

66 ANALECTS AND
SPRING AND
AUTUMN ANNALS OF
MASTER LÜ

A WISE MAN AND HIS FOLLOWERS

CONFUCIUS AND CONFUCIANISM

66 Confucius, *Analects*, fifth
century BCE

“Is it not a joy to learn something, and then to use the knowledge from time to time?” “Don’t worry about others not knowing about you; worry about you not knowing about others.”

These are two statements made by the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Many people around the world have heard of Confucius and know that he was an ancient Chinese man who made wise statements about human beings. These people are partly right—but not completely.

First, people are only partly right about his name. It was not really Confucius, but Kong Qiu. His followers sometimes called him **Kongfuzi**, or “Great Master Kong.” Catholic missionaries who went to China much later and admired his ideas referred to him by the Latin-sounding “Confucius.”

It’s also true that he said wise things. But Confucius did more

孔夫子

Kong + fu + zi = family name +
title of respect + “master”



“The First Teacher, Confucius, spreading his teachings” is how the philosopher Confucius is identified in this illustration. “At home, be reverent; at work, be respectful; with friends, be loyal” is one of his sayings.

than write the proverbs that many people associate with him. He was a great thinker who was interested in how people ought to live, how society is structured, and how righteousness and justice can be achieved on earth. He influenced Chinese thought so deeply that his ideas and beliefs are still part of Chinese thinking today.

Confucius was born about 551 BCE into a China that was changing. In earlier times, the work that people did and the lives that they led were pretty much determined as soon as they were born. If your father worked for the king, you almost certainly would work for the next king when you grew up. If your parents were farmers, you would be a farmer someday. If you were the daughter of a silk weaver, one day you would learn how to weave silk.

But that rigid system was being challenged in the mid-sixth century BCE, even for the highest job in the land: ruler. Men who were not direct descendants of the oldest son of the last king made attempts to take over the throne. Also, the states were getting so large, and governing them was getting so complicated, that some rulers were taking the unusual step of relying on advice from men who were best able to help them govern, not necessarily the sons of earlier advisers. These new officials might come from families of soldiers, merchants, even farmers. All that mattered now was that they be talented and wealthy enough to afford the necessary education, and that they come to the attention of someone in power.

Along with these political and social changes came changes in religious customs. Ever since the long-ago days of the Shang dynasty, only the members of the royal family performed certain religious rituals. But now some other, non-royal men were starting to perform them.

Confucius came from one of the rising classes. His father was a knight of the state of Lu. Historians do not know who his mother was, and some think he was orphaned at an early age. You might expect that Confucius would be in favor of the new way of doing things, since it gave an advantage to men like him. Instead, he was horrified. He thought that the changes were dangerous for society, that they ruined

IF YOUR NAME IS HOPE, ARE YOU AN OPTIMIST?

Mencius, an important follower of Confucius, had an intriguing idea. He said that if people behaved the way their social positions were defined, everything would be well. For example, if a king is defined as someone who governs well, then someone who rules badly isn't truly a king, even if he is the son of the previous ruler. For this reason, Mencius said, you could kill the man who sits on the throne if he is a poor leader without being guilty of killing a king.

He also asserted that people are basically good. Why are there bad people, then? Well, Mencius said, water flows downhill. You can force it to run uphill with an external force, but it will go downhill whenever the force is removed. Similarly, circumstances can force people to be bad, but that doesn't change the fact that they are fundamentally good.

people's characters, and that the only way to get things back on the right track was to return to the way people had behaved in earlier generations.

Confucius had started out his career in a traditional way. He was an official in the government, and it doesn't appear that he was very successful, since he is mentioned only once in passing in documents of his time. A later document, the *Tradition of Zuo*, records that he held the position of Minister of Bandits (something like a sheriff).

Confucius found his real calling when he became a teacher. He grew so well known and his statements were so admired that before the first century BCE, his followers collected much of what he said in a book called the *Analects*. He ran his school with a mixture of tradition and innovation. A major innovation was that he would accept any man as a student (women had very little opportunity for any sort of education), regardless of social class, and he didn't care much about payment. A small bundle of dried meat was enough of a fee.

On the other hand, many of his methods looked traditional. In fact, Confucius claimed in the *Analects* that he was "a transmitter [of the old ways], not a creator [of new ones]." What was most traditional in his school was the course of study. Confucius's students learned the "six arts": archery, charioteering, ritual, music, **calligraphy**, and mathematics. His pupils studied literature as well. They were supposed to be tough, like true knights, and should follow the example of their teacher, who said, "I can live with coarse rice to eat, water for drink and my arm as a pillow and still be happy."

For Confucius, education wasn't as important as being a good member of society and of your family. He said, "A young man should be a dutiful son at home and be respectful to elders outside his home. He should be serious and trustworthy, loving all, but drawing close to the humane. After doing this, if he has energy to spare, he can study the literary arts."

Confucius cared deeply about decent behavior between people. His saying, "what you do not want for yourself, do

“ Confucius, *Analects*, fifth century BCE

calligraphy = “beautiful writing”
Calligraphy was an art form and a means of communication. }

“ Confucius, *Analects*, fifth century BCE

“ Confucius, *Analects*, fifth century BCE

not inflict on others” is similar to the “Golden Rule”: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Confucius was very much concerned with the duty that children owe their parents. He said that a son should cause so little trouble that “his parents have to worry only about him getting sick,” not about misbehavior or any other kind of problem. He said that for at least three years after a father dies, his sons should keep doing things the same way that their father had done. Only then can they start making changes. If a parent behaves illegally or immorally, the children should gently try to change that parent’s ways, but if that doesn’t work, they should still respect their elders and honor their decisions.

Above all, people should behave with *ren*, or humanity, toward one another. This principle was so important to Confucius that he said that people should die rather than treat others badly.

What makes someone *ren*? Being honest and genuine with others is crucial. Confucius said that only someone who is “forceful, resolute, simple and cautious of speech” is truly noble of spirit, whereas one with “honeyed words and pious gestures” is not. Confucius even claimed that someone who is not *ren* cannot perform the important religious rituals that bound the Chinese people together. These rituals included ceremonies celebrating the return of spring, the harvest, the new year, and other important dates, as well as sacrifices to a family’s dead ancestors. Confucius asked scornfully, “A man without humanity, what does he have to do with the rites?” Knowing the rites was important for a ruler. He said, “If you guide the people with laws and control them with punishments, they will avoid committing crimes, but have no personal sense of shame. If you guide them by means of virtue and control them with the rites, they will have a sense of shame and correct themselves.”

A man who lives honorably, knows how to perform the rites, and cultivates *ren*, is a **junzi**—a gentleman. A *junzi* doesn’t care much about his salary or about what people say about him. He doesn’t just say the right things, but acts according to what he says.

PARTS OF SPEECH

Many words in classical Chinese can be different parts of speech without changing their form. *Ren* means not only “humanity” or “humaneness,” but “humane” and “humanely.”

“ Confucius, *Analects*, fifth century BCE

君子

Junzi = “son of the lord”
The word was originally used for young nobles, but by this time had come to mean just “gentleman.”

66 Confucius, *Analects*, fifth century BCE

Although Confucius was probably a strict teacher, many people found him appealing and even lovable. He was able to poke fun at himself, and he told one of his students that when someone asked what Confucius was like, he should say, “He is someone who forgets to eat when he gets excited about something, who is so happy that he forgets his troubles, and who doesn’t realize that old age is upon him.” He thought that people needed to take some responsibility for their own education and once said, “If a student is not eager, I won’t teach him; if he does not struggle with the truth, I won’t reveal it to him. If I lift up one corner and he can’t come back with the other three, I will not do it again.” In other words, Confucius would offer his students help on part of a problem and expect them to figure out the rest on their own.

Later philosophers and historians respected Confucius. Some said that he was so wise that he should have been a king. But others who started out following his teachings with devotion later broke away from strict Confucian teaching.

One of those who departed from the wise man’s teachings was Mozi, who lived about a century after Confucius, and was probably even lower-born. He may have come from a family of carpenters (he used carpentry terms in his writings) or may have been a convict-laborer (“Mo” means “tattooed,” and tattoos were sometimes used to mark convicts). At first, Mozi was a follower of Confucian ideas, but later he disagreed with much of what the earlier philosopher had said. Mozi was impatient at the emphasis Confucians laid on rituals and elaborate funerals, which Mozi thought wasted money that should have been spent on the living. He sought practical solutions to political and social problems.



Pupils studying with Confucius might learn how to play a qin, or lute, a stringed instrument plucked with the fingers.

Some of Mozi's ideas differed greatly from those of other thinkers of his day. For instance, he said that Heaven is interested in all individuals, not just the ruler. Heaven also, according to Mozi, has a plan, called the Will of Heaven, for each individual. Another new idea was that Heaven loves all people equally, and so should we. In the Confucian ideal, it's natural to love members of one's family more than strangers and people from your own country more than foreigners. Mozi rejected this, saying that loving some people more than others led to behavior that was against the Will of Heaven, such as stealing, heavy taxation, and injustice of all kinds.

Most of what scholars know about this philosopher comes from a fifth-century BCE book, the *Mozi*. This book contains some of his sayings, recorded by his followers, and also discusses nonphilosophical topics such as military tactics. Mozi was against warfare because it destroyed property, killed people, and often didn't give the winners the benefits that they were expecting. Besides, because Heaven loved everyone equally, Heaven would certainly be against anyone who was aggressive toward someone else. People and states could defend themselves from attack, he said, but they couldn't attack someone else.

Mozi didn't just say lofty things and then sit back and let other people put them into practice. Instead, he and his followers (called "Mohists") learned how to fight and offered their services to any small state that was being attacked by a larger one. Once, one of his followers was facing certain defeat in a battle. According to *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü*, the philosopher said to the person who advised him to run away, "If I flee now, who will ever turn to the Mohists for help again?"

Mozi was only one of many philosophers whose ideas shaped the way Chinese people thought during the Warring States period (480–221 BCE) and in many cases, continue to think today. Among the most influential of these thinkers was the mysterious author of a book that still puzzles and inspires people all over the world today: the *Classic Text of the Way and Virtue*.

MORE OF CONFUCIUS'S SAYINGS

If someone is not humane, he cannot stand to dwell long in hardship or in good fortune.

If there is a knight/scholar who has his sights set on the right track but is ashamed of ugly clothes and poor food, he isn't worth talking to.

If I go walking with two others, there will certainly be one who can be my teacher. I select the good points of one and imitate them; I choose the bad points of the other and change them [in myself].

66 *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü*, about 240 BCE