



China
Part 2 – Culture

Osher Course, February 2024
John Hooker

Outline

- Chinese language(s)
- Family
- Interpersonal relationships
- Meals
- Superstition
- Health
- Philosophy



Tiānānmén Guǎngchǎng, Běijīng

Chinese Language(s)

- Chinese is several languages (“dialects”)
 - Official language of PRC is *Pǔtōnghuà* (Mandarin)
 - Written in Roman letters using *Pīnyīn*.



Chinese Language(s)

□ Some Chinese languages

- *Pǔtōnghuà* = Mandarin
- *Wú* = Shanghainese
- Min (*Mǐnyǔ*) = Fujianese
- Southern Min \approx Taiwanese
- *Yuè* = Cantonese



Chinese Language(s)

“Tones” are important.

- There are 4 in *Pǔtōnghuà*, plus neutral tone:
 - *mā* (mother)
 - *má* (as in *má jiàng*)
 - *mǎ* (horse)
 - *mà* (to curse)
 - *ma* (used for questions)
- There are at least 6 tones in Cantonese.



Game of mahjong (*má jiàng*)



Chinese Language(s)

Traditional

Simplified

- Characters are fairly standard...
 - Mainland China and Singapore use **simplified** characters
 - Many in Hong Kong and Taiwan use **traditional** characters.

號	号	(hào)	number
門	门	(mén)	door
業	业	(yè)	industry
學	学	(xué)	study
來	来	(lái)	come
寫	写	(xiě)	write
馬	马	(mǎ)	horse
話	话	(huà)	speech
紙	纸	(zhǐ)	paper
見	见	(jiàn)	see

Chinese Language(s)

□ Keyboard input

- *Pīnyīn* often used.
 - Computer shows menu of corresponding characters.
 - Or *shuāngpīn* = 2-letter *pīnyīn* abbreviations.
- Shape-based methods
 - *Wǔbǐ* (5 stroke) method is most popular but hard to learn

Q	q	W	w	E	e	R	r	T	t	Y	y	U	sh	I	ch	O	o	P	p
	iu		ia ua				er uan		ue		uai v		u		i		uo		un
A	a	S	s	D	d	F	f	G	g	H	h	J	j	K	k	L	l	;	ing
			ong		iang uang		en		eng		ang		an		ao		ai		
Z	z	X	x	C	c	V	zh	B	b	N	n	M	m						
	ei		ie		iao		ui ve		ou		in		ian	微软拼音双拼方案					

Microsoft *pīnyīn* system

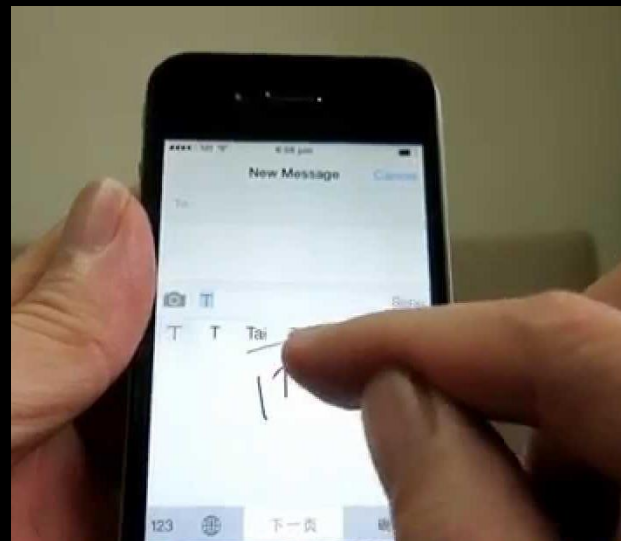


Wubi system

Chinese Language(s)

□ Smartphone input

- Use *pīnyīn* keyboard input, or...
- Draw characters with finger or stylus
 - Screen suggests characters as you enter the strokes.



Chinese Language(s)

- Some common phrases...

- *Nǐ hǎo*

hello

- *Nǐ hǎo ma*

how are you?

- *Hěn hǎo xiè xie*

very well thank you

- *Hǎo jiǔ bù jiàn*

“Long time no see”

- *Zǎoshàng hǎo*

good morning

- *Wǎnshàng hǎo*

good evening

- *Zàijiàn*

goodbye



Chinese Language(s)

- Some common phrases...

- *Qǐng nǐ* please
- *Xiè xie* thank you
- *Bù xiè* you're welcome
- *Duìbùqǐ* excuse me
- *Nǐ shuō Yīngyǔ ma?* Do you speak English?
- *Méiyǒu* I can't help you, get lost
- Counting nouns take the place of plurals:
 - *wǔ kuài rénmínbì* 5 RMB
 - *yī píng shuǐ* 1 bottle of water



Family

- Life is all about **family, family, family.**
 - Children come first.
 - Parents, grandparents and ancestors next.
 - Self comes last.
- Basic source of **security.**



Family

□ Family discipline

- Everyone **dots** on small children.
- Older children are more strictly **disciplined**.
- Kids **obey** their parents, or else...



Family

- High expectations, pressure to **succeed**
 - **High grades** in school
 - Admission to a **top university**
 - **Prestigious job.**
 - These bring **honor** to the family, and provide financial **support** for elders.



Family

□ Family hierarchy

- Grandfathers
 - Paternal 爺爺 (*yé yé*), maternal 老爺 (*lǎo yé*) or *wàifù*.
- Grandmothers
 - Paternal 奶奶 (*nài nài*), maternal 姥姥 (*lǎo lǎo*) or *wàipó*
- Parents
 - Father 爸爸 (*bà bà*)
 - Mother 媽媽 (*mā mā*)
- Older sibling
 - Brother 哥哥 (*gē gē*)
 - Sister 姐姐 (*jǐe jǐe*)
- Younger sibling
 - Brother 弟弟 (*dì dì*)
 - Sister 妹妹 (*mèi mèi*)



Family

- **Marriage** – A union between two families
 - Arranged marriages have been illegal since 1950.
 - But parents play an important role in choice of spouse.



Family

□ Encouraging marriage

- For security... and grandchildren
- Young people sometimes **rent** boyfriends or girlfriends to reassure parents of interest in marriage.



Family

- Encouraging marriage
 - Or rent “shopping boyfriends” in malls.



Family

□ Weddings

- Can be Western-style...
- or traditional (more fun?)



Part of tea ceremony



Double happiness

Family

- Honoring ancestors
 - Burn incense during **Spring Festival**
 - Lunar New Year
 - Leave offering during **Qīngmíng Festival**
 - “Grave sweeping,” similar to Memorial Day



Spring festival 2024 (Year of the Dragon): 10 Feb, public holiday 9-15 Feb.
Qīngmíng Festival 2024 (similar to Memorial Day): 4 April.

Interpersonal Relationships

□ Among associates

- Show courtesy, humility. Take care to **save face**.
- Before speaking or acting, consider the effect on **face**.





Interpersonal Relationships

□ Among associates

- More important to be **nice** than **right**.
 - **Universalizing** Westerners believe differences can be resolved by reason and fairness.
 - In China, life is based on **personal relationships**, which must be preserved
- So, **one must not give offense in the first place.**

Interpersonal Relationships

- Among associates
 - When differences must eventually be resolved...
 - ...**defer** to older relatives, boss, government official.



Interpersonal Relationships

- When there is no common authority
 - Rely on *guānxì*
 - cultivated by exchange of favors over years.
 - A relationship of **mutual trust**.
 - ***Guānxì* is absolutely essential to business and diplomacy.**



Interpersonal Relationships

□ Among strangers

- No need to preserve relationships.
- **Rudeness**, shoving may occur in public.
- Yet crime rate is **low**.
- Why? Family.



Interpersonal Relationships

□ Introductions

- Exchange **business cards**.
 - Receive card with both hands.
- Avoid direct eye contact.



Interpersonal Relationships

□ Introductions

- Accept offer of (green) tea.





Interpersonal Relationships

□ Forms of address

- Surname first: **Wang Lin** is Mr. Wang (*Wáng xiānsheng*).
- May use **Lin Wang** in English-speaking context.

□ Titles preferred

- *Lǎo Wáng* Old Wang
- *Xiǎo Wáng* Young Wang
- *Wáng jīnglǐ* Manager Wang
- *Wáng jiàoshòu* Professor Wang

Interpersonal Relationships

- No-touch culture in public
 - Handshakes OK
 - Don't bow (a Japanese thing).



Not a good idea

Interpersonal Relationships

- Different sense of privacy
 - People may ask about your **age**
 - Advanced age is a **virtue**.
 - ... or your **salary** (to give you a chance to show off).
 - Emphasis on **family** privacy.



Meals

- Main object: **have fun.**
 - Host will seat you.
 - If you're clumsy with chopsticks, no problem.
 - People may giggle (all in good fun).
 - Don't fill your own teacup.
 - Don't take a drink until others do – there may be a toast.



Meals

- Just so you know...
 - Host may serve you with his/her chopsticks.
 - You don't want to know what you're eating.
 - Variety is the spice of life (and food).
 - Beware – Spicy side of Sichuan hot pot is **hot**.



Meals

□ Etiquette

- OK to slurp noodles.
- May need to ask for rice.
- There may be a dozen courses.
- Soup may come last.
- Don't blow your nose.
- Toothpick OK, but cover your mouth.



Superstition

□ (Un)lucky numbers

- 8 = wealth
- 9 = longevity
- 4 = death
- Good sequences: 168, 289, 518

Very
expensive
Hong Kong
license
plates



Superstition



Elevator panel

Superstition

□ Auspicious dates

- Consult lunar calendar or an astrologer.
 - Good dates for **travel**, **business**, **marriage**.



Mass wedding on Feb 22, 2022

Superstition

- *Fēng shuǐ*
 - Set of design principles
 - “**Wind & water,**” desirable location for a tomb.



Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Design follows *fēng shuǐ* principles

Superstition

- Why superstition?
 - Stress management.
 - Sense of control over one's life.



"Step on a crack, break your mother's back."

Health

□ Exercise regimens

- Develops **equanimity**, a Confucian virtue.
 - **Chi gong** (*qìgōng*)
≈ energy exercise
 - **Tai chi chuan** (*tàijíquán*)
≈ supreme boxing



Morning chi gong in park



Tai chi chuan

Health

□ Medicine

- Not universalizing.
- A mix of “scientific” and folk medicine.
- Whatever **works**.



Chinese medicinal herbs

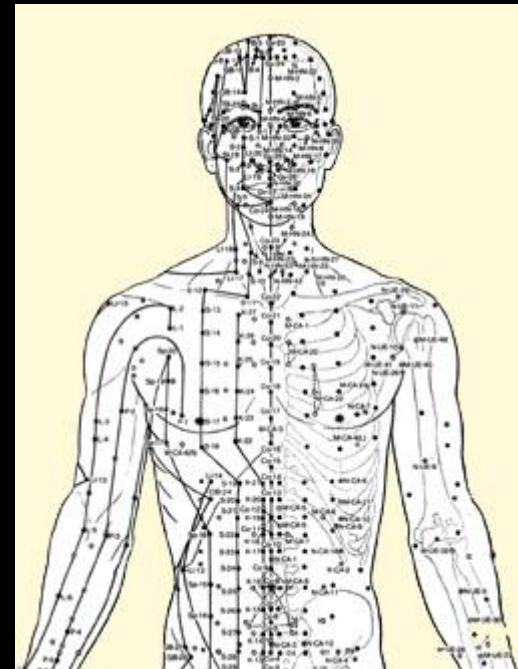


Chinese MRI machine

Health

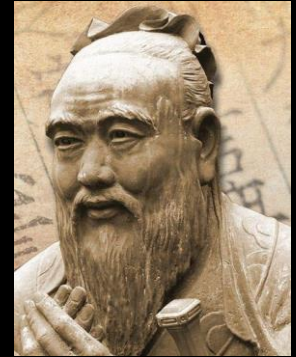
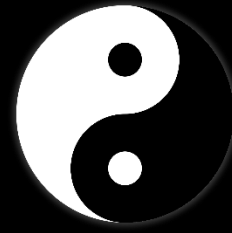
□ Acupuncture

- Redirects qi along 365 meridians.
 - Qi = negative entropy.
- Approved by FDA in 1996.
 - Endorsed by NIH for certain treatments.
- Placebo effect?
 - Placebo effect is an **effect**.



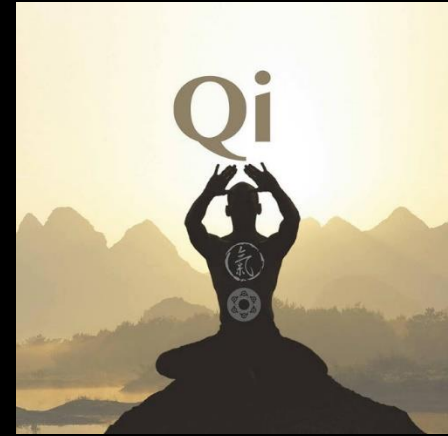
Philosophy

- Domestic traditions
 - *Yīn/yáng* cosmology
 - **Daoism**
 - **Confucianism**
 - **Folk** religions
- Imported religion
 - Mahayana **Buddhism** with Chinese flavor



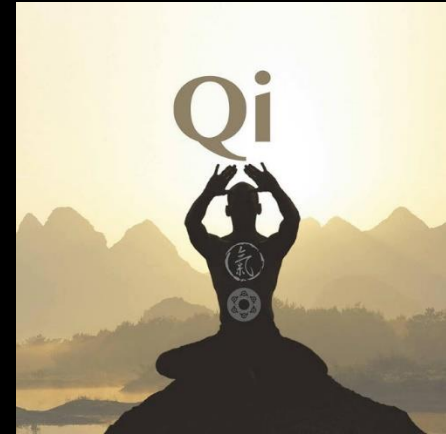
Philosophy

- *Yīn/yáng* cosmology
 - Principle of **complementarity**
 - Opposites generate *qì* (roughly, negative entropy)
 - Cold/hot, female/male, dark/light, etc.



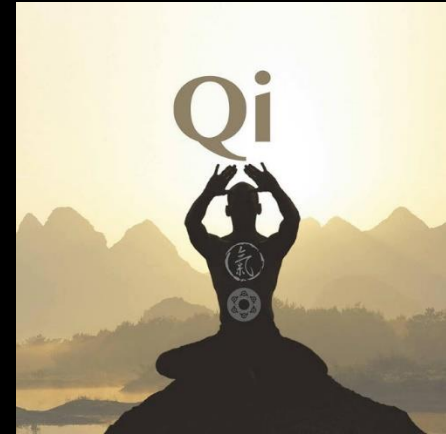
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- Differs from Western **good/evil duality**
 - Roots in Zoroastrian religion (Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu).



Philosophy

- **Yīn/yáng** cosmology
 - Principle of **complementarity**
 - Opposites generate **qì** (roughly, negative entropy)
 - Cold/hot, female/male, dark/light, etc.
- Differs from Western **good/evil duality**
 - Roots in Zoroastrian religion (Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu).
- The universe is **good**
 - Problems (e.g. illness) result from **imbalance** of *yīn* and *yáng*.

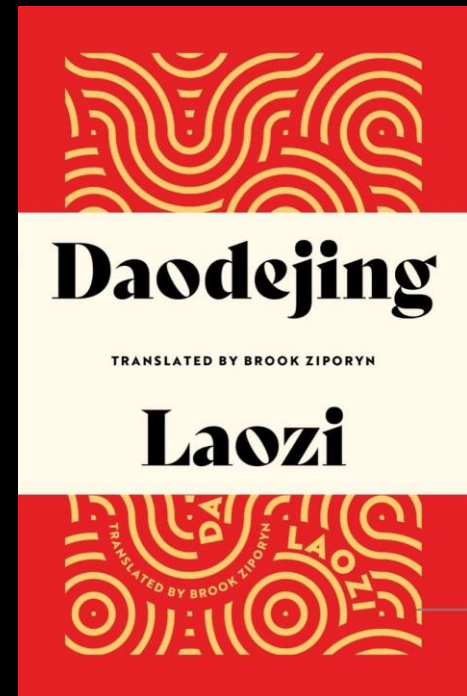




Philosophy

□ Daoism

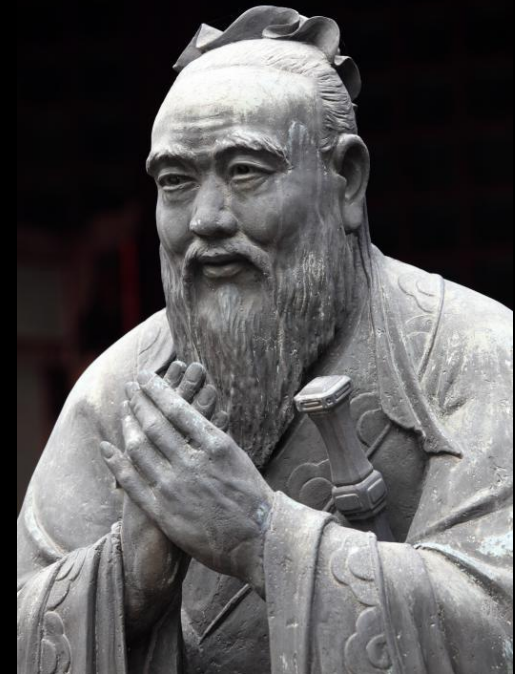
- Live according to nature
 - “Go with the flow.”
- Not helpful for understanding today’s Chinese culture?
 - Much as **Stoicism** doesn’t characterize today’s Western cultures.



Philosophy

□ Confucianism

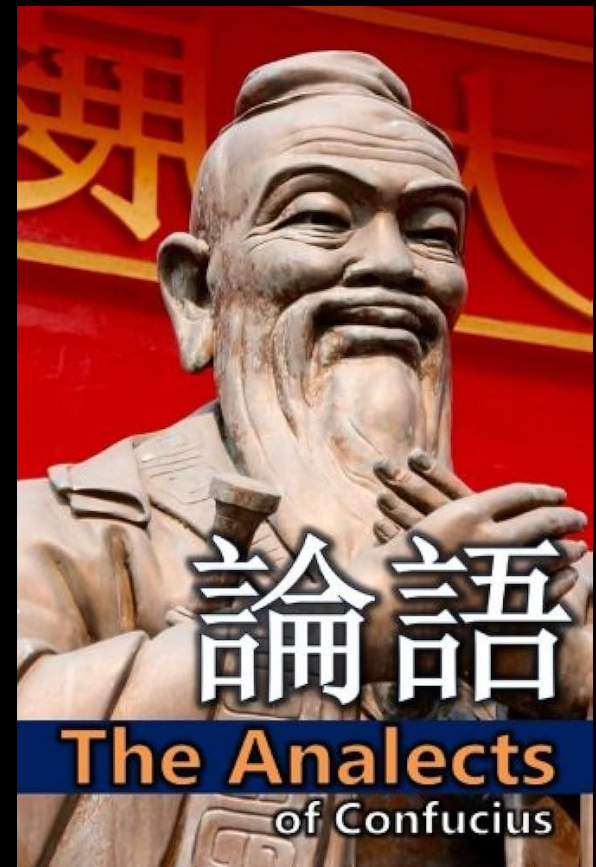
- Articulates the essence of historical Chinese culture
- Focus on 3 aspects especially relevant today:
 - **Family**
 - **Leadership**
 - **Education**



Confucius, 551-479 bce
In Chinese, *Kǒng fū zǐ* or *Kǒng zǐ*
(Master Kong)

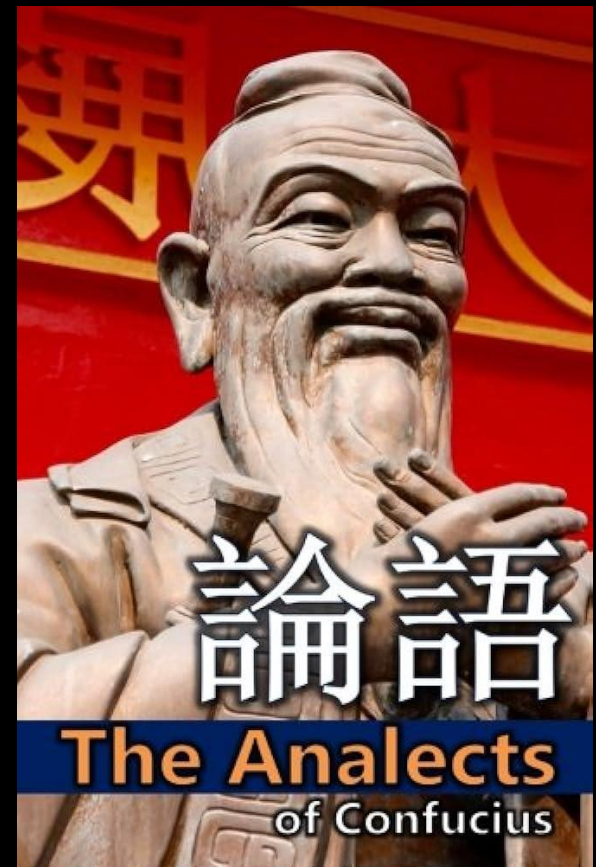
Philosophy

- Who was Confucius?
 - An itinerant teacher/advisor and would-be government official
 - Loved lifelong learning!
 - Held minor positions.
 - Began his travels during mid-life crisis.
 - Like Socrates, wrote nothing
 - Disciples recorded his thoughts.



Philosophy

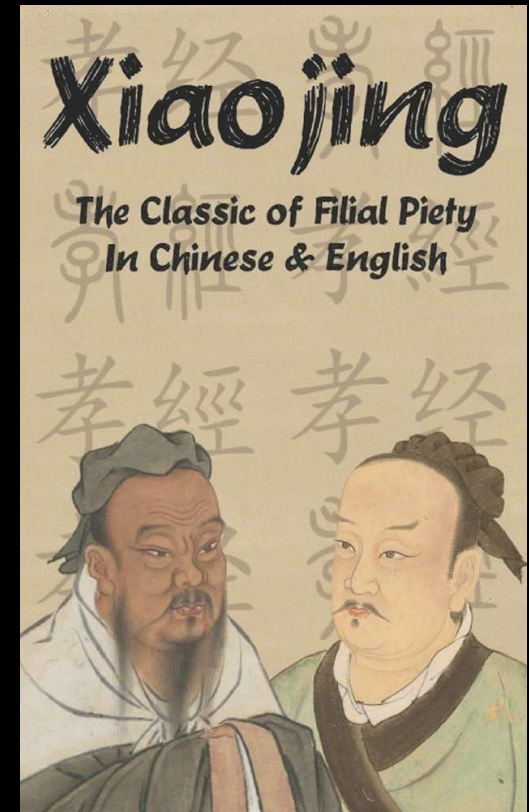
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 - Like Socrates, wrote nothing
 - Disciples recorded his thoughts.
 - Ultimately viewed his life as a failure.



Philosophy

□ The Confucian family

- Filial piety
 - Obligations to parents, grandparents, and ancestors.
 - The only **legitimate power relation** is one modeled on parent/child relationship.
 - Whence high power distance.
- A **bedrock principle** of Chinese society



Based on dialog between Confucius and disciple Zēngzǐ.

Philosophy

□ The Confucian leader

- Must act as a **good parent**
 - Otherwise there is no legitimate authority.
- Must therefore have **good character**.
 - Role model: Duke of Zhou, 11th c. bce, who developed the concept of **Mandate of Heaven**.



Kǒng family home in Qufu



Duke of Zhou temple, Qufu 50

Philosophy

□ The Confucian leader

- Must act as a **good parent**
 - Otherwise there is no legitimate authority.
- Must therefore have **good character**.
 - Role model: Duke of Zhou, 11th c. bce, who developed the concept of **Mandate of Heaven**.
- Lifelong process
 - A person of good character acquires autonomy with **age**.
 - Whence filial piety!



Kǒng family home in Qufu



Duke of Zhou temple, Qufu 51

Philosophy

□ Confucian education

- The foundation of character
 - **Everyone can and should be educated.**
 - Human beings are instinctively **altruistic**.
 - But this trait must be **cultivated**.

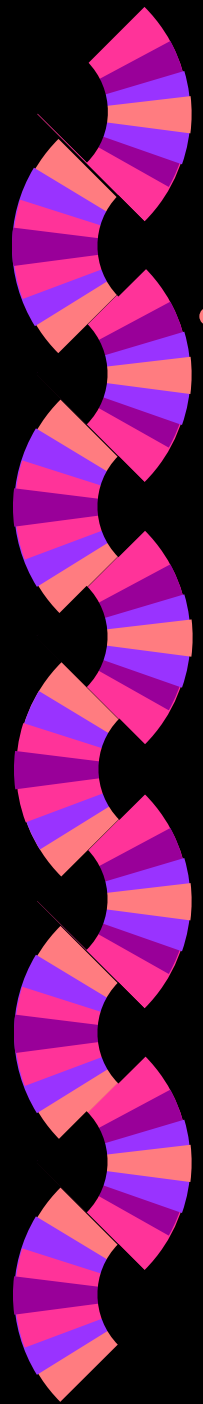


Philosophy

□ Confucian education

- The foundation of character
 - **Everyone can and should be educated.**
 - Human beings are instinctively **altruistic**.
 - But this trait must be **cultivated**.
- A view reinforced by Confucian disciple Mencius (*Mèngzǐ*)
 - Parable of the child in danger.
 - *Mèng mǔ sān qiān* – Mencius' mother, three moves.





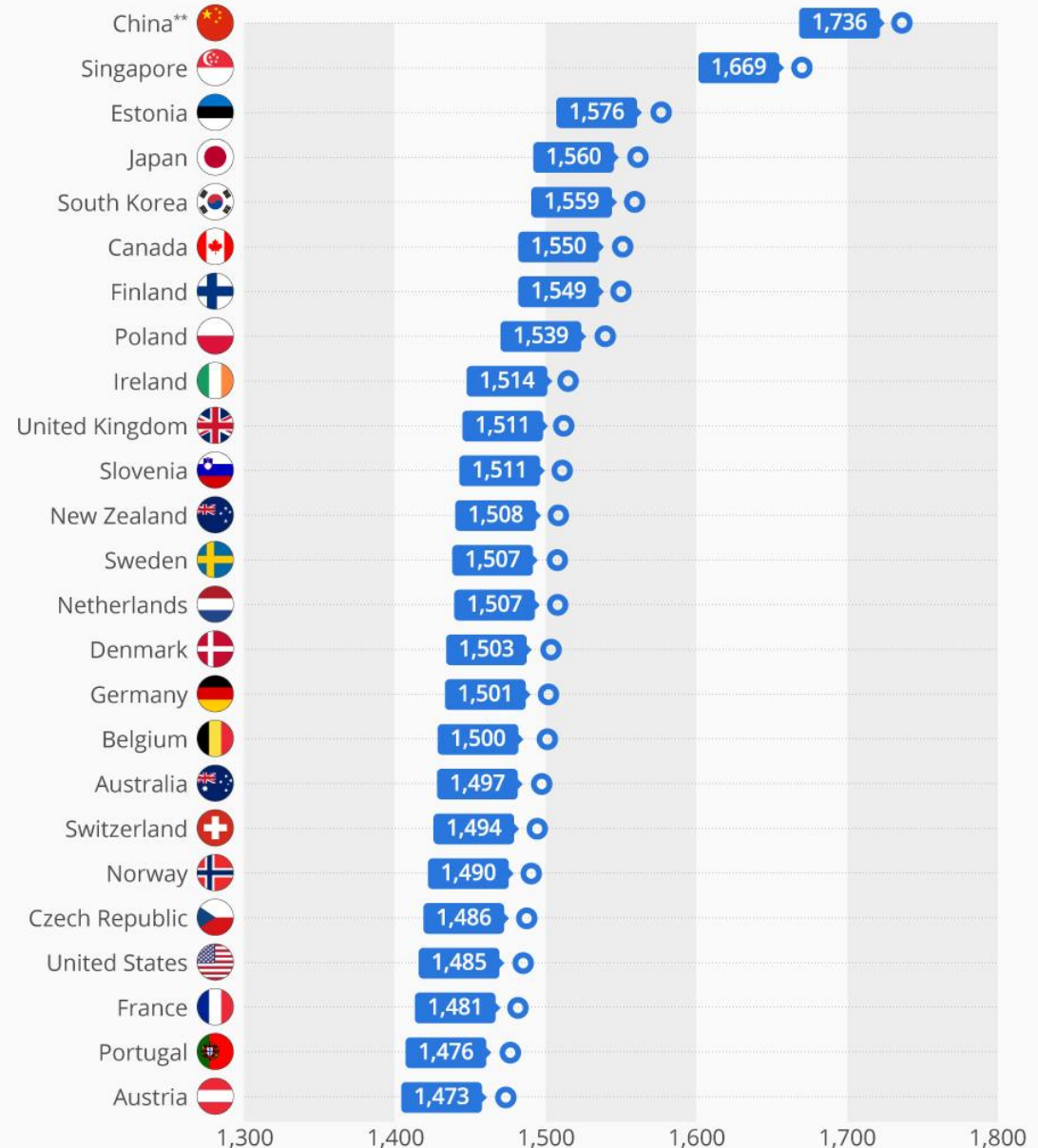
• “No excuses” view of education

- Everyone **can** and **should learn**.
- Regardless of “talent,” whatever that is.

China and Singapore have equally superior scores on the math portion of the test.

PISA 2018: The Top Rated Countries

Sum of mean science, reading and mathematics scores from the OECD PISA Results 2018*



* PISA=Programme for International Student Assessment

** Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang



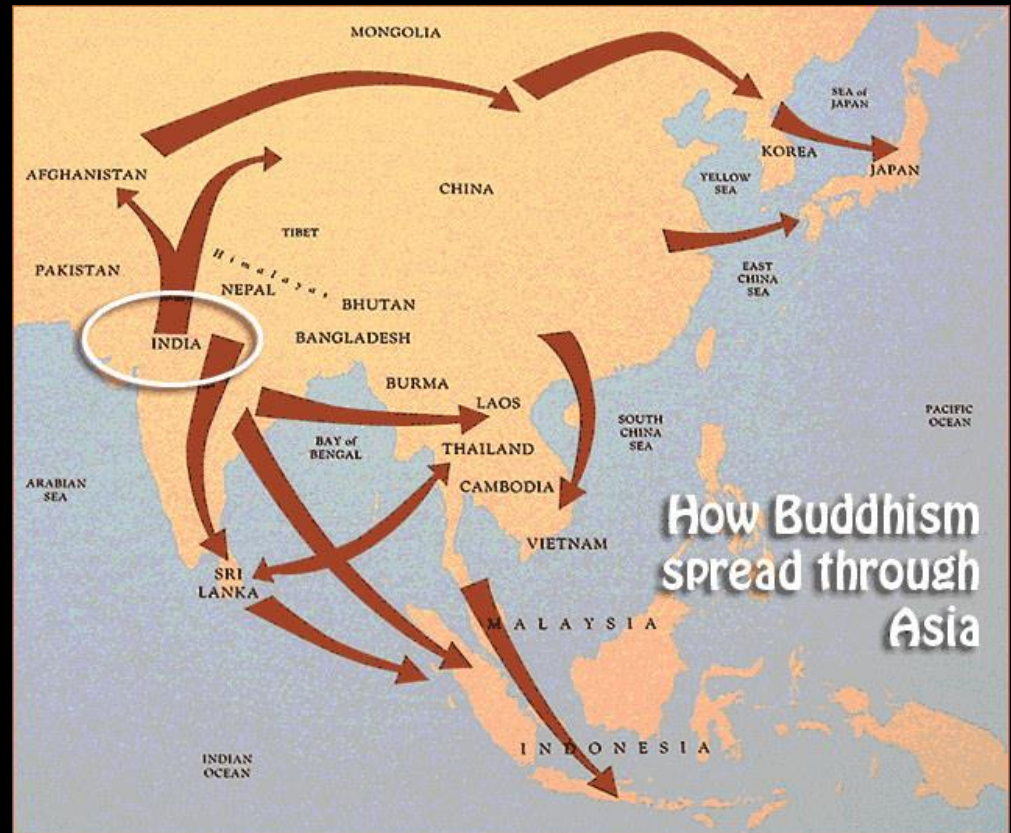
@StatistaCharts

Source: OECD

Philosophy

□ Buddhism

- An import from India/Nepal
- China developed its own variety of Mahayana Buddhism
 - “Pure Land” Buddhism especially popular.



Philosophy

□ **Buddhism**

- An import from India/Nepal
- China developed its own variety of Mahayana Buddhism
 - “Pure Land” Buddhism especially popular.
 - Tendency to pray to the Buddha for protection or good fortune



Laughing Buddha, popular in China

Philosophy

□ **Buddhism**

- How many Chinese are Buddhists?



Philosophy

□ Buddhism

- How many Chinese are Buddhists?
 - A meaningless question.
 - Chinese see no need to “buy into” or “convert to” an exclusive religion or philosophy.

