

7 KEY CHINESE VALUES: CONFUCIANISM

Many Chinese beliefs were formed early, as civilization emerged along the Yellow River before 1000 B.C.E. One such belief stressed the importance of harmony in and with nature around the concept of the Way. More formal systems of thought developed later, in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E., during a divided and troubled period of Chinese politics. Various thinkers sought means to shore up a strong political system or live without one. Of the resulting philosophies or religions, Confucianism proved the most durable and significant.

Deemed by students a "Divine Sage," Confucius (Kong Fuzi) (ca. 551–479 B.C.E.) was founder of a humanistic school of philosophy that offered Zhou China a social and political ethos derived from idealized values of the past. As a remedy for the political chaos of his age, the famous teacher abandoned the decadent aristocratic code and offered in its place an ethical system focused on individual moral conduct, propriety, ritual, and benevolence. Arguing that the foundations of good government and the well-being of society rested on individual ethical behavior, Confucius urged the emperor and his assistants, the *junzi* (gentlemen), to provide moral examples for society at large. Confucius believed the appointment of modest, wise, polite, and virtuous gentlemen scholars was essential for good government and that this was the best means for eliminating the immorality and amorality that undermined law and order. Idealistic gentlemen could restore the conditions prevailing under the early Zhou dynasty, whose government Confucius viewed as a perfect form. In the selection from the *Analects*, which is a collection of sayings attributed to the "Master" and set down long after his death, one finds his views of gentlemen. Because scholars doubt that Confucius put his ideas into writing, it is impossible to determine whether these views are authentically his own or those of later Confucianists.

Confucian theories of government were adopted as state ideology during the Han dynasty [200 B.C.E.–220 C.E.], and many of his concepts proved fundamental to Chinese philosophy more generally. From the following passages, consider what the main interests and values of Confucianism were. Compare these with leading value systems—typically religious systems—in other ancient and classical civilizations. How do they

From Confucians, *The Analects of Confucius*, translated and annotated by Arthur Waley (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1938), pp. 85, 90–91, 104–106, 121, 131, 152, 163, 167, 177–178, 181, 187–188, 197, 199, 200, 205–207, 233. Permission granted by the Arthur Waley Estate.

compare with Judaism, or with Hindu or Buddhist concepts developing during the same time period in India?

THE SMALL ANALECTS

The Master said, If a gentleman is frivolous, he will lose the respect of his inferiors and lack firm ground upon which to build up his education. First and foremost he must learn to be faithful to his superiors, to keep promises, to refuse the friendship of all who are not like him. And if he finds he has made a mistake, then he must not be afraid of admitting the fact and amending his ways.

Zigong asked about the true gentleman. The Master said, He does not preach what he practises till he has practised what he preaches.

The Master said, A gentleman can see a question from all sides without bias. The small man is biased and can see a question only from one side.

The Master said, A gentleman in his dealings with the world has neither enmities nor affections; but wherever he sees Right he ranges himself beside it.

The Master said, A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay.

The Master said, A gentleman covets the reputation of being slow in word but prompt in deed.

The Master said, A gentleman who is widely versed in letters and at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual is not likely, I think, to go far wrong.

The Master said, A true gentleman is calm and at ease; the Small Man is fretful and ill at ease.

At home in his native village his manner is simple and unassuming, as though he did not trust himself to speak. But in the ancestral temple and at Court he speaks readily, though always choosing his words with care.

At Court when conversing with the Under Ministers his attitude is friendly and affable; when conversing with the Upper Ministers, it is restrained and formal. When the ruler is present it is wary, but not cramped.

When the ruler summons him to receive a guest, a look of confusion comes over his face and his legs seem to give beneath his weight. When saluting his colleagues he passes his right hand to the left, letting his robe hang down in front and behind; and as he advances with quickened step, his attitude is one of majestic dignity.

When the guest has gone, he reports the close of the visit, saying, "The guest is no longer looking back."

On entering the Palace Gate he seems to shrink into himself, as though there were not room. If he halts, it must never be in the middle of the gate, nor in going through does he ever tread on the threshold. As he passes the Stance a look of confusion comes over his face, his legs seem to give way under him and words seem to fail him. While, holding up the hem of his skirt, he ascends the Audience Hall, he seems to double up and keeps in his breath, so that you would think he was not breathing at all. On coming out, after descending the first step his expression relaxes into one of satisfaction and relief. At the bottom of the steps he quickens

his pace, advancing with an air of majestic dignity. On regaining his place he resumes his attitude of wariness and hesitation.

When carrying the tablet of jade, he seems to double up, as though borne down by its weight. He holds it at the highest as though he were making a bow, at the lowest, as though he were proffering a gift. His expression, too, changes to one of dread and his feet seem to recoil, as though he were avoiding something. When presenting ritual-presents, his expression is placid. At the private audience his attitude is gay and animated.

A gentleman does not wear facings of purple or mauve, nor in undress does he use pink or roan. In hot weather he wears an unlined gown of fine thread loosely woven, but puts on an outside garment before going out-of-doors. With a black robe he wears black lambskin; with a robe of undyed silk, fawn. With a yellow robe, fox fur. On his undress robe the fur cuffs are long; but the right is shorter than the left. His bedclothes must be half as long again as a man's height. The thicker kinds of fox and badger are for home wear. Except when in mourning, he wears all his girdle-ornaments. Apart from his Court apron, all his skirts are wider at the bottom than at the waist. Lambskin dyed black and a hat of dark-dyed silk must not be worn when making visits of condolence. At the Announcement of the New Moon he must go to Court in full Court dress.

When preparing himself 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. But there is no objection to his rice being of the finest quality, nor to his meat being finely minced. Rice affected by the weather or turned he must not eat, nor fish that is not sound, nor meat that is high. He must not eat anything discoloured or that smells bad. He must not eat what is overcooked nor what is undercooked, nor anything that is out of season. He must not eat what has been crookedly cut, nor any dish that lacks its proper seasoning. The meat that he eats must at the very most not be enough to make his breath smell of meat rather than of rice. As regards wine, no limit is laid down; but he must not be disorderly. He may not drink wine bought at a shop or eat dried meat from the market. He need not refrain from such articles of food as have ginger sprinkled over them; but he must not eat much of such dishes.

After a sacrifice in the ducal palace, the flesh must not be kept overnight. No sacrificial flesh may be kept beyond the third day. If it is kept beyond the third day, it may no longer be eaten. While it is being eaten, there must be no conversation, nor any word spoken while lying down after the repast. Any article of food, whether coarse rice, vegetables, broth or melon, that has been used as an offering must be handled with due solemnity.

He must not sit on a mat that is not straight.

When the men of his village are drinking wine he leaves the feast immediately after the village-elders have left. When the men of his village hold their Expulsion Rite, he puts on his Court dress and stands on the eastern steps.

When sending a messenger to enquire after someone in another country, he prostrates himself twice while speeding the messenger on his way. When K'ang-tzu sent him some medicine he prostrated himself and accepted it; but said, As I am not acquainted with its properties, I cannot venture to taste it.

When the stables were burnt down, on returning from Court, he said, Was anyone hurt? He did not ask about the horses.

When his prince sends him a present of food, he must straighten his mat and be the first to taste what has been sent. When what his prince sends is a present of uncooked meat, he must cook it and make a sacrificial offering. When his prince sends a live animal, he must rear it. When he is waiting upon his prince at meal-times, while his prince is making the sacrificial offering, he (the gentleman) tastes the dishes. If he is ill and his prince comes to see him, he has himself laid with his head to the East with his Court robes thrown over him and his sash drawn across the bed. When the prince commands his presence he goes straight to the palace without waiting for his carriage to be yoked.

On entering the Ancestral Temple, he asks about every detail.

If a friend dies and there are no relatives to fall back on, he says, "The funeral is my affair." On receiving a present from a friend, even a carriage and horses, he does not prostrate himself. He does so only in the case of sacrificial meat being sent.

In bed he avoids lying in the posture of a corpse. When at home he does not use ritual attitudes. When appearing before anyone in mourning, however well he knows him, he must put on an altered expression, and when appearing before anyone in sacrificial garb, or a blind man, even informally, he must be sure to adopt the appropriate attitude. On meeting anyone in deep mourning he must bow across the bar of his chariot; he also bows to people carrying planks. When confronted with a particularly choice dainty at a banquet, his countenance should change and he should rise to his feet. Upon hearing a sudden clap of thunder or a violent gust of wind, he must change countenance.

When mounting a carriage, he must stand facing it squarely and holding the mounting-cord. When riding he confines his gaze, does not speak rapidly or point with his hands.

(The gentleman) rises and goes at the first sign, and does not "settle till he has hovered." (A song) says:

The hen-pheasant of the hill-bridge,
Knows how to bide its time, to bide its time!
When Zilu made it an offering,
It sniffed three times before it rose.

Sima Niu asked about the meaning of the term Gentleman. The Master said, The Gentleman neither grieves nor fears. Sima Niu said, So that is what is meant by being a gentleman—neither to grieve nor to fear? The Master said, On looking within himself he finds no taint; so why should he either grieve or fear?

The Master said, The gentleman calls attention to the good points in others; he does not call attention to their defects. The small man does just the reverse of this.

The Master said, The true gentleman is conciliatory but not accommodating. Common people are accommodating but not conciliatory.

The Master said, The true gentleman is easy to serve, yet difficult to please. For if you try to please him in any manner inconsistent with the Way, he refuses to be pleased; but in using the services of others he only expects of them what they are capable of performing. Common people are difficult to serve, but easy to please. Even though you try to please them in a manner inconsistent with the Way, they will still be pleased; but in using the services of others they expect them (irrespective of their capacities) to do any work that comes along.

The Master said, The gentleman is dignified, but never haughty; common people are haughty, but never dignified.

The Master said, It is possible to be a true gentleman and yet lack Goodness. But there has never yet existed a Good man who was not a gentleman.

When the Master said, He who holds no rank in a State does not discuss its policies, Master Zeng said, "A true gentleman, even in his thoughts, never departs from what is suitable to his rank."

The Master said, A gentleman is ashamed to let his words outrun his deeds.

The Master said, The Ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them. For he that is really Good is never unhappy, he that is really wise is never perplexed, he that is really brave is never afraid. Zigong said, That, Master, is your own Way!

The Master said, (A gentleman) does not grieve that people do not recognize his merits; he grieves at his own incapacities.

The Master said, The gentleman who takes the right as his material to work upon and ritual as the guide in putting what is right into practice, who is modest in setting out his projects and faithful in carrying them to their conclusion, he indeed is a true gentleman.

The Master said, A gentleman is distressed by his own lack of capacity; he is never distressed at the failure of others to recognize his merits.

The Master said, A gentleman has reason to be distressed if he ends his days without making a reputation for himself.

The Master said, "The demands that a gentleman makes are upon himself; those that a small man makes are upon others."

The Master said, A gentleman is proud, but not quarrelsome, allies himself with individuals, but not with parties.

The Master said, A gentleman does not accept men because of what they say, nor reject sayings, because the speaker is what he is.

The Master said, A gentleman, in his plans, thinks of the Way; he does not think how he is going to make a living. Even farming sometimes entails times of shortage; and even learning may incidentally lead to high pay. But a gentleman's anxieties concern the progress of the Way; he has no anxiety concerning poverty.

The Master said, It is wrong for a gentleman to have knowledge of menial matters and proper that he should be entrusted with great responsibilities. It is wrong for a small man to be entrusted with great responsibilities, but proper that he should have a knowledge of menial matters.

The Master said, from a gentleman consistency is expected, but not blind fidelity.

Confucius said, There are three things against which a gentleman is on his guard. In his youth, before his blood and vital humours have settled down, he is on his guard against lust. Having reached his prime, when the blood and vital humours have finally hardened, he is on his guard against strife. Having reached old age, when the blood and vital humours are already decaying, he is on his guard against avarice.

Confucius said, There are three things that a gentleman fears: he fears the will of Heaven, he fears great men, he fears the words of the Divine Sages. The small man does not know the will of Heaven and so does not fear it. He treats great men with contempt, and scoffs at the words of the Divine Sages.

Confucius said, The gentleman has nine cares. In seeing he is careful to see clearly, in hearing he is careful to hear distinctly, in his looks he is careful to be kindly; in his manner to be respectful, in his words to be loyal, in his work to be diligent. When in doubt he is careful to ask for information; when angry he has a care for the consequences, and when he sees a chance of gain, he thinks carefully whether the pursuit of it would be consonant with the Right.

The Master said, He who does not understand the will of Heaven cannot be regarded as a gentleman. He who does not know the rites cannot take his stand. He who does not understand words, cannot understand people.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the proper goals of life according to Confucius?
2. What was the Confucian definition of a gentleman? Why did Confucianism place so much emphasis on manners and ceremony?
3. Did Confucius judge human nature to be good or bad? What was his attitude toward human emotions?
4. What social structure did Confucianism imply? What were the key social classes and how did they differ?
5. In what ways was Confucianism not a religion?
6. Why did Confucianism have such a deep impact on Chinese and East Asian history? What groups and institutions could benefit from it?
7. How does Confucianism compare with the political values and systems developed in Mesopotamia and Persia (Chapters 2 and 5)? What are the distinctive features of Confucianism as a basis for political life?