hundred Schools of Thought (6th–3rd c. BCE)

## A philosophical “marketplace” shaped by crisis:

- Warring states and social fragmentation raise an urgent question: how to stop chaos?
- Confucianism answers with culture, education, and ritual order (Li [li:]).
- Daoism answers with naturalness, simplicity, and non-coercive action (Wu-Wei [wu:'wei]).
- Other schools (e.g., Legalists) propose stronger state control—but our focus is the two poles above.

# Confucianism: Confucius (Kong Fuzi) & the Analects

- Confucius (Kong Fuzi, c. 551–479 BCE): teacher during an age of feudal warfare.
- Primary text: Analects (Lun Yu [lʊn juː]), compiled by disciples.
- Focus is practical and ethical, not metaphysical: cultivate order within to restore order without.
- Education becomes the central instrument of civilization-building.
- Status should follow virtue and knowledge: an early ideal of “meritocracy.”



# Junzi ['dʒʊn'dʒʌ]: The Noble Person

**Junzi ['dʒʊn'dʒʌ] = “noble by character”, not by blood.**

- Self-cultivation: constant improvement through study, ritual, and reflection.
- Social chaos reflects inner disorder; moral formation is political therapy.
- Junzi embodies Ren [rən] (humaneness) and expresses it through Li [li:] (ritual).
- The aim is not self-expression, but becoming a reliable “node” of harmony.

# Zhengming [dʒəŋ' mɪŋ]: Rectification of Names

## **Confucian social philosophy begins with language and roles.**

- Zhengming [dʒəŋ' mɪŋ] says: names and roles must match reality.
- If “ruler” does not act as ruler, and “father” does not act as father, society dissolves.
- Order requires clarity about obligations, expectations, and authority.
- This is not mere semantics: correct naming is moral alignment.
- Political implication: reform starts with cultivating exemplary persons, not coercion.

# Ren [rən] and Xiao [ʃaʊ]

## Ren [rən] (Humaneness)

- Empathy, restraint of egoism, ethical intuition.
- Not abstract love for “everyone at once”.
- Begins in close relations and extends outward.
- Internal substance of Junzi ['dʒʊn'dʒɪ].

## Xiao [ʃaʊ] (Filial Piety)

- Family is the “training ground” of ethics.
- Respect and care for parents anchors social trust.
- Virtues spread in concentric circles: self → family → community → state.
- Harmony is built from stable relational practices.

# Li [liː]: Ritual as Social “Glue”

**If Ren [rən] is content, Li [liː] is form.**

- Li [liː] includes ceremony, manners, gestures, and shared norms.
- It makes interaction predictable, respectful, and harmonious.
- Ritual is not empty formalism: it shapes emotion and trains attention.
- Through Li, everyday life becomes ethically “sacred”.
- Political meaning: good institutions are embodied in habit, not fear.

# De [də]: Rule by Moral Example

- De [də] is virtuous power—an attractive moral force.
- Ideal ruler governs as a moral exemplar, not as a punisher.
- Metaphor: people follow virtue as grass bends before the wind.
- The state is like a family: authority should be paternal, responsible, and educated.
- Result: stability through trust, not intimidation.



# Daoism: Lao-tzu ['laʊ'dzʌ] and the Dao [daʊ]

- Daoism is a protest against excessive culture and rigid social conventions.
- It rejects anthropocentrism: humans are one ripple in a vast cosmic flow.
- Key move: stop forcing the world into categories; let reality be itself.
- Daoist wisdom is often expressed through paradox to “wake” the mind.



# Daoist Practice: Wu-Wei [wu:'wei], Ziran [dzi'ra:n], Pu [pu:]

**Key virtues are ecological: do not block the world's own intelligence.**

- Wu-Wei [wu:'wei] (“non-action”): act without forcing; follow the grain of reality.
- Ziran [dzi'ra:n] (“naturalness”): spontaneity without performative virtue.
- Pu [pu:] (“uncarved block”): primordial simplicity before social carving.
- Zhenren [dʒəŋ 'rən] (“true person”): one who returns to the source rather than chasing status.
- Image of water: soft yet unstoppable—strength in weakness and flexibility.

# Confucianism vs Daoism (Comparative Table)

| Criterion         | Confucianism                                        | Daoism                                               |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Central ideal     | Junzi ['dʒʊn'dʒʌ] — constructs self through duty    | Zhenren [dʒəŋ 'rən] — returns to the source          |
| View on society   | Society as a large family; hierarchy sustains order | Society as artificial shackles; bonds corrupt nature |
| Method of action  | Li [li:] — active ritual and rule-following         | Wu-Wei [wu:'weɪ] — non-forcing and flow              |
| View on knowledge | Education as supreme value; transmit ancient wisdom | Knowledge can delude; “empty” the mind               |
| Metaphor          | Polished jade (refining character)                  | Uncarved block Pu [pu:] (primordial purity)          |

## One theme, two styles of wisdom

- India: cosmic order (Rta ['ri:tə]) → liberation (Moksha ['moʊkʃə]) through knowledge and practice.
- China: cosmic resonance (Dao [daʊ], Qi [tʃi:]) → harmony through ethics (Ren [rən], Li [li:]) or naturalness (Wu-Wei [wu:'wei]).
- Both: philosophy is not abstract “belief”—it is training in how to see and how to live.
- Pronunciation tip: keep IPA on first mention; repeat terms consistently across your speaking.

### Discussion prompts:

- Is “liberation” (India) compatible with “social harmony” (China)?
- When is ritual (Li [li:]) a tool for ethical growth—and when is it mere conformity?
- What might Wu-Wei [wu:'wei] look like in modern leadership?