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一 当今之世，舍我其谁——生平、抱负和著作

Chapter I During the Present Age Nobody Can Achieve
It, but I! Life, Aspirations, and Works

In ancient China the greatest persons were called “sages.” The original meaning of “sage” was clever. Only those who possessed the greatest wisdom and virtue, and who were able to invent culture, implements, and institutions or who were able to save the people in deep water were worthy of being called sages. In ancient Chinese records and legends, Fuxi, Nü wa, and Shennong were the so-called sages since the creation of the world, who were collectively termed the “Three August Ones.” Following them came Huangdi, Zhuanxu, Diku, Yao and Shun, known as the “Five Emperors.” Afterwards appeared Yu of Xia, Tang of Shang, and King Wen of Zhou, called the “Three Kings” and then Confucius, who lived between 551 B.C. to 479 B.C. He deeply felt the crisis in the ancient cultural tradition created by political turbulence and moral decay, and so self-consciously took upon himself the burden of assuming the tradition of moral governance transmitted since the times of Yao and Shun. His self-appointed task was thus to elucidate the civilization based on ritual and music that had been the legacy of King Wen of Zhou, King Wu of Zhou, and the Duke of Zhou. Confucius termed this tradition of civilization or culture of approximately 2500 years in duration “culture” (*wen*). He travelled all around the various kingdoms promoting his own positions. Once he went to a place called Kuang, where he was mistaken by the populace for a nobleman who had once pillaged the place. This led to him becoming besieged. Yet he was full of confidence as he spoke to his disciples, saying: “After the death of King Wen, hasn’t ‘culture’ fallen to me to transmit? If Heaven above desired to destroy ‘culture’, then why would it choose me to inherit it? If Heaven does not desire this to happen, then what could the people of Kuang do to me?” ¹

Although Confucius was unable to become a sage king, his lifetime of itinerant teaching, education, and method of composition preserved the ancient writings, elucidated the ancient culture, and criticized the amoral government. He also founded private teaching and the Confucian school of thought; therefore he was venerated by later generations as a “sage,” and called “the Most Holy First Teacher.” The meaning of this title is the greatest sage and the earliest teacher. Because he was the explainer of culture to Chinese people, the ancients said: “If Heaven had not created Confucius, all time would have been one long night of darkness.” In world history, Confucius, together with Socrates who lived from 469 to 399 B.C., and Sakyamuni, who lived between 560 B.C. to 480 B.C. as well as Jesus Christ who lived later, from the turn of the era until 30 A.D., became four great philosophers who created models of

在中国古代，最伟大的人物被称为“圣人”。“圣”的原意是聪明。只有那些最有智慧和道德，并能发明文化、器物、制度或者拯救民众于水深火热之中的人才能被称为圣人。在中国古代文献或传说中所谓自天地开辟以来的圣人，有伏羲、女娲、神农，称为“三皇”；接着有黄帝、颛顼、帝喾、尧、舜，称为“五帝”；以后还有夏禹、商汤、周文王，称为“三王”。而生活在公元前551年至479年间的孔子，深切地感受到古代文化传统因为政治的动荡和道德沦丧而产生的危机，便自觉地承担起继承尧、舜以来的德治教化传统，以阐释周文王、武王及周公以来的礼乐文明为己任。孔子称这样一个具有2500年左右的文明或文化传统叫做“文”。他周游列国，推行自己的主张。一次走到一个叫匡的地方，被民众误认为是某个掠夺过当地的贵族，因而遭到围困。他却非常自信地对弟子们说：“周文王死了，‘文’不都承担在我的身上吗？如果上天想要灭绝‘文’，哪就不会选中我来承担它；如果上天不想这样做，这些匡地的民众能拿我怎样？”^①

虽然孔子没有能够成为一个帝王，但他一生以游说、教育和著述的方式保存古代的文献，阐释古代的文化，批评不道德的政治，开创了私人讲学和儒家学派，因此被后人推尊为“圣人”，称之为“至圣先师”，意思是最了不起的圣人和最早的教师。因为他是中国人的文化启蒙者，所以古人说：“天不生仲尼，万古如长夜”。在世界史上，孔子与生活在公元前469年至公元前399年间的苏格拉底、与生活在公元前560年至480年间的释迦牟尼以及迟至公元元年至公元30年间的耶稣并称为四位

^① 《论语·子罕第九》5章。按，本书引述古代文献，均译为现代汉语。

^① *Analects*, “Zihan,” 9.5. In this work all citations from ancient works will be translated into modern Chinese.