

Prawat (Pong) Trairatvorakul

Professor Lu and Professor Bender

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Creation of Authority in the *Lunyu*

Kongzi is occasionally referred to as a “king without a crown.” Although he was never a ruler or even held high political position, he was deeply invested in the philosophy behind ruling. In the *Lunyu*, one of the topics touched upon is the creation of authority by the ruler. Within the content, not only can we find numerous instances where Kongzi makes a statement about ruling, but we can also find many instances of Kongzi giving advice to rulers. Interestingly, if we were to look at the form of the *Lunyu*, one could also argue that it echoes this very idea, aiding the portrayal of Kongzi in this text as an authority figure. Thus, the *Lunyu* can be viewed as an implementation of some of the ideas in governing its contents describe.

One of the main characteristics of the *Lunyu* is how its overarching form is essentially a collection of Kongzi’s quotes, as opposed to a story or poem employed by other texts from around the same era.¹ The vast majority of quotes begin with the phrase “the Master said” (子曰). This phrase lacks the name Kong (孔) when referring to the Master, whereas all the other masters mentioned in the *Lunyu* have their names attached. A common interpretation is that this is a sign of respect from the author’s voice towards Kongzi. This differentiation between Kongzi and the other masters can be viewed as elevating Kongzi to an even higher status, analogous to being the one master above the rest. Since we often associate ways of thought with their primary philosophers, one could even extend the

¹ Such as the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Xunzi*

interpretation of this form to suggest that just like how Kongzi is portrayed as the one master superior to the others, Ruism also exists as a superior school of thought.

This portrayal of Kongzi in a higher status² than others in the *Lunyu*, can be related to the creation of authority through roles. 12.11³ introduces the idea of roles when Kongzi responded to Duke Jing of Qi's question about governing with "let the lord be a true lord, the ministers true ministers, the fathers true fathers, and the sons true sons." It is possible to interpret this quote that society has a hierarchy in which those in it have roles they should adhere to.

In the same way that each group of people has a role in society, we can also draw parallels to roles of different people in the *Lunyu*. Although the *Lunyu* is centered on Kongzi, it also has a selection of other people, namely rulers and his disciples. From a holistic perspective, it appears that these auxiliary characters serve formal roles that help augment Kongzi's authority in this text. A large proportion of when these auxiliary characters appear is to ask Kongzi questions. The form of these questions are mainly to inquire about a general topic or to ask for advice. The former, such as "Duke Jing of Qi asked Kongzi about governing" (12.11), tends to be very broad and frames the asker as someone who simply wants to learn more about the state of the world from Kongzi, while Kongzi is framed as a source of knowledge. Meanwhile, there are also cases where the auxiliary characters ask for advice on specific things such as 2.19 when "Duke Ai asked, 'What can I do to induce the common people to be obedient?'" Questions in this form serve more to suggest that Kongzi was also viewed as a trustworthy source of advice who not only has the understanding of concepts, but also how they can be applied. With both types of questions, the form of what follows appears to be consistent. In both cases, Kongzi typically responds in the form of a statement or an analogy to express his point. Some quotes end there, while others return to the original speaker with either an affirmation of what Kongzi has said, like in the

² Intellectual status.

³ Since this paper only refers to the *Lunyu*, references to quotes are notated by just their numbers.

case of 12.11, or continue to a follow up question which Kongzi then responds to. With this in mind, at no point are the words of Kongzi left contested, leading to no debate or further dialog against his ideas.

Furthermore, the students, dukes, and Kongzi also seem to adhere to their roles as one would expect them to in society. It does not come as a surprise that his disciples are inquisitive and want to ask questions to gain knowledge from the Master. After all, this is the role of an obedient student often alluded to in Kongzi's texts. The role of the Duke is one of a ruler, and from 2.3, we observe the thought in the *Lunyu* that good rulers should guide the common people "with Virtue, and keep them in line by means of ritual." From the *Lunyu*, we observe many instances of Kongzi discussing or practicing rituals. In fact, some would even consider this to place Kongzi in the role of a master of rituals. Thus, dukes asking Kongzi about how to govern adheres to this notion of the role of the ruler. Kongzi himself appears to attain the role of a knowledgeable intellectual authority figure. One could also argue that Kongzi largely remains true to this role, reflected in the form of the *Lunyu*, which places Kongzi on a pedestal by referring to him as "the Master" as well as making uncontested claims, whether they be responses to questions, like the case of 2.19 and 12.11, or standalone statements like 2.3. This adherence to the roles in society of figures in the *Lunyu*, thus aids placing Kongzi as an authority figure.

While a ruler aims to "induce the common people to be [politically] obedient" (2.19), the *Lunyu* portrays intellectual obedience towards Kongzi by those of lesser intellectual roles through the lack of doubt or challenge of his ideas. The question now turns to how does one induce obedience? Kongzi's reply to Duke Ai in 2.19 is "raise up the straight and apply them to the crooked, and the people will submit to you. If you raise up the crooked and apply them to the straight, the people will never submit." To "raise up" in this case can be interpreted as to commend, while the act of applying those we commend to another person can be interpreted as using the commended as a template from which the applied to can follow.

Since the *Lunyu* seems to portray intellectual obedience towards Kongzi, the contrapositive⁴ to the latter part of Kongzi's reply in 2.19 leads to a deduction that the "straight" has been raised.¹⁵ If we were to limit our scope to the *Lunyu*, then it is not difficult to assume that this "straight" template which could be applied on others is Kongzi himself. With this in mind, we return to the form of the *Lunyu* which portrays Kongzi as a believable human being with multifaceted thoughts. For the most part, the *Lunyu* expresses ideas through quotes or exchanges that tend to have relatively short lengths and are arranged in a non-linear progression, such that quotes relating to the same topic are not always guaranteed to be presented in one contiguous block. This could already be seen with the two quotes mentioned earlier (2.19 and 12.11) which are both questions from Dukes regarding governance, yet are presented far from each other in Books Two and Twelve.⁶ This not well-defined ordering⁷ based on themes leads to perception of the persona of Kongzi as a holistic human being that embodies all the various ideas simultaneously, rather than a well-organized book consisting of a combination of different ideas that exist independently and are not fused with one another. This holistic human is further observed through descriptions of Kongzi's actions, mostly appearing in Book Ten, some of which may seem trivial. It seems like having the persona of a holistic human Kongzi to embody the idea is an important feature as it creates a template that others can easily follow – one could model one's actions after another human much more easily than after an inanimate object such as a book. If the ideas were expressed without the human to embody them, then they would only exist as abstract concepts in one's head.

Another major component to ruling mentioned in the *Lunyu* is following. In 8.9, The Master said, "The common people can be made to follow it, but they cannot be made to understand it." The Chinese

⁴ A logic law that states that a conditional is equivalent to its flipped inversion.

⁵ Derivation shown in endnote i. Note that this is only *one* of the deductions made.

⁶ This could also be the result of different compilation time and source which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, if this were the case then the point still stands since the different books were not categorized and merged into a linear progression of themes.

⁷ A "well-defined ordering" here borrows a mathematical definition of being a clearly identifiable deterministic ordering

word used which was translated to “it” in this case is “之” which some translations explain as referring to the Way (道). Additionally, it appears that “can” in this case comes from “可使” which some translations clarify as “permitted to.” What is particularly striking about this quote is the focus on the “common people” (民). With regards to creation of authority and the social hierarchy alluded to in 12.11, this quote explicitly states what those in the role of the common people are permitted and not permitted to do. The first part of the statement that “the common people can be made to follow it” serves as an extension to 2.19 of creating obedience by having “straight” examples applied to. However, the content of the second part, pertaining to understanding, has a different stance. While a more nuanced understanding of the meaning could be achieved through further study into the connotations of “可使”, one could safely say that in this quote, the attitude towards *understanding* is simply the negation of that of *following*. In less abstract terms, while following is welcomed, understanding is not. The form of the *Lunyu* involves a significant number of statements that are simply laid out without justification or any detailed explanation. Applying the reading of roles alluded to in 12.11 gives one interpretation, but if we were to apply the attitude from 8.9 as well, it is possible to see the provision of material one could follow, but not much explanation beyond that. It appears that minimal effort was made to provide the receiver with a guide to understanding.

This then raises the question about who the intended receiver is. Based purely on 8.9 and the lack of explanation, one might think that it is the common people. However, given the form of the *Lunyu* is a compilation of quotes Kongzi’s disciples have observed, the implied receiver in this case seems to be other disciples of Kongzi, thus creating what seems like asynchrony between the two interpretations. While one would expect a master to explain concepts thoroughly to ensure that the student understands it, this was not the case with Kongzi. In 7.8, the Master said “If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again.” Applying this attitude, one could interpret the lack of thorough explanations in quotes as

Kongzi only providing the implied receiver with a corner from which he expects the student to extrapolate the other three. If the student is unable to gain an understanding from there, then Kongzi does not attempt to provide further explanations. Thus, the student cannot be made to understand it. However, since the “corner” that Kongzi provides is often the basis of ideas, one can say that this is sufficient for them to follow it. This interpretation leads us to find a high degree of similarity between a student that is unable to learn and the “common people” referred to in 8.9. Essentially, those in the role of a student but are unable to fulfill that role are no more than common people. This suggests the existence of a barrier that prevents someone from a role of a lower status to attain a role of a higher status.⁸ With ideas from 12.11, this confinement into societal roles would aid in creating authority by the ruler.

Was Kongzi the ruler of a kingdom? The general consensus points to no. However, what if one were to reframe the question to “was Kongzi a ruler?” The answer would not be as straightforward. The *Lunyu* contains ingredients that, according to some of its quotes, combine to form a governed kingdom, namely roles and using a virtuous example to make the common people obedient. Furthermore, it places Kongzi in such high esteem that one could argue that if the *Lunyu* were a kingdom, then Kongzi would be its king.

ⁱ Deductions based on the second statement in 2.19

$$(raise\ crooked) \wedge (apply\ to\ straight) \Rightarrow \neg submission$$

By contrapositive,

$$submission \Rightarrow \neg((raise\ crooked) \wedge (apply\ to\ straight))$$

By De Morgan’s law,

$$submission \Rightarrow \neg(raise\ crooked) \vee \neg(apply\ to\ straight)$$

If we assume that something is either straight or crooked, then

$$submission \Rightarrow (raise\ straight) \vee (apply\ to\ crooked)$$

Expanding this, we get

$$submission \Rightarrow (raise\ straight) \vee ((raise\ crooked) \wedge (apply\ to\ crooked))$$

⁸ In the intellectual realm of the *Lunyu*, this barrier is an intellectual one rather than a socio-economic one (7.7)