Confucius is important because he argues that a good government should rule by virtue rather than by force. This idea has been the mainstream thought of all good governments in China and abroad. I believe it still applies to all good governments. This is his relevance to modern world.

He teaches that a virtuous government must be based on some understanding of humanity or ren. In Chinese history, Confucius is the first thinker who made humanity the only key issue of his thought. Surprisingly, his ren is what western thinkers usually call the Golden Rule.
Humanity means ‘Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.’ (己所不欲，勿施於人)

This is a negative way of putting it. Positively, Confucius said: ‘A man of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent.’ (夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人)

I believe this is a truth universal to all cultures and nations. Following it, a nation will rise; otherwise, it will fall.
To be specific, humanity means some rules of action for different people. Confucius said: Let a ruler be a ruler, the minister be a minister, the father be a father, and the son be a son. (君君，臣臣，父父，子子)

Untranslatability in terms of its simplicity and clarity.

He further explains that ‘A ruler should employ his minister according to the principle of propriety, and ministers should serve their ruler with loyalty.’ (君使臣以礼，臣事君以忠)

Likewise, a father should be caring to his children, and children filial to their parents. And friends faithful to each other.
Force is needed in government, but it must be subject to virtue. About their relation, Confucius teaches that “Lead the people with governmental measures and regulate them by law and punishment, and they will avoid wrongdoing but will have no sense of honor and shame. Lead them with virtue and regulate them by the rules of propriety, and they will have a sense of shame, and moreover, set themselves right.”

- 道之以政，齐之以刑，民免而无耻；道之以德，齐之以礼，有耻且格。
• Confucian classics remained to serve as the civil service examination for over 800 years in China. Many of its main ideas are living values of the Chinese. For example, now we advocate the Rule by Virtue (以德治国).

• Good as it may be, Confucianism did have some critics. Taoism may be its most famous and important critic. Laozi (Lao Tsu) is believed to be twenty years senior to Confucius, and the latter was recorded to have asked the former about the rites in ancient times.
Laozi taught that Tao/Way is the creator and determinant of all things in the world. ‘Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after Tao. And Tao models itself after Nature.’

(人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。)

What does Nature mean? It is not only the nature of scientists, but more importantly, it is the way of Tao itself. Tao has nothing to model on except itself. It is as it is.
• What is Tao like? ‘Tao is eternal and has no name. Though its simplicity seems insignificant, none in the world can master it.’ (道常无名。朴虽小，天下莫能臣。)
• Laozi despised and blamed Confucian virtues for they did not go so far as to reach Tao. ‘Only when Tao is lost does the doctrine of virtue arise. When virtue is lost, only then does the doctrine of humanity arises. When humanity is lost, only then does the doctrine of righteousness arises. When righteousness is lost, only then does the doctrine of propriety arises. Now, propriety is a superficial expression of loyalty
and faithfulness, and the beginning of disorder.’

(失道而后德，失德而后仁，失仁而后义，失义而后礼。夫礼者，忠信之薄，而乱之首。)

Laozi couldn’t see in advance that Mencius would provide an ontology for Confucianism 180 years later. Mencius said, “He who exerts his mind to the utmost knows his nature. He who knows his nature knows Heaven.”
• (孟子曰：尽其心者，知其性也。知其性，则知天矣)

• This is the well-known principle of heaven-man unity in Chinese philosophy. We reach heaven through thought.

• To Laozi, a sage ruler should govern by Tao, not by virtue. From a ruler’s point of view, ‘I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed. I love tranquility and the people of themselves become correct. I engage in no activity and the people of themselves become prosperous. I have no desires and the people of themselves become simple.’
Let’s compare the two thought. Confucianism says we must do everything to change the world better: ‘It is man that makes Tao great, not Tao that makes man great (人能弘道，非道弘人).’ But Taoism says we needn’t do anything: ‘I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed’ [我无为，而民自化]. Are they really opposed to each other?
• Not really. They are **different approaches** to the same Tao: Confucianism says, **before we get at Tao**, we need to take actions to explore it and put it into practice; Taoism says, **after we get at Tao**, we needn’t take any action but live by it. Confucian action means to pursue Tao, while Taoist no-action means to live by it.
• The unity between Confucianism and Taoism is the universal Tao of man and the world.
• The diversity between them is their approaches to achieve Tao. On the one hand, Confucius saw the ruler’s ignorance of and reluctance to pursuing Tao, hence his taking action; on the other hand, Laozi saw the ruler’s many actions other than pursuing Tao, hence his taking no action.
• **Relevance of Confucianism to modern life:** To follow the principle of humanity, we will enjoy peace and order; otherwise, we may get into war and disorder.

• **Relevance of Taoism to modern life:** To follow the course of Nature (Tao), we will enjoy not only peace and order, but also health, and harmony between man and environment; otherwise, we may run into danger. For ‘Not to know the eternal is to act blindly to result in disaster.’

• (不知常，妄作，凶)
• We see that Confucianism is more receptive to and eager to learn from other ideas than Taoism. So it became orthodoxy in Chinese culture.

• In conclusion, history shows that a learning culture must be a promising culture and a learning world a promising world. I suppose that should be the reason why we are here and what we are looking for.