

## Life and Teachings of Confucius

- Confucius, the great Chinese sage, was born June 19th, 551 B.C. at Shang-ping, in the country of Lu.
- His own name was Kong, but his disciples called him Kong-fu-tse, (i.e. Kong the Master, or Teacher,) which the Jesuit missionaries Latinized into Confucius.
- His father died when Confucius was only three years of age, but he was very carefully brought up by his mother, Yan-she, and from his earliest years, displayed an extraordinary love of learning, and veneration for the ancient laws of his country.
- When only 19 Confucius married, but divorced his wife four years after marriage that he might have more time for study and the performance of his public duties.
- The death of his mother, which occurred in his 23rd year, gave occasion to the first solemn and important act of Confucius as a moral reformer.
- He shut himself up in his house to pass in solitude the three years of mourning for his mother, the whole of which time he dedicated to philosophical study.
- We are told that he reflected deeply on the eternal laws of morality, traced them to their source, imbued his mind with a sense of the duties they impose indiscriminately on all men, and determined to make them the immutable rule of all his actions.
- Henceforth his career is only an illustration of his ethical system.
- He commenced to instruct his countrymen in the precepts of morality, exhibiting in his own person all the virtues he inculcated in others.
- Gradually his disciples increased, as the practical character of his philosophy became more apparent.
- His disciples generally were not the young and enthusiastic, but men of middle age, sober, grave, respectable, and occupying important public situations.
- It was moral, not religious, and aimed exclusively at fitting men for conducting themselves honorably and prudently in this life.
- Confucius travelled through various states, in some of which he was well received, while in others he was not much appreciated.
- His later wanderings were very unpropitious: state after state refused to be improved.
- Finally seeing no hope of securing the favourable attention of the mass of his countrymen while alive, he returned in extreme poverty to his native state, and spent his last years in the composition of literary works, by which posterity at least might be instructed. He died 479 B.C., in the 70th year of his age.

Immediately after his death, Confucius began to be venerated and his family was distinguished by various honors and privileges.

## Teachings of Confucius

Confucius expounded a system of social and political philosophy which he conveyed to a group of disciples. His teachings and sayings were later collected by the disciples of Confucius in a book known in the West as the Analects.

### Confucianism teaches 5 virtues

- **Ren** (Jen), that refers to altruism and humanity. परोपकारिता एवं मानवता
  - **Yi**, that refers to righteousness. न्यायसंगत
  - **Li**, that refers to good conduct.
  - **Zhi**, that refers to knowledge.
  - **Xin**, which means loyalty. विश्वसनीयता
- Confucius said that he was not an innovator and that all of his teachings were merely rediscoveries of what had been true in the past.
  - Society was said to have deviated from an earlier Golden Age, and it was his task to guide it back to its proper condition. Appeals to ancient authority were probably customary at the time, and it is not true that Confucius was merely relating ideas which had existed before. In fact, there is reason to believe that much of what Confucius taught was revolutionary at the time, as witnessed by the fact that after his death Chinese emperors attempted to suppress the spread of Confucianism by burning his books and executing Confucian scholars. However Confucianism and the teachings of Confucius eventually prevailed, and Confucianism eventually received Imperial sanction and came to be adopted as the state "religion" (the word religion is in quotes because there is debate whether Confucianism is actually a religion or is simply a system of philosophy.) The privileged position of Confucianism within Chinese society lasted for many centuries, until the Communist takeover, and had a profound influence on the development of China.

The teachings of Confucius are focused on two interrelated areas: Social Teachings, which deal with the proper behaviour of the individual in society and to his fellow men, and Political Teachings, which deal with the art of governance and the proper relationship of the Ruler to the ruled. He viewed education as central to achieving proper conduct both within Society and in Government

### Social Teachings of Confucius

Confucius taught that people should have compassion for one another, and to avoid treating others in ways that they themselves would not wish to be treated: ❖What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.❖ (Analects 12.2)

In order to be compassionate, people should avoid self-aggrandizement and be ♦simple in manner and slow of speech.♦ They should practice altruism and self restraint.

Confucius taught that the key to achieving proper self-mastery was adherence to correct ritual. In Confucius' teachings, ritual encompassed both quasi religious practices as veneration of dead ancestors, as well as the broader concept of etiquette and correct social interaction. Confucius taught that there were mutual obligations arising between members of social relationships, for example as between Husband and Wife, Parents and Children, Older Brother and Younger Brother, and so on. Adherence to the proper conduct expected between members of these groupings would guarantee an harmonious relationship between them and also serve as the foundation of a just a stable society.

Although the subordinate members of a relationship (children to their parents, wives to their husbands) were required to be obedient, their obedience was not absolute and depended upon the superior member of the relationship (parent, husband for example) acting in accordance with his own obligations.

Confucius's teachings strongly emphasized the importance of following ritual. He said: "Look at nothing in defiance of ritual, listen to nothing in defiance of ritual, speak of nothing in defiance of ritual, never stir hand or foot in defiance of ritual." (Analects 12.1)

Within society, Confucius prescribed the following main ceremonies or rituals: Capping ( a joyous occasion when a son achieved manhood on his twentieth birthday - analogous to a Bar Mitzvah), marriage, mourning rites, sacrifices, feasts, and interviews. These ceremonies were quite complex and highly ritualized.

While to Westerners the emphasis on ritual may seem stultifying and oppressive, it must be remembered that the guiding principal in Confucius's social teachings is that people should follow the Five Virtues and love one another and treat each other with kindness, which is a concept shared by all great religions and humanistic philosophies.

### **Political Teachings**

Much of Confucius's teachings focused on the art of governance and how a ruler should act. Unlike Machiavelli, who expounded a concept of amoral statecraft in which he counseled the ruler on how to appear just in order to gain the trust of the people, while at the same time engaging in oppression and stratagems, Confucius advocated for true justice and compassion on the part of the ruler and the ruled. Only by being a just ruler would the ruler enjoy the Mandate of Heaven and continue to have the right to rule.

As with his social teachings, Confucius believed that the key to good governance lay in each man carrying out his duties as prescribed by his position within the hierarchy. He stated: ♦Good government consists in the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father, and the son being a son.♦ (Analects 12.11)

It was essential that the ruler possess virtue. Virtue would enable the ruler to retain the supreme position. ♦ He who governs by means of his virtue is, to use an analogy, like the pole-star: it remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it. ♦ (Analects 2.1) Remarkably, given the violent nature of his times, Confucius believed that rulers should not have to resort to force or the threat of punishment to maintain power. He stated: "Your job is to govern, not to kill" (Analects XII:19)

As in the case of social relationships such as those between parents and children, husbands and wives, Confucius believed that the rulers should observe proper ritual in order to maintain their position and right to rule. These rituals included giving proper sacrifices to the ancestors at the ancestral temples, the exchange of gifts between members of the nobility which bound them together in a web of obligation and indebtedness, and acts of etiquette and decorum such as bowing.

### **Confucius Teachings on Education**

Confucius taught that one the key to self mastery was through scholarship and study. He stated "He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger." (Analects 2.15) In his own teachings, Confucius did not expound, but rather used asked questions of his pupils and used analogies to classic texts. According to Confucius ♦ I only instruct the eager and enlighten the fervent. If I hold up one corner and a student cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not go on with the lesson. ♦ (Analects 7.8).

In exhorting men to become gentlemen or Superior Men, Confucius recommended diligent study under a master familiar with the rules of correct behaviour. He recommended learning from the classics. In time, Confucius's emphasis on education and his belief that position and rank should be based on merit, led to the establishment of an imperial bureaucracy in which admission was based not on birth but on how well the applicant did on the imperial examinations. This was an admirable system which in theory at least rewarded merit and therefore recruited the best candidates; however in practice, the school curriculum, which was based on meeting the requirements of the state examinations became stultified. Too great an emphasis was placed on knowing and being able to quote classical authors while science and economics were neglected. Although this had not been Confucius's intent, the result was that China's education system produced a traditionalist bureaucracy which was ill equipped to deal with military and economic problems.

China was eventually conquered by neighboring barbarians, who established their own dynasties, though they maintained the educational and examination system. When the rapidly rising European powers came to China, China was slow to adopt Western technological innovations and as a result China suffered further humiliations as it was partitioned among spheres of influence by Germany, England and other European powers from the 1800s to World War 2.

Confucianism became a major system of thought in Ancient China, developed from the teachings of Confucius and his disciples, and concerned with the principles of good conduct, practical wisdom, and proper social relationships. Throughout the feudal societies, it almost became dominant thinking. Confucianism has to some extent influenced the Chinese attitude toward life, set the patterns of living and

standards of social value. Its legacy and beliefs spread from China to Korea, Japan, Vietnam and other Asian nations.

While some Western scholars take it for a Chinese religious thinking, it is actually only a philosophy.

Its founder, Confucius, or K'ung-tze, or K'ung-Qiu, was born in 551 B.C., in what was then the feudal state of Lu, now included in the modern province of Shandong. Confucius was only three when his father died. From childhood he showed a great aptitude for study and became very learned. In the past, education was the privilege of the rich and the nobles, but Confucius broke this rule by opening his own school.

His 3000 disciples came from various social classes. Confucius taught them his own political thoughts, moral thinking, as well as code of conduct. Many of his disciples had also become important philosophers who continued or expanded upon Confucius thinking.

The reason Confucianism was favored and even taken as an orthodox system of thought during the feudal society was mainly because of its emphasis on class distinctions and obedience to one's superior, meeting the need and desires of the ruling class. He emphasized that every person should have a role in society: the emperor should well manage the state, officials should be loyal to the emperor, a son should obey his father, and a wife should obey her husband, and so on and so forth. On different occasions, one might have different roles to play, so he should act accordingly and properly. This way, the whole society would be kept very stable. The Emperor exercised an absolute authority over his subjects, as the father over his children.

The book Lun Yü or Analects contains a collection of maxims by Confucius and conversations with his disciples that form the basis of his moral and political philosophy. In the feudal society, the book was beheld somewhat like the Holy Bible. Commoners had to regulate one's code of conduct according to it. Lun Yu and other Confucius classics secured a firmer hold on Chinese intellectuals as candidates for responsible government positions, for they received their appointments on the strength of their knowledge of it.

Nonetheless, the book Lun Yu was not all made up of dogmatic preaching. In fact, the language is witty and lively and the content ranges from politics to study to music. Quite a few of the sentences have become proverbs that were popularly used in daily life.

Confucius

Says...

- 1. "If you govern with the power of your virtue, you will be like the North Star. It just stays in its place while all the other stars position themselves around it."**
2. "In my understanding of music, the piece should be begun in unison. Afterwards, if it is pure, clear and without break, it will be perfect."
3. "The noble man is not a utensil."
4. "To govern means to rectify. If you lead on the people with correctness, who will dare not to be correct?"

5. "The noble man is all-embracing and not partial. The inferior man is partial and not all-embracing."

6. "If a person lacks trustworthiness, I don't know what s/he can be good for. When a pin is missing from the yoke-bar of a large wagon, or from the collar-bar of a small wagon, how can it go?"

7. "To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous."

8. "If the noble man lacks gravitas, then he will not inspire awe in others. If he is not learned, then he will not be on firm ground. He takes loyalty and good faith to be of primary importance, and has no friends who are not of equal moral caliber. When he makes a mistake, he doesn't hesitate to correct it."

9. "I am not bothered by the fact that I am unknown. I am bothered when I do not know others."

10. "When the noble man eats he does not try to stuff himself; at rest he does not seek perfect comfort; he is diligent in his work and careful in speech. He avails himself to people of the Way and thereby corrects himself. This is the kind of person of whom you can say, 'he loves learning.'"

11. "The 300 verses of the Book of Odes can be summed up in a single phrase: 'Don't think in an evil way.'"

12. "Those who are born with the possession of knowledge are the highest class of men. Those who learn, and so readily get possession of knowledge, are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet compass the learning are another class next to these. As to those who are dull and stupid and yet do not learn—they are the lowest of the people."

13. "You, shall I teach you about knowledge? What you know, you know, what you don't know, you don't know. This is knowledge."

14. "If you govern the people legalistically and control them by punishment, they will avoid crime, but have no personal sense of shame. If you govern them by means of virtue and control them with propriety, they will gain their own sense of shame, and thus correct themselves."

15. "At fifteen my heart was set on learning; at thirty I stood firm; at forty I had no more doubts; at fifty I knew the mandate of heaven; at sixty my ear was obedient; at seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing the norm."

16. "People err according to their own level. It is by observing a person's mistakes that you can know his/her goodness."

17. "There are three things of which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of the sages. The mean man does not know the ordinances of Heaven,

and consequently does not stand in awe of them. He is disrespectful to great men. He makes sport of the words of the sages.”

**18.** “See a person’s means (of getting things). Observe his motives. Examine that in which he rests. How can a person conceal his character?”

**19.** “Someone who is a clever speaker and maintains a contrived smile is seldom considered to be a really good person.”

**20.** “Reviewing what you have learned and learning anew, you are fit to be a teacher.”

**21.** “To worship to other than one’s own ancestral spirits is flattery. If you see what is right and fail to act on it, you lack courage.”

**22.** “The noble man has nothing to compete for. But if he must compete, he does it in an archery match, wherein he ascends to his position, bowing in deference. Descending, he drinks the ritual cup. This is the competition of the noble man.”

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## **Confucius**

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Confucius (551?-479? BCE), according to Chinese tradition, was a thinker, political figure, educator, and founder of the *Ru* School of Chinese thought.<sup>[1]</sup> His teachings, preserved in the *Lunyu* or *Analects*, form the foundation of much of subsequent Chinese speculation on the education and comportment of the ideal man, how such an individual should live his life and interact with others, and the forms of society and government in which he should participate. Fung Yu-lan, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century authorities on the history of Chinese thought, compares Confucius’ influence in Chinese history with that of Socrates in the West.

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## 1. Confucius' Life

The sources for Confucius' life were compiled well after his death and taken together paint contradictory pictures of his personality and of the events in his life. The early works agreed by textual authorities to be relatively reliable sources of biographical material are: the *Analects*, compiled by Confucius' disciples and later followers during the centuries following his death; the *Zuozhuan*, a narrative history composed from earlier sources sometime in the fourth century; and the *Mengzi* or *Mencius*, a compilation of the teachings of the well-known eponymous fourth century follower of Confucius' thought put together by his disciples and adherents.<sup>[2]</sup> The Confucius of the *Analects* appears most concerned with behaving morally even when this means enduring hardship and poverty. Mencius' Confucius is a politically motivated figure, seeking high office and departing from patrons who do not properly reward him.<sup>[3]</sup> A third Confucius is found in the pages of the *Zuozhuan*. This one is a heroic figure courageously facing down dangers that threaten the lord of Confucius' native state of Lu.

Many of the stories found in these three sources as well as the legends surrounding Confucius at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century were included in a biography of Confucius by the Han dynasty court historian, Sima Qian (145-c.85), in his well-known and often-quoted *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*.<sup>[4]</sup> This collection of tales opens by identifying Confucius' ancestors as members of the Royal State of Song, a genealogy Sima Qian borrows from the *Zuozhuan*.<sup>[5]</sup> This same account notes as well that his great grandfather, fleeing the turmoil in his native Song, had moved to Lu, somewhere near the present town of Qufu in south-eastern Shandong, where the family became impoverished. Confucius' father is usually identified as Shu He of Zhou who, according to the *Zuozhuan*, led Lu armies in 563 and again in 556, acting with great valor and extraordinary strength (qualities for which his son would later be known according to the same historical source). Nothing of certainty is known of his mother; she may have been a daughter of the Yan family. Confucius was born in the walled town of Zhou in the state of Lu in 552 or in 551 according to the earliest sources that preserve such information about him. If the year of his birth was 551—the date most scholars favor—then, since that year was a *gengxu* year according to the traditional system of cyclical designations for years, Confucius was born under the sign of the dog. This may account for why, according to Sima Qian's biography, Confucius accepted as true the observation that in his sad and forlorn appearance he resembled a "stray dog."<sup>[6]</sup>

Confucius is described, by Sima Qian and other sources, as having endured a poverty-stricken and humiliating youth and been forced, upon reaching manhood, to undertake such petty jobs as accounting and caring for livestock.<sup>[7]</sup> Sima Qian's account includes the tale of how Confucius was born in answer to his parents' prayers at a sacred hill (*qiu*) called Ni. Confucius' surname *Kong* (which means literally an utterance of thankfulness when prayers have been answered), his tabooed given name *Qiu*, and his social name *Zhongni*, all appear connected to the miraculous circumstances of his birth. This casts doubt, then, on Confucius' royal genealogy as found in the *Zuozhuan* and *Shiji*. Similarly, Confucius' recorded age at death, 'seventy-two,' is a 'magic number' with far-reaching significance in early



Chinese literature. It is not surprising that we can say little about Confucius's childhood beyond noting that he probably spent it in the Lu town where he is reported to have been born. There are many important figures in early Chinese history about whose youth we know even less. Almost as if to provide something to fill this lacuna in his account of Confucius, Sima Qian says that, "As a child [of five, according to some highly imaginative hagiographers], Confucius entertained himself by habitually arranging ritual vessels and staging ceremonies," thus prefiguring the philosopher's famous interest in rites.

We do not know how Confucius himself was educated, but tradition has it that he studied ritual with the fictional Daoist Master Lao Dan, music with Chang Hong, and the lute with Music-master Xiang. In his middle age Confucius is supposed to have gathered about him a group of disciples whom he taught and also to have devoted himself to political matters in Lu. The number of Confucius' disciples has been greatly exaggerated, with Sima Qian and other sources claiming that there were as many as three thousand of them. Sima Qian goes on to say that, "Those who, in their own person, became conversant with the Six Disciplines [taught by Confucius], numbered seventy-two." The *Mencius* and some other early works give their number as seventy. Perhaps seventy or seventy-two were a maximum, though both of these numbers are suspicious given Confucius' supposed age at death.

In 525, when Confucius was twenty-seven or twenty-eight, he is supposed by the authors of the *Zuo zhuan* to have visited the ruler of the small state of Tan in order to learn bureaucratic history from him and then to marvel, with reflexive condescension, at how such knowledge was lost to the Son of Heaven but "may still be studied among the distant border peoples of the four quarters." The theme of the extreme inquisitiveness of the young Confucius is also reflected in the *Analects*: "When the Master entered the Grand Temple he asked questions about everything. Someone said, 'Who said that this son of a man from Zhou knows about ritual? When he entered the Grand Temple he asked about everything.' When the Master learned of this he observed, 'Doing so is prescribed by ritual'" (*Lunyu* 3.15).<sup>[8]</sup>

Two *Zuo zhuan* passages—that relate to events that took place in 522 when Confucius would have been thirty or thirty-one—lay claim to what appear to be among the first times when Confucius uttered judgment on the behavior or reputation of others. The first of these has to do with Duke Jing of Qi (r. 547–490) whom Confucius criticized for becoming angry with an underling determined to fulfil his official responsibilities even when that meant disobeying a direct order from his ruler. The other is his "tearful" comment when he learned of the death of the Zheng statesman Zi Chan: "The love for others seen among the ancients survived in him."<sup>[9]</sup>

In another *Zuo zhuan* passage that occurs not long after these two, the Lu nobleman Ming Xizi, immediately before his death in 518, praised Confucius as "the descendant of a sage" and instructed the grand officers who attended him that, upon his death, they should entrust his two sons to Confucius. These are strong signals that in the eyes of the authors of the *Zuo zhuan*, Confucius was by this time in his life established as a person of significance in Lu. Meng Xizi went on, however, and declared that what another Lu nobleman named Zang Sunhe had once said was true in the case of Confucius: "If a sage possessed of bright virtue does not fit the age in which he lives then surely among his descendants there will be one who is

successful.” Meng Xizi’s *Zuozhuan* speech should be read not only as indicative of a turning point in Confucius’ early career—his emergence from obscurity—but also as the first of many ancient declarations that Confucius was worthy of a crown that he would not receive in his lifetime.

Politics in Confucius’ native Lu were extremely unstable because of the challenge to the ruler posed by the “three Huan families” which had the hereditary right to occupy the most powerful ministerial offices in the Lu government. In 517 Duke Zhao of Lu moved against the head of the most powerful—and the wealthiest—of the families: the Ji clan. But the attack failed and the duke was forced to flee from Lu and spend the remaining years of his reign in exile, first in Lu’s large neighbor Qi and then in a town in the state of Jin where he died in 510. According to Sima Qian, when Duke Zhao was first forced into exile, Confucius also went to Qi to serve as a retainer in the household of the nobleman Gao Zhaozi. The *Analects* mentions how, during this period in Qi, Confucius heard for the first time a performance of the sacred Shao music and was overwhelmed by the experience and then had an audience with Duke Jing of Qi in which Confucius observed that what Qi required was that “The ruler should be a ruler, his subjects subjects, the father should be a father, and his son a son” (*Lunyu* 12.11). He was no doubt commenting on politics in Qi where—as was also the case in Lu—power rested not in the hands of the ruler but instead in the hands of the powerful ministerial families who were supposed to serve him. Some unidentified adversity probably precipitated Confucius’ departure from Qi. And it seems that back home in Lu he was fairsing poorly in locating employment. So noteworthy was this failure that a passage in the *Analects* comments on it: “Someone asked Confucius, ‘Why is it that you are not in government?’ Confucius replied, ‘The *Documents* say, “Be filial, oh, only be filial! Be friendly toward your brothers and extend this to governing.” Practicing this is also to govern. Why must one be in office to govern?’” (*Lunyu* 2.21). As noted earlier, what mattered to the Confucius of the *Analects* was not winning an official position but remaining faithful to the moral behavior he valued.<sup>[10]</sup>

Whether or not Confucius held any important office in Lu is a much-debated point, but from the *Mengzi* onward, there is consistent ancient testimony that he was director of crime (*si kou*). The *Zuozhuan* confirms that he held the post starting sometime around 509.<sup>[11]</sup> We know very little of what Confucius accomplished in the job and nothing about his understanding of his responsibilities. Given what one might expect a director of crime to do—to enforce the law and impose corporal punishments on those found guilty of crime—it is odd to think that Confucius served in the role given his famous opposition to the use of fines and punishments, dismissing them as ineffective and counterproductive in governing people: “If they are led by virtue, and uniformity sought among them through the practice of ritual propriety, the people will possess a sense of shame and come to you of their own accord” (*Lunyu* 2.3). The contradiction among our sources is paradigmatic of the problems we face in figuring out the events in Confucius’ life. Perhaps the claims that Confucius served as director of crime are fictional. Perhaps he did serve in the role and learned from the experience the ineffectiveness of punishment in maintaining order in society. Or perhaps the *Analects* passage is an interpolation—something Confucius himself never said—added by a branch of his school that wanted to represent their master as strongly opposed to legalistic measures in spite of his having served as a law enforcement officer in Lu.

As it is presented in the *Zuozhuan*, the single most important event in Confucius' official career in Lu, and perhaps even in his lifetime, was the 500 BCE meeting at Jiagu in the state of Qi when he was called upon to protect the life of Duke Ding of Lu (r. 509–495) and defend the honor of his native state. To formalize a peace agreement between Lu and Qi, the rulers of the two states met at Jiagu and signed an oath promising to abide by certain terms and conditions lest they be harshly dealt with by the gods and spirits. Confucius' role in the event is described in the text as that of "overseer" of the protocols of the meeting. The Qi ruler and his lieutenants had plotted to use the occasion to humiliate Lu and perhaps even to seize Lu's ruler. The Confucius of the *Zuozhuan* is shown as adroit and skilful in dealing with these dangerous circumstances. He succeeds not only in getting Qi to withdraw its armed men from the meeting but also to return to Lu lands that Qi had previously appropriated in return for Lu's future participation in Qi's military adventures.<sup>[12]</sup>

If Confucius in fact experienced some sort of triumph at Jiagu, tales about the period following his return to Lu speak of intense conflict among the three Huan families and between them and Duke Ding. The duke attempted to have the families tear down the walls of the fortresses that secured their fiefs—the duke's argument was that the fortresses might be seized by lower-ranking stewards and thus were more of a threat than a benefit to the families—but the population of the Ji family fortress at Bi rebelled and attacked the Lu capital threatening the life of the duke. Again, Confucius came to the duke's rescue and the rebellion by the Bi masses was eventually put down by the army of Lu. However, the Meng family simply refused to tear down the walls that protected their family fortress at Cheng. Duke Ding led an army to lay siege to Cheng and level its walls but he failed to do so and his weakness and ineptitude were made all the more obvious by this failure.

What role Confucius played in the duke's plans is difficult to determine. It seems rather that, at least according to the *Zuozhuan*, his disciple Zi Lu, in the employ of the Ji family, played a more significant part. Whatever the case may be, in the stories that follow this dramatic tale, Confucius, along with Zi Lu and other disciples, departed Lu late in 498 and went into exile.<sup>[13]</sup> As in other ancient cultures, exile and suffering are common themes in the lives of the heroes of the early Chinese tradition. In the company of his disciples, Confucius travelled in the states of Wei, Song, Chen, Cai, and Chu, purportedly looking for a ruler who might employ him but meeting instead with indifference and, occasionally, severe hardship and danger. Several of these episodes, as preserved in Sima Qian's account, appear to be little more than prose retellings of songs found in the ancient Chinese *Book of Songs*. Confucius' life is thus rendered a re-enactment of the suffering and alienation of the personas of the poems. *Analects* 6.28 claims that while he was in Wei, Confucius visited its ruler's wicked consort Nanzi. Confronted by Zi Lu's displeasure, Confucius swore he did not do anything wrong with the woman. While it is possible to suspect that the story is a later addition to the *Analects*, that does not mean that it is less believable than anything else the text says about events in Confucius' life. Later on, in the state of Song, Confucius just barely escaped with his life from an attack by Marshal Huan, a formidable Song nobleman, who for unknown reasons was intent on killing him.<sup>[14]</sup> During these difficulties Confucius got separated from his favorite disciple Yan Hui. When they were subsequently reunited, Confucius said, "I assumed you were dead!" Yan Hui responded, "While the Master is alive, how would I, Hui, dare to die?" (*Lunyu* 11.21). Still later in his exile, while in the tiny state of Cai,

Confucius is supposed to have encountered the disreputable Shen Zhuliang, better known by his title “duke of She,” who along with other noblemen from the great southern state of Chu were occupying Cai and herding about its population. According to passages in the *Analects*, the duke of She asked Confucius about the art of governing and also asked Zi Lu about Confucius’ character. Both passages are meant to suggest that Confucius found the duke lacking in virtue and learning.<sup>[15]</sup>

Their time in the small state of Chen was especially precarious for Confucius and his followers: “While in Chen, food supplies for the journey were cut off. Followers fell ill and none was able to rise to his feet. Zi Lu, indignant, saw Kongzi and asked, ‘Is it right that even the superior man should be reduced to poverty?’ The Master replied, ‘A superior man remains steadfast in the face of poverty; the small man, when impoverished, loses all restraint’” (*Lunyu* 15.2). Confucius’ reply to Zi Lu is not merely a lesson on the distinction between the superior man’s endurance of hardship and the tendency of his opposite, the petty individual, to resort to crime. Confucius is drawing the distinction when all were in straitened circumstances and as such his words should be read as a pointed reminder to Zi Lu and the other disciples traveling with him at the time that, in spite of the difficulties they were facing, they should adhere to the highest standards of ethical behavior. Perhaps it was Zi Lu’s indignation that triggered in Confucius a worry that his followers might take extreme and even immoral measures to find food. Either inspired by this story or informed by tales and traditions that are lost to us, a passage in the *Mozi*—a text that preserves a political and social philosophy greatly at odds with the teachings of Confucius and the Ru school—claims that Confucius, who had a reputation for being scrupulous about his meals, ate pork given him by Zi Lu even though he had reason to believe that Zi Lu had stolen it.<sup>[16]</sup> Other passages in the *Analects* hint that Confucius was disturbed by the behavior of some of his followers while they were abroad with him and by their failure to make more progress in the cultivation of the moral values he prized.<sup>[17]</sup>

In any case, by most traditional accounts, after a brief second visit to Wei, Confucius returned to Lu in 484. The Ji family was still the most powerful in Lu as they had been when Confucius had departed in the aftermath of Duke Ding’s aborted efforts to dismantle the fortresses of the three Huan families. While he had some interaction with the head of the Ji family as well as with the reigning Lu ruler, Duke Ai, Confucius appears to have spent the remainder of his life teaching, putting in order the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, and other ancient classics, as well as editing the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the court chronicle of Lu. Sima Qian’s account also provides background on Confucius’ connection to the early canonical texts on ritual and on music (the latter of which was lost at an early date). Sima Qian claims, moreover, that, “In his later years, Confucius delighted in the *Yi*”—the famous divination manual popular to this day in China and in the West. The *Analects* passage which appears to corroborate Sima Qian’s claim seems corrupt and hence unreliable on this point. Confucius’ traditional association with these works led them and related texts to be revered as the “Confucian Classics” and made Confucius himself the spiritual ancestor of later teachers, historians, moral philosophers, literary scholars, and countless others whose lives and works figure prominently in Chinese intellectual history.

Our best source for understanding Confucius and his thought is the *Analects*. But the *Analects* is a problematic and controversial work, having been compiled in variant versions long after Confucius' death by disciples or the disciples of disciples. Some have argued that, because of the text's inconsistencies and incompatibilities of thought, there is much in the *Analects* that is non-Confucian and should be discarded as a basis for understanding the thought of Confucius.<sup>[18]</sup> Benjamin Schwartz cautions us against such radical measures: "While textual criticism based on rigorous philological and historic analysis is crucial, and while the later sections [of the *Analects*] do contain late materials, the type of textual criticism that is based on considerations of alleged logical inconsistencies and incompatibilities of thought must be viewed with great suspicion... . While none of us comes to such an enterprise without deep-laid assumptions about necessary logical relations and compatibilities, we should at least hold before ourselves the constant injunction to mistrust all our unexamined preconceptions on these matters when dealing with comparative thought."<sup>[19]</sup> The difficulties in reading and interpreting the text of the *Analects* have given rise to numerous extensive commentaries that struggle to untangle the complexities of its language and thought.<sup>[20]</sup>

Book X of the *Analects* consists of personal observations of how Confucius comported himself as a thinker, teacher, and official. Some have argued that these passages were originally more general prescriptions on how a gentleman should dress and behave that were relabelled as descriptions of Confucius. Traditionally, Book X has been regarded as providing an intimate portrait of Confucius and has been read as a biographical sketch. The following passages provide a few examples of why, more generally, it is difficult to glean from the *Analects* a genuinely biographical, let alone intimate, portrait of the Master.

Confucius, at home in his native village, was simple and unassuming in manner, as though he did not trust himself to speak. But when in the ancestral temple or at Court he speaks readily, though always choosing his words with due caution. (*Lunyu* 10.1)

When at court conversing with the officers of a lower grade, he is friendly, though straightforward; when conversing with officers of a higher grade, he is restrained but precise. When the ruler is present he is wary, but not cramped. (*Lunyu* 10.2)

On entering the Palace Gate he seems to contract his body, as though there were not sufficient room to admit him. If he halts, it must never be in the middle of the gate, nor in going through does he ever tread on the threshold. (*Lunyu* 10.4)

When fasting in preparation for sacrifice he must wear the Bright Robe, and it must be of linen. He must change his food and also the place where he commonly sits. He does not object to his rice being thoroughly cleaned, nor to his meat being finely minced. (*Lunyu* 10.7, 10.8)

When sending a messenger to enquire after someone in another country, he bows himself twice while seeing the messenger off. (*Lunyu* 10.15)

In bed he avoided lying in the posture of a corpse ... On meeting anyone in deep mourning he must bow across the bar of his chariot. (*Lunyu* 10.24, 10.25)

*Analects* passages such as these may not satisfy a modern reader looking for some entry into understanding the connection between Confucius the man and Confucius the thinker, but they did succeed in rendering Confucius *the* model of courtliness and personal decorum for countless generations of Chinese officials.

By the fourth century, Confucius was recognized as a unique figure, a sage who was ignored but should have been recognized and become a king. At the end of the fourth century BCE, Mencius says of Confucius: “Ever since man came into this world, there has never been one greater than Confucius.” And in two passages Mencius implies that Confucius was one of the great sage kings who, according to his reckoning, arises every five hundred years. Confucius also figures prominently as the subject of anecdotes and the teacher of wisdom in the writings of Xunzi, a third century follower of Confucius’ teachings. Indeed chapters twenty-eight to thirty of the *Xunzi*, which some have argued were not the work of Xunzi but compilations by his disciples, look like an alternative, and considerably briefer, version of the *Analects*.

Confucius and his followers also inspired considerable criticism from other thinkers. The anecdote quoted earlier from the *Mozi* is an example. The authors of the *Zhuangzi* took particular delight in parodying Confucius and the teachings conventionally associated with him. But Confucius’ reputation was so great that even the *Zhuangzi* appropriates him to give voice to Daoist teachings.

## 2. Confucius’ Ethics

Confucius’ teachings and his conversations and exchanges with his disciples are recorded in the *Lunyu* or *Analects*, a collection that probably achieved something like its present form around the second century BCE. While Confucius believes that people live their lives within parameters firmly established by Heaven—which, often, for him means both a purposeful Supreme Being as well as ‘nature’ and its fixed cycles and patterns—he argues that men are responsible for their actions and especially for their treatment of others. We can do little or nothing to alter our fated span of existence but we determine what we accomplish and what we are remembered for.

Confucius represented his teachings as lessons transmitted from antiquity. He claimed that he was “a transmitter and not a maker” and that all he did reflected his “reliance on and love for the ancients” (*Lunyu* 7.1). Confucius pointed especially to the precedents established during the height of the royal Zhou (roughly the first half of the first millennium BCE). Such justifications for one’s ideas may have already been conventional in Confucius’ day. Certainly his claim that there were antique precedents for his ideology had a tremendous influence on subsequent thinkers many of whom imitated these gestures. But we should not regard the contents of the *Analects* as consisting of old ideas. Much of what Confucius taught appears to have been original to him and to have represented a radical departure from the ideas and practices of his day.

Confucius also claimed that he enjoyed a special and privileged relationship with Heaven and that, by the age of fifty, he had come to understand what Heaven had mandated for him and for mankind. (*Lunyu* 2.4). Confucius was also careful to instruct his followers that they should never neglect the offerings due Heaven.

(*Lunyu* 3.13) Some scholars have seen a contradiction between Confucius' reverence for Heaven and what they believe to be his skepticism with regard to the existence of 'the spirits.' But the *Analects* passages that reveal Confucius' attitudes toward spiritual forces (*Lunyu* 3.12, 6.20, and 11.11) do not suggest that he was skeptical. Rather they show that Confucius revered and respected the spirits, thought that they should be worshipped with utmost sincerity, and taught that serving the spirits was a far more difficult and complicated matter than serving mere mortals.

Confucius' social philosophy largely revolves around the concept of *ren*, "compassion" or "loving others." Cultivating or practicing such concern for others involved deprecating oneself. This meant being sure to avoid artful speech or an ingratiating manner that would create a false impression and lead to self-aggrandizement. (*Lunyu* 1.3) Those who have cultivated *ren* are, on the contrary, "simple in manner and slow of speech" (*Lunyu* 13.27). For Confucius, such concern for others is demonstrated through the practice of forms of the Golden Rule: "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others;" "Since you yourself desire standing then help others achieve it, since you yourself desire success then help others attain it" (*Lunyu* 12.2, 6.30). He regards devotion to parents and older siblings as the most basic form of promoting the interests of others before one's own. Central to all ethical teachings found in the *Analects* of Confucius is the notion that the social arena in which the tools for creating and maintaining harmonious relations are fashioned and employed is the extended family. Among the various ways in which social divisions could have been drawn, the most important were the vertical lines that bound multigenerational lineages. And the most fundamental lessons to be learned by individuals within a lineage were what role their generational position had imposed on them and what obligations toward those senior or junior to them were associated with those roles. In the world of the *Analects*, the dynamics of social exchange and obligation primarily involved movement up and down along familial roles that were defined in terms of how they related to others within the same lineage. It was also necessary that one play roles within other social constructs—neighborhood, community, political bureaucracy, guild, school of thought—that brought one into contact with a larger network of acquaintances and created ethical issues that went beyond those that impacted one's family. But the extended family was at the center of these other hierarchies and could be regarded as a microcosm of their workings. One who behaved morally in all possible parallel structures extending outward from the family probably approximated Confucius's conception of *ren*.

It is useful to contrast this conception of *ren* and the social arena in which it worked with the idea of *jian ai* or "impartial love" advocated by the Mohists who as early as the fifth century BCE posed the greatest intellectual challenge to Confucius' thought. The Mohists shared with Confucius and his followers the goal of bringing about effective governance and a stable society, but they constructed their ethical system, not on the basis of social roles, but rather on the self or, to be more precise, the physical self that has cravings, needs, and ambitions. For the Mohists, the individual's love for his physical self is the basis on which all moral systems had to be built. The Confucian emphasis on social role rather than on the self seems to involve, in comparison to the Mohist position, an exaggerated emphasis on social status and position and an excessive form of self-centeredness. While the Mohist love of self is also of course a form of self-interest, what distinguishes it from the Confucian position is that the Mohists regard self-love as a necessary means to an

end, not the end in itself, which the Confucian pride of position and place appears to be. The Mohist program called for a process by which self-love was replaced by, or transformed into, impartial love—the unselfish and altruistic concern for others that would, in their reckoning, lead to an improved world untroubled by wars between states, conflict in communities, and strife within families. To adopt impartial love would be to ignore the barriers that privilege the self, one’s family, and one’s state and that separate them from other individuals, families, and states. In this argument, self-love is a fact that informs the cultivation of concern for those within one’s own silo; it is also the basis for interacting laterally with those to whom one is not related, a large cohort that is not adequately taken into account in the Confucian scheme of ethical obligation.

Confucius taught that the practice of altruism he thought necessary for social cohesion could be mastered only by those who have learned self-discipline. Learning self-restraint involves studying and mastering *li*, the ritual forms and rules of propriety through which one expresses respect for superiors and enacts his role in society in such a way that he himself is worthy of respect and admiration. A concern for propriety should inform everything that one says and does:

Look at nothing in defiance of ritual, listen to nothing in defiance of ritual, speak of nothing in defiance of ritual, never stir hand or foot in defiance of ritual. (*Lunyu* 12.1)

Subjecting oneself to ritual does not, however, mean suppressing one’s desires but instead learning how to reconcile one’s own desires with the needs of one’s family and community. Confucius and many of his followers teach that it is by experiencing desires that we learn the value of social strictures that make an ordered society possible (See *Lunyu* 2.4.). And at least for Confucius’ follower Zi Xia, renowned in the later tradition for his knowledge of the *Book of Songs*, one’s natural desires for sex and other physical pleasures were a foundation for cultivating a passion for worthiness and other lofty ideals (*Lunyu* 1.7).<sup>[21]</sup>

Confucius’ emphasis on ritual does not mean that he was a punctilious ceremonialist who thought that the rites of worship and of social exchange had to be practiced correctly at all costs. Confucius taught, on the contrary, that if one did not possess a keen sense of the well-being and interests of others his ceremonial manners signified nothing. (*Lunyu* 3.3) Equally important was Confucius’ insistence that the rites not be regarded as mere forms, but that they be practiced with complete devotion and sincerity. “He [i.e., Confucius] sacrificed to the dead as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits as if the spirits were present. The Master said, ‘I consider my not being present at the sacrifice as though there were no sacrifice’” (*Lunyu* 3.12).

### **3. Confucius’ Political Philosophy**

Confucius’ political philosophy is also rooted in his belief that a ruler should learn self-discipline, should govern his subjects by his own example, and should treat them with love and concern. “If the people be led by laws, and uniformity among them be sought by punishments, they will try to escape punishment and have no sense of shame. If they are led by virtue, and uniformity sought among them through the practice of ritual propriety, they will possess a sense of shame and come to you



of their own accord" (*Lunyu* 2.3; see also 13.6.). It seems apparent that in his own day, however, advocates of more legalistic methods were winning a large following among the ruling elite. Thus Confucius' warning about the ill consequences of promulgating law codes should not be interpreted as an attempt to prevent their adoption but instead as his lament that his ideas about the moral suasion of the ruler were not proving popular.

Most troubling to Confucius was his perception that the political institutions of his day had completely broken down. He attributed this collapse to the fact that those who wielded power as well as those who occupied subordinate positions did so by making claim to titles for which they were not worthy. When asked by a ruler of the large state of Qi, Lu's neighbor on the Shandong peninsula, about the principles of good government, Confucius is reported to have replied: "Good government consists in the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father, and the son being a son" (*Lunyu* 12.11). I should claim for myself only a title that is legitimately mine and when I possess such a title and participate in the various hierarchical relationships signified by that title, then I should live up to the meaning of the title that I claim for myself. Confucius' analysis of the lack of connection between actualities and their names and the need to correct such circumstances is often referred to as Confucius' theory of *zhengming*. Elsewhere in the *Analects*, Confucius says to his disciple Zilu that the first thing he would do in undertaking the administration of a state is *zhengming*. (*Lunyu* 13.3). In that passage Confucius is taking aim at the illegitimate ruler of Wei who was, in Confucius' view, improperly using the title "successor," a title that belonged to his father the rightful ruler of Wei who had been forced into exile.<sup>[22]</sup> Xunzi composed an entire essay entitled *Zhengming*. But for Xunzi the term referred to the proper use of language and how one should go about inventing new terms that were suitable to the age. For Confucius, *zhengming* does not seem to refer to the 'rectification of names' (this is the way the term is most often translated by scholars of the *Analects*), but instead to rectifying the behavior of people and the social reality so that they correspond to the language with which people identify themselves and describe their roles in society. Confucius believed that this sort of rectification had to begin at the very top of the government, because it was at the top that the discrepancy between names and actualities had originated. If the ruler's behavior is rectified then the people beneath him will follow suit. In a conversation with Ji Kangzi (who had usurped power in Lu), Confucius advised: "If your desire is for good, the people will be good. The moral character of the ruler is the wind; the moral character of those beneath him is the grass. When the wind blows, the grass bends" (*Lunyu* 12.19).

For Confucius, what characterized superior rulership was the possession of *de* or 'virtue.' Conceived of as a kind of moral power that allows one to win a following without recourse to physical force, such 'virtue' also enabled the ruler to maintain good order in his state without troubling himself and by relying on loyal and effective deputies. Confucius claimed that, "He who governs by means of his virtue is, to use an analogy, like the pole-star: it remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it" (*Lunyu* 2.1). The way to maintain and cultivate such royal 'virtue' was through the practice and enactment of *li* or 'rituals'—the ceremonies that defined and punctuated the lives of the ancient Chinese aristocracy. These ceremonies encompassed: the sacrificial rites performed at ancestral temples to express humility and thankfulness; the ceremonies of enfeoffment, toasting, and gift exchange that

bound together the aristocracy into a complex web of obligation and indebtedness; and the acts of politeness and decorum—such things as bowing and yielding—that identified their performers as gentlemen. In an influential study, Herbert Fingarette argues that the performance of these various ceremonies, when done correctly and sincerely, involves a ‘magical’ quality that underlies the efficacy of royal ‘virtue’ in accomplishing the aims of the ruler.

#### 4. Confucius and Education

A hallmark of Confucius’ thought is his emphasis on education and study. He disparages those who have faith in natural understanding or intuition and argues that the only real understanding of a subject comes from long and careful study. Study, for Confucius, means finding a good teacher and imitating his words and deeds. A good teacher is someone older who is familiar with the ways of the past and the practices of the ancients. (See *Lunyu* 7.22) While he sometimes warns against excessive reflection and meditation, Confucius’ position appears to be a middle course between learning and reflecting on what one has learned. “He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger” (*Lunyu* 2.15).<sup>[23]</sup> He taught his students morality, proper speech, government, and the refined arts. While he also emphasizes the “Six Arts” — ritual, music, archery, chariot-riding, calligraphy, and computation — it is clear that he regards morality as the most important subject. Confucius’ pedagogical methods are striking. He never discourses at length on a subject. Instead he poses questions, cites passages from the classics, or uses apt analogies, and waits for his students to arrive at the right answers. “Only for one deeply frustrated over what he does not know will I provide a start; only for one struggling to form his thoughts into words will I provide a beginning. But if I hold up one corner and he cannot respond with the other three I will not repeat myself” (*Lunyu* 7.8).

Confucius’ goal is to create gentlemen who carry themselves with grace, speak correctly, and demonstrate integrity in all things. His strong dislike of the sycophantic “petty men,” whose clever talk and pretentious manner win them an audience, is reflected in numerous *Lunyu* passages. Confucius finds himself in an age in which values are out of joint. Actions and behavior no longer correspond to the labels originally attached to them. “Rulers do not rule and subjects do not serve,” he observes. (*Lunyu* 12.11; cf. also 13.3) This means that words and titles no longer mean what they once did. Moral education is important to Confucius because it is the means by which one can rectify this situation and restore meaning to language and values to society. He believes that the most important lessons for obtaining such a moral education are to be found in the canonical *Book of Songs*, because many of its poems are both beautiful and good. Thus Confucius places the text first in his curriculum and frequently quotes and explains its lines of verse. For this reason, the *Lunyu* is also an important source for Confucius’ understanding of the role poetry and art more generally play in the moral education of gentlemen as well as in the reformation of society. Recent archaeological discoveries in China of previously lost ancient manuscripts reveal other aspects of Confucius’s reverence for the *Book of Songs* and its importance in moral education. These manuscripts show that Confucius had found in the canonical text valuable lessons on how to cultivate moral qualities in one self as well as how to comport oneself humanely and responsibly in public.

## **Confucianism: The Religion of Social Propriety**

Confucianism has been the chief cultural influence of China for centuries. The teachings of Confucius were never intended to be a religion. It has no revelatory sacred writings, no priesthood, no doctrine of an afterlife, and frowned on asceticism and monasticism. Later Confucius was deified and raised to the rank of Emperor and Co-assessor with the deities in Heaven and Earth. Official animal sacrifices were made at the tomb of Confucius for centuries. In 1982 Confucianism claims 156,070,100 adherents.

The Chinese name of Confucius was Kung. His disciples called him Kung, the master (Kung Fu-tse) which western missionaries Latinized to "Confucius." He was born in 551 B. C. of an aristocratic family who had lost their wealth and position. His father, who died before Confucius was three, is said to have been a famous warrior of gigantic size and strength who was seventy years old when Confucius was conceived. Confucius was the youngest of eleven children. He grew up in poverty but received a good education. In his teens he accepted a minor government position, married and fathered a son but the marriage ended in divorce.

In his twenties, following his mother's death, Confucius set himself up as a teacher. He taught the traditional Six Disciplines: history, poetry, government, propriety (ethics), music, and divination. Confucius became one of the great teachers of history but aspired to public office. He had supreme confidence in his ability to reorder society.

Legend has it that at the age of fifty Confucius ascended through the offices of Minister of Public Works and Minister of Justice to Prime Minister. His government was ideal. Enemies, however, conspired against him and he was forced to retire at the age of fifty-five. In reality, scholarly speculation has assumed that contemporary rulers were much too afraid of Confucius' candor and integrity to appoint him to any position involving power.

During the next twelve years Confucius wandered from place to place with a few of his disciples. He was jeered at and even placed in jail. At the age of sixty-seven a position was found for him as an advisor to the Duke of Ai. During the next years he spent his time teaching and compiling some of the classic Chinese texts. He died in 479 B. C. Confucius was not only a wise man, he was an incorruptible, human-hearted man. Although largely defeated in his purpose of reforming society, he died with courage, saying, "There is not one in the empire that will make me his master!"

Li (social propriety) is the greatest principle of living. When society lives by li it moves smoothly. Confucius saw the embodiment of this society in the idealized form of feudalistic government, illustrated by the Five Relationships: kindness in the father, filial piety in the son; gentility in the eldest brother, humility and respect in the younger; righteousness behavior in the husband, obedience in the wife; humane consideration in elders, deference in juniors; benevolence in rulers, loyalty in ministers and subjects. Li may also refer to the "middle way" in all things.

Just as li is the outward expression of the superior man, jen (goodness, humaneness, love) is the inner ideal. Confucius taught that men should love one

another and practice respect and courtesy. If li and jen were operative in a person, the end product would be the Confucian goal: the superior man. Confucius believed in the natural goodness or at least the natural perfectibility of man. He stressed government by virtue (Te) and the arts of peace (Wen). Since filial piety is the root of all virtue this concern for parental respect is seen in the veneration of age and ancestor worship. Confucius was a pragmatic man who thought one should respect the spirits but keep them at a distance.

Confucius regarded himself as a transmitter, not the originator, of social values and wisdom. Although Confucianism does not claim revelatory scriptures, the Five Classics and the Four Books are regarded as the touch-stone of Confucian conduct and wisdom. Mencius and Hsun Tzu were the great expositors of Confucius in the fourth and third centuries B.C. and did much to popularize and spread his teachings. During the Han Dynasty there developed a cult of Confucius himself. By the sixth century A.D. every prefecture in China had a temple to honor Confucius.

The Confucian cult was checked in 1503 when the images of Confucius were ordered removed from the temples and replaced with wooden tablets inscribed with his teachings. All titles were removed and he was spoken of simply as "Master Kung, the perfect teacher of antiquity." In 1906 there was an attempt to revive the Confucian cult but with the birth of the People's Republic of China all sacrifices to Confucius and other religious observances were officially abandoned.