Xun Zi / Hsun Tzu 荀子

1, Overview
Hsun Tzu or Xunzi is usually considered as one of the two divergent tendencies in ancient Confucianism: one is Mencius' idealistic Confucianism and the other Xunzi's naturalistic Confucianism. Xunzi's dates are not definitely known, probably between 298-238 B.C. He argued that human nature is bad, so we need law and rules of propriety to control our feelings. So he is considered diametrically opposed to Mencius.

He exerted far greater influence up through the Han period (206 B.C.- 220 A.d.) than did Mencius. In his advocacy of control, he contributed to the totalitarianism that resulted in the dictatorship of the Qin (221-206 B.C.). Two of the ministers of the Qin, Han Fei (d. 233 B. C.) and Li Si (d. 208 B.C.), were his pupils. His influence was extensive in the Han. However, since then, he was largely neglected until the 19th century. Mencius was regarded as in the direct line of transmission from Confucius. He was contemporaneous with Mencius, but there is no evidence that the two ever met. His writing is named after him as Xunzi.

2, Human nature is evil
Superficially it seems that Xunzi had a very low opinion of man, yet the truth is quite the contrary. His main view is that everything that is good and valuable is the product of human effort. Value comes not from nature but from culture. In this sense man is as important as Heaven and Earth. He said: ‘Heaven has its seasons, earth has its wealth, and man has
his government. This is how they are able to form a triad.’

Mencius said the sage seeks to know Heaven. In contrast, Xunzi said ‘the sage does not seek to know Heaven.’  

Why? Because we can do nothing about it. Heaven and earth have distinctive functions of their own. So he said, ‘Is it not much better to heap up wealth and use it advantageously than to exalt heaven and think about it?’  

Xunzi argues that ‘the nature of man is evil; his goodness is acquired training’. As to the relation between nature and culture, he said: ‘nature is the unwrought material of the original; what are acquired are the accomplishments and refinements brought about by culture. Without nature there would be nothing upon which to add the acquired. Without the acquired, nature could not become beautiful of itself.’  

Despite the opposition between him and Mencius, Xunzi agrees that common people may become a sage. ‘any man in the street can become a Yu (a traditional sage).’

Unlike Mencius who said that we are good by nature, Xunzi said that we may become good because we are originally intelligent. ‘Every man in the street has the capacity of knowing humanity, righteousness, law and uprightness, and the means to carry out these principles.'
Thus it is evident that he can become a Yu.’[然而涂之人也，
皆有可以知仁义法正之质，皆有可以能仁义法正之具，
然则其可以为禹明矣。]

3, **Rites** Morality and rites are two sides of the same coin. Xunzi explains them pragmatically. ‘A single individual needs the support of the accomplishments hundreds of workmen. Yet an able man cannot be skilled in more than one line, and one man cannot hold two offices simultaneously. If people all live alone and do not serve one another, there will be poverty.’ [故百技所成，所以养一人也。而能不能兼技，
人不能兼官。离居不相待则穷]

The origin of rites and morality: Xunzi asks: ‘Whence do the li (rites) arise? The answer is that man is born with desires. When these desires are not satisfied, he cannot remain without seeking their satisfaction. When this seeking for satisfaction is without measure or limit, there can only be contention. When there is contention, there will be disorder. When there is contention, everything will be finished. The early kings hated this disorder, and so they established the li (rules of conduct) and yi (righteousness), to set an end to this confusion.’ [礼起于何也？曰：人生而有欲，欲而不得，则不能无求。求而无度量分界，则不能不争；争则乱，乱则穷。先王恶其乱也，故制礼义以分之，以养人之欲，给人之求。使欲必不穷于物，物必不屈于欲。两者相持而长，是礼之所起也。]
Xunzi on death: The rites are careful about the treatment of man’s life and death. Life is the beginning of man, and death is his end. If the beginning and end of man are both well treated, the Way of Humanity is complete...If we render adequate service to our parents when they are living but not when they are dead, that means that we respect our parents when they have knowledge, but neglect them when they do no. [礼者，谨于治生死者也。生、人之始也，死、人之终也，终始俱善，人道毕矣...夫厚其生而薄其死，是敬其有知，而慢其无知也。]

In the same chapter, he continued to say that the superior men ‘exist to render the same service to the dead as to the living, to render the same service to the lost as to the existing. What they serve has neither shape nor even a shadow, yet they the completion of culture and refinement.’ [事死如事生，事亡如事存，状乎无形影，然而成文。] With this interpretation, the meaning of mourning and sacrificial rites becomes completely poetic, not religious. This attitude towards death remains unchanged with many Chinese.