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Confucius

1017

Confucius was a philosopher, a teacher and a politician. His most important contribution to mankind was his moral teachings which greatly influenced Chinese culture and helped shape Chinese mentality. Confucius' studies mainly concentrated on political and social philosophy. Confucius like many other great men became influential only after his death. He gained many followers who documented his teachings and expanded his philosophy to what became known as Confucianism.¹

Confucian philosophical teachings evolved into a guiding principle for Chinese families and the state. He prioritized harmonious relations among individuals and a structured society. He believed that prosperity can be attained in a society that values strong ethical principles. Confucian teachings were not limited to ethics and politics, but also included education, arts, history, and many other disciplines. His influence spread to Vietnam, Japan, and Korea that later developed their own theories based on Confucianism. Admiration of Confucius in Asian countries can be observed in the presence of numerous Confucian temples, schools dedicated to his studies, and ceremonies in his honor. Confucian teachings became popular among scholars around the world; for example, the Analects, Confucius most important book, was translated into

¹ Li-Fu, Chen. *Why Confucius has been referenced as the model teacher of all ages*. New York: 1976. 13-16.

most languages of the world. The number of books written about Confucius is astonishing.²

Confucian philosophy did not employ original ideas; the theories were already common in the Shang dynasty which was established thousands of years before Confucius time. Confucianism is sometimes referred as Ju Chiao, in accordance with Chinese scholar Ju of the Shang dynasty. Confucius, however, had aspirations to change old fashioned theories to make them suitable for the changing social and political realms of his time. His ideology was carried on for the next two thousand years and evolved into three different stages of Confucianism: Classical Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and twentieth century new Confucianism. Confucius was the founder of Classical Confucianism; Neo-Confucianism describes an era when Confucian theories dominated in Korea, Vietnam, and Japan; and the New Confucianism originated in the twentieth century in response to negative criticism of Confucian philosophy. The longevity of Confucian philosophy and the astonishing number of followers proves once more how influential Confucianism was.³

Confucius was born in the era of great social inequality between the elite and the peasants in feudal China. The peasants served the interests of the elite, but there was emerging a small middle class with many bright people. This is the class that Confucius

² **Confucianism**

Rodney Taylor and Gary Arbuckle
The Journal of Asian Studies , Vol. 54, No. 2 (May, 1995), pp. 347-354
Published by: [Association for Asian Studies](#)
Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2058740>

³ **Achievements, predicaments and trend of Moral Confucianism**

Zhiming SONG and Huang Deyuan
Frontiers of Philosophy in China , Vol. 2, No. 4 (October 2007), pp. 503-516
Published by: [Springer](#)
Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27823311>

belonged to. Confucius, eager to contribute to reforms of his society participated in political activity. However, his attempts to change the feudal regime were unsuccessful; even though hundred years later his theories became political ideologies. Confucius ethical theories were shaped by the experiences of his time. He observed that most hardships of the working class were caused by disrespectful behavior, and disobedience of the elite. He concluded that personal growth of those in power would lead to a harmonious society. Confucius believed that the purpose of the individual is to develop his personality, while the purpose of society is to be in order. Confucius thought that every man had to follow a certain path to develop his character; the concept that was called Tao or The Way. Those who do seek to follow the path and to develop noble character are called chun-tzu. In his school of morality, Confucius aspired to teach his students ethical traits that constitute a noble man.⁴

In political philosophical teachings Confucius described two state powers: authoritarian and democratic, giving preference to democratic values. In his opinion, even though democratic state can be very vulnerable, it provides freedom to citizens and cares about their well-being. Confucian theories and explanations of democratic state gained him a large following. A democratic state that gives so much power to its citizens can only function properly if its citizens follow a certain code of conduct, described as the Way in Confucian philosophy.⁵

Confucianism gained wide acceptance in the era of Han Dynasty and since then his teachings became a foundation in the Chinese culture. In the twentieth century,

⁴ Smith, D. *Confucius*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973. 24-40.

⁵ Harper Torchbooks. *Confucius and the Chinese Way*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1949. 12-17.

however, as Chinese economic development started lagging behind that of Japan and the West people started questioning benefits of Confucian teachings in the modern world. Many argued that Confucianism was an impediment to growth in China because of its focus on group values. Confucianism in fact contradicts with modern Western theories on aspects such as self interest and individualism which are considered essential for economic growth in the West. Independence and equality are also highly valued in modern Western society; on the contrary, Confucian theories focus on community values and preferential treatment. In comparison with other popular at that time ideologies such as Communism and Capitalism that concentrated on growth and development, Confucianism didn't provide any insight into how to handle competition in the modern world. As a result, importance of Confucianism faded in the political arena in the past century, however, Confucian values didn't lose its significance in family and interpersonal relations. ⁶

On the other hand, some scholars argued that Confucianism contributed to modernization in East Asian countries. Before Confucius higher education was only accessible to the elite. However, Confucius believed that everyone with the desire to learn and attain wisdom should be allowed to pursue studies. He became the first teacher who would accept students on the basis of their devotion regardless of their social class or ability to pay. His legacy was continued in 1968 when educational reforms were undertaken in China. In addition to education, Confucius emphasized the importance of hard work and saving, characteristics that are essential for economic development. Some

⁶ **Economic Development in East Asia and a Critique of the Post-Confucian Thesis**
Keedon Kwon
Theory and Society , Vol. 36, No. 1 (Feb., 2007), pp. 55-83
Published by: [Springer](#)
Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4501775>

state that using Confucian teachings as a basis countries such as Japan and Korea developed their own path to economic success as viable as capitalism in the West.⁷

Despite the opposing views on impact of Confucianism on modernization, it's indisputable that impact of Confucianism is profound on the Chinese culture. Today China is a progressively developing country posing a challenge to the developed countries. China is a hot topic all around the world and in order to analyze Chinese culture and values people still refer to Confucianism even though thousands of years passed since the death of Confucius.

7

Can Confucianism Survive in an Age of Universalism and Globalization?

Gilbert Rozman

Pacific Affairs , Vol. 75, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 11-37

Published by: [Pacific Affairs, University of British Columbia](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4127239>