

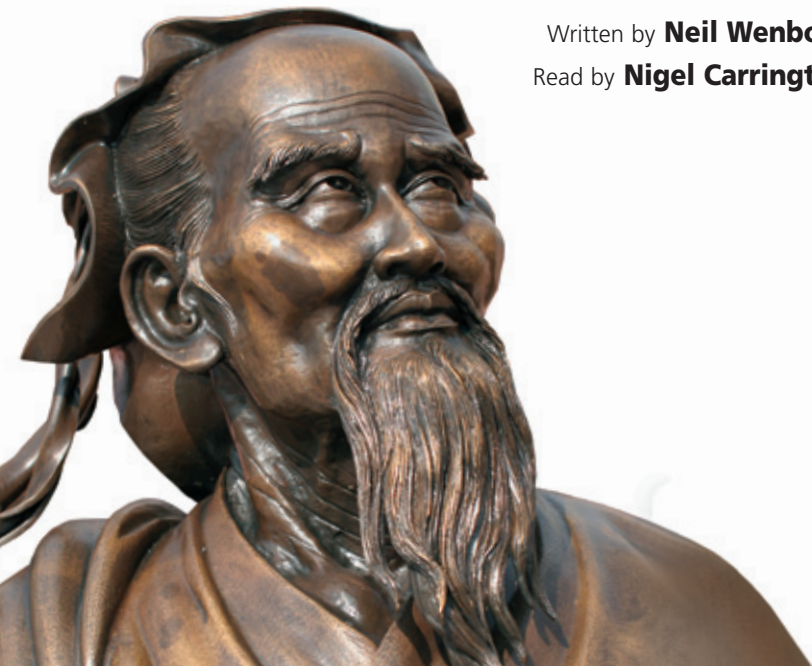


CONFUCIUS

IN A NUTSHELL

Written by **Neil Wenborn**

Read by **Nigel Carrington**



1	Confucius – In a Nutshell by Neil Wenborn	5:06
2	Whatever else he was, the Duke of Zhou...	5:37
3	About Confucius's private life we know next to nothing....	4:20
4	Confucius's stint as police commissioner came to a sudden end...	4:32
5	He was clearly an inspirational teacher...	4:22
6	The <i>Analects</i> as we now have it consists of 20 so-called 'books'...	4:56
7	Round the corner from the by-street...	5:15
8	We look to the <i>Analects</i> in vain, however...	4:52
9	The <i>Analects</i> shows us a very human Confucius...	5:22
10	The Way, or dao, is mentioned several times in the <i>Analects</i> .	4:15
11	Confucius expands on this in another conversation...	5:13
12	At his most pragmatic, he takes an almost utilitarian view...	4:11
13	What Confucius has to say about Fate or Destiny...	4:56
14	Central to this remarkable cultural triumph...	4:27
15	Throughout the period when the Classics were being formalised...	3:15
16	Central to this Neo-Confucian metaphysics...	4:14
17	Mao Zedong, who swept to power in the Communist Revolution...	3:34

Total time: 78:41

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'Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.'

'A people will not stand if it lacks trust.'

'To say you know when you know,
and to say you do not when you do not,
that is knowledge.'

These are just three of the hundreds of sayings attributed to Kong fuzi, or Master Kong, an obscure teacher who lived two and a half millennia ago in a backwater of the region we now call China. Sometimes pithy, sometimes conversational, occasionally enigmatic, often profoundly searching, those sayings form the basis of one of the world's most lasting cultural traditions – a tradition which, over the course of 25 centuries, has, arguably, shaped the lives of more people than any other. As the fountainhead of that tradition, Kong fuzi, universally known

in the West as Confucius, is one of the undisputed giants in the history of human thought. Indeed, he is arguably the most enduring of all the world's great thinkers.

Confucius is many things to many people. He has been seen as an agnostic and as the founder of one of the world's great religions. He has been hailed as an egalitarian in an age of autocrats, and condemned as an elitist in an age of democracy. For some he is a peddler of ancient superstitions, for others the model of a rational humanist, even a distant ancestor of the European Enlightenment.

Celebrated as a source of inexhaustible wisdom, he has also been derided as a music-hall caricature, spouting banalities in mock-oriental patois.

But whichever Confucius we choose, there is no sign of him going away. Born in the sixth century BCE,¹ he is still a living presence on the world stage. His teachings, accorded the kind of reverence we associate more with prophets than with philosophers, formed the basis of the educational and political system in China into modern times. As late as 1906 ritual sacrifice to Confucius was raised to the same level as sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, by becoming one of the Great Sacrifices performed by the Emperor himself. And only in 1905 did detailed study of the *Analects* – the slender volume with the strongest claim to represent Confucius's actual words – cease to be a requirement for entry to the Chinese civil service. After years of official censure during the 20th century, Confucianism is again widely studied in universities throughout China, and popular interest in Confucius himself has reached new levels in East Asia and beyond. At the beginning of the third

millennium, far from withering away under the glare of modern communications, this figure from the distant past is the subject of a blockbuster movie, a multi-episode television series, and a self-help guide whose sales worldwide are numbered in the millions. His insights continue to serve, as they have served so often in the past, as touchstones for the moral health of the individual, the family and the body politic.

Confucius has often been described as the founder of a new school of thought. He has even been seen to stand in the same relation to Confucianism as the Buddha stands to Buddhism or Christ stands to Christianity. But his self-image was that of a conservator, not an innovator, a conduit rather than a wellspring. Like many of his contemporaries, he looked to the past as a golden age of social and political harmony, and sought in its values a means of navigating the present and of shaping the future. In particular, he looked to the time, some 500 years before his birth, when the Zhou established themselves as what would prove the longest-lasting of all China's ruling dynasties. In this sense, Confucianism might be said to have

begun centuries before Confucius, just as it continued for centuries after him; and Confucius's own career might be likened to the neck of an hourglass, concentrating the accumulated wisdom of the past and passing it on to expand once more in the minds and lives of future generations.

This audiobook sets Confucius's thought in the wider context of political and intellectual life in China, from the earliest times to the present day. It looks at what can be reclaimed of his life and character from the accretions of fact, speculation and myth that gathered around his name in the centuries after his death. It also examines what, through the mists of 2,500 years, can be glimpsed of his original teachings, and how those teachings were developed and remodelled, sometimes almost beyond recognition, in the hands of later generations of his followers. It is a long and complicated journey through what, to Westerners at least, is frequently unfamiliar territory. But it is also a journey in the company of a man whose voice seems often to belong as much to our time as to his own, and whose values remain central to our

understanding of what it means to live a good life in an ever more interconnected global society.

Notes by Neil Wenborn

- 1 Because the traditional Western dating system has its roots in a single religion, Christianity, scholars studying other religious or philosophical traditions increasingly use the terms BCE and CE instead of BC and AD. This audiobook follows their practice. CE stands for Common Era and BCE for Before Common Era, but the numbering of the years remains the same – 2000 BC becomes 2000 BCE, for example, and 2000 AD becomes 2000 CE.

Dynasties of China

Xia

?2205–?1600 BCE (semi-legendary)

Shang

c.1600–c.1050 BCE (semi-legendary)

Zhou

c.1050–256 BCE

Western Zhou (c.1050–771 BCE)

Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE)

Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 BCE)

Warring States Period (403–221 BCE)

Qin

221–206 BCE

Han

206 BCE –220 CE

Former Han (206 BCE–220 CE)

Xin Dynasty (9–23 CE)

Later Han (25–220 CE)

Age of Division

220–589

Three Kingdoms Period (220–265)

Western Jin (265–316)

Eastern Jin (317–420)

Southern and Northern Dynasties (386–581)

Sui

581–617

Tang

618–907

Five Dynasties

907–960

Song

960–1276

Northern Song (960–1126)

Southern Song (1127–1276)

Yuan

1276–1368

Ming

1368–1644

Qing

1644–1911

Republic

1911–

Republic of China (1911–)

People's Republic of China (1949–)



Nigel Carrington has been a regular on the London voice-over circuit since 1981. He is also a former member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. He has narrated over 60 unabridged audio titles, and played Nigel Pargetter in *The Archers* 1986–89 and Dr David Boyce in *Westway* 1997–2005, for BBC World Service Drama. His television credits include *Jonathan Creek*, *Kavanagh QC*, *The Bill*, *Casualty*, *Coronation Street*, *London Bridge* and *Brookside*. His West End credits include *Hamlet*, *No Mans Land*, *Taking Sides* and *Collaboration*. His film credits include The Warden in *The Dark Knight*.



Neil Wenborn is a freelance writer and publishing consultant, whose work has appeared widely both in Britain and in the United States. Co-editor of the highly respected *History Today Companion to British History* (Collins & Brown) and *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge University Press), he has also written biographies of Haydn and Stravinsky, and is the author of *Dvořák* and *Mendelssohn* in Naxos's *Life and Music* series. His recent publications include a study of Jane Austen's *Emma* (humanities-ebooks.co.uk) and *The French Revolution – In a Nutshell* (Naxos AudioBooks). A collection of his award-winning poetry, *Firedoors*, is published by Rockingham Press.

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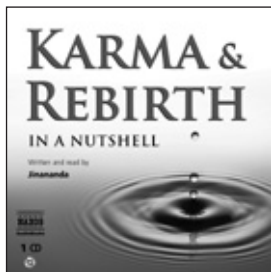
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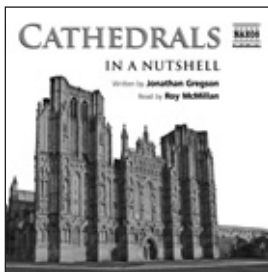
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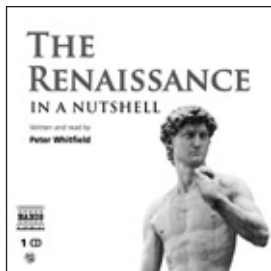
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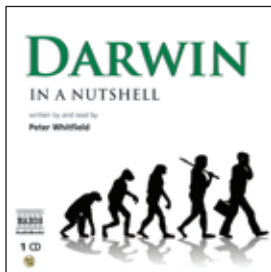
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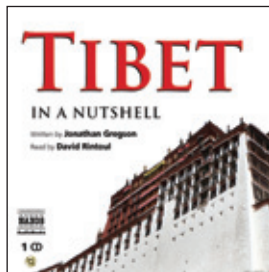
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Written by **Neil Wenborn**
Read by **Nigel Carrington**

Confucius stands alone among the world's great thinkers. Perhaps no other teacher has exerted so powerful a hold over so many people for so long. For two and a half millennia his sayings, preserved and developed by generations of his followers, have shaped the cultural and political life of the world's most populous nation, and they continue to offer fresh insights for today's globalised society. This audiobook sets Confucius's life and teachings in the context of the long history of China, and examines the origins, meanings and influence of one of history's most enduring philosophical traditions.



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