

# Confucianism and contemporary issues

Religion



## Confucianism and Contemporary Issues

This essay will illustrate the history of Confucianism and the background of Master Kong (Confucius) in the early beginnings of the religion. The purpose of the paper is to discuss the common characteristic of Confucianism with other eastern religions, the contemporary issues it faces, and the interaction between the modern world and Confucianism. Also the paper list the nine most common text of literature used by the religion and it includes the role of women and the five bonds also known as the five great relationships.

### History

Confucius was born August 27, 551 BC in a small state called Lu. His birth name is Kong Qui or K'ung Fu-tzu. " The modern name of Confucius is an early Western rendering of the sage's Chinese honorific name " K'ung-fu-tsu" (Confucius, 2013) It is noted that Confucius was born in answer to his parents prayers. Confucius surname Kong means an utterance of thankfulness when prayers have been answered. He stemmed from the Chang dynasty 500 years before the birth of Christ. According to the text, the exact details of his childhood vary. Some say that he grew up in a wealthy household. Other reports say that he stemmed from a poverty stricken background. Scholars do agree that Confucius existed during a time of crisis in China.

The crisis stemmed from the challenge to the ruler posed by the " three Huan families". By heredity they had the right to occupy the ministerial offices of the Lu government. It is recorded that he entertained himself during his youth by arranging rituals and staging ceremonies. This turmoil in

society had an effect on Confucius. He thought that if the thinking of society would change it would change the way things were done. The notion of society must change. Individuals must strive to be noble as possible. (Confucius, 2013) During his early adult life, Confucius took on odd jobs to support him-self and assumedly hisfamily. He was most often unemployed with very littlemoney. He was said to be a very humble and sympathetic man that had a passion for government. He believed in sharing his knowledge with the world.

What was most important to Confucius was not holding an official governmental position but upholding his moral beliefs. Confucius held two moral values. Per the text, his two main ideals were to produce excellent individuals that would be great social leaders. And secondly, he wanted to create a harmonious society. (Molly, 2010) His concern for others is demonstrated through his regard for the principles communicated in the belief of “ do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. That principle is more commonly known as the Golden Rule. Confucius also believed that everyone had a socialresponsibility; these social responsibilities were communicated into the five great relationships. Duties were identified by what social classification you were included in. With all five of the great relationships there is a high level ofrespectthat is shown. Each party is held in the same regard as the other.

He established a school with the intent to produce and develop supreme individuals. He wanted to teach his students to mentally and morally expand their social views and to practice self-discipline. Confucius teachings to his disciples were recorded in the book of Analects. His teachings were informal

and primarily delivered in lectures. His teachings were not religious. The focus of his teachings revolved around the “ Six Arts”: archery, calligraphy, music, computation, chariot driving and ritual. (Confucius, 2013)

According to an article written by Valerie Sartor, she notes “ He (Confucius) must have been a highly persuasive speaker, and a magnetic personality, for he convinced many men to become his disciples...”. (Sarator, V., 2009) He is said to have had 3, 000 students and 72 disciples, with whom he traveled with throughout China. (China Today, 2005) Confucius’s principles and virtues still have a heavy influence on Chinese religion. At the time, his teachings provided guidelines for the Chinese educational system. Common characteristics the Confucianism religion

Confucius put forth kindness to humanity and kind-heartedness and teaches people to do unto others what you would like for yourself, (1996–2013 A+E Television Networks, LLC). His social philosophy was based primarily on the principle of Ren, loving others (Moloy 2010). The people believed in him and his teachings. Confucius, said when people are educated the distinction between classes of people will disappear and this will bring harmony amongst people. Religions, such as Buddhism has a lot in common with Confucianism, both believed in spiritual development, having good morals and harmony amongst ourselves.

Confucianism and Buddhism also believed that people should act with good manners, and have good etiquette. In today’s world, Chinese strongly push themselves in education, learning different languages, mathematics and arts. Confucius saw no difference between people with money and the ones without money. He believed that anyone can be superior and he teaches his

student to be noble and with good character and with education you can achieve a lot and anything. Education will also make a better way of life. Confucianism also value males over females there for males have dominance over the women.

The comparison between Confucianism and Hinduism teachings is that they are both similar, both religions meditate and having good ethics. Confucianism and Buddhism are also similar. They both do meditation and they both believe in end of suffering and the love for each other.

#### Interactions between the modern world and Confucianism

In today's society it is easy to see that religion in the modern world would face multiple challenges and changes. Some of the advances today scientifically such as DNA genetics, reproducing of children, and major organ transplant surgery are all questions that men and women in the earlier times didn't have to worry about. They are many eastern cities that are the home base for certain religions. At one point these religions were thought of as foreign. We now live in a world where every place to visit and Remote Island in the world is may be featured on the travel channel. Television exposes all humans in the world the different cultures and diversity as well as the different religions.

Every day this world we live in is constantly evolving. It makes you think of where this world would be in the future. The writer started to question in what ways would religion change. From the beginning when religion was first introduced just take a moment to think about how much it has changed. There is no way possible to predict that far into the future, but we can make

an educated guess based on the things that are transpiring today in religion. There are many different influences that make up religions and how they continue to evolve throughout the years. It was not long ago, the majority of most human beings in the world lived as farmers, and in small villages, and monarchs ruled the majority of the countries.

As time passed we slowly begin to see less kings and queens and in some counties they just disappeared. Some governments were formed and a lot of people traded in rural life for a big city lifestyle. There was a period of time where people traveled sometimes out of the country in order to taste different food or experience firsthand the way of living for another culture. Now you can purchase a Whopper at a burger king located in Switzerland or have the pleasure of drinking a cup of Starbucks coffee in Hong Kong. With all these changes and our world as we know it today is steadily evolving it makes you take a moment to think about how the cultural unifications will change religion.

In the past many religions preached the value of being less fortunate and living a simple but comfortable lifestyle. Things that were taught held value because it was a reflection of the lifestyle of the majority of people. Today in religion we see exhortation from the poor to get ahead and how money can be the center of the religion. In the new world contact is always attainable. There are many different items that we have that can be used to educate men and women on Confucianism and some of the religion interactions. It's common to utilize television, radio, books, magazines and most important internet to close in the gap that once kept every culture and religion separate. More frequently are we seeing where religions adopt different

beliefs and religious ways from other religions. Contemporary Issues in Confucianism

The beliefs of Confucianism are written in the Sacred Narratives as Confucian thinking, believed that learning from the past is fundamental (Beverluis, 1995). Confucius did not eliminate the possibility of a reality beyond the human world. However he believed that a human did not have the capacity to understand such a world. He believed that human morals should be based on human relationships, without reference to some higher order (Beverluis, 1995). Most Confucian scholars believed that the human being existence is based upon reaching ones highest potential in life. And that by achieving the ultimate goal of a “ perfect person” is a lifelong process of self-cultivation (Beverluis, 1995).

We also see that the belief in suffering and evil by some Confucian scholars’ are inevitable in human life. These two problems can promote learning and growth. A mistake does not label one as a sinner, but one should take it as opportunity to learn and grow from the mistake. Even though some humans are incapable of feeling empathy, the suffering of others for most should provide motivation for moral growth (Beverluis, 1995). Confucius believed that human beings should live and conduct their lives with good moral statures so that they can exist in harmony with others, rather than hoping to be rewarded or punished in the afterlife (Beverluis, 1995). Woman’s role in Confucianism

Now let us take a look at the role of women in Confucianism. A woman’s role in this religion is that of subservience and obedience. Scholar Xiao Ma has said: " Women always have been fighting for a way out of the Confucian

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shadows.” According to “Women And Confucianism” (1996-2012)“ the Confucian structure of society, women at every level were to occupy a position lower than men. Most Confucians accepted the subservience of women to men as natural and proper order of life. At the same time they accorded women's honor and power as mother and mother-in-law within their family” end quote.

Some Neo-Confucian saying as it regards to women are, “Woman's greatest duty is to produce a son”, “Disorder is not sent down by Heaven, it is produced by women”, “Women are to be led and to follow others” and a favorite by male Confucians is, “A woman should look on her husband as if he were Heaven itself, and never weary of thinking how she may yield to him” (“Women And Confucianism”, 1996-2012). Sacred texts

Sacred texts associated with Confucianism are The Five Classics. These are the Book of Songs (Shī Jīng), The Classic of History (Shū Jīng), The Classic of Rites (Lǐ Jì), The Book of Changes (I Ching), and The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chūn Qiū). The Four Books, which are The Analects of Confucius (Lùn Yǔ), The Mencius (Mèng Zǐ), The Great Learning (Dà Xué) and The Doctrine of the Golden Mean (Zhōng Yóng). The Thirteen Classics and the Three Commentaries (Hare, 2010).

#### The Five Great Relationships

The Five Great Relationships were implemented by Confucius so that everyone would know the role they played in society and conduct themselves accordingly. These five bonds are those of ruler and subject: compassion in rulers, loyalty in ministers and subjects; father and son:



kindness in the father, filial piety in a son; husband and wife: righteous behavior in the husband, obedience in the wife; elder brother and younger brother: gentility in the oldest son, humility and respect in the younger siblings and friend and friend: humane consideration in elders, deference in juniors.

Confucianism today, is mainly practiced in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. There are over six million devotees who practice Confucianism. In the past Confucianism was the state philosophy in China, but this has drastically decreased in today's world due to communism in China (Beverluis, 1995). However as recently as 2011 we saw President Hu Jintao introducing the idea of a “ Harmonious Socialist Society” in order to officially revive this fading religion in China. There has been several network of cultural Confucius institutes set up globally by the Chinese government, as well as erecting a statue of Confucius in Tiananmen Square.

### Conclusion

Master Kong (Confucius) was a man of great moral standings and character. Even if many in the beginning of the religion disliked him, he has been immortalized by the Chinese Government because of the millions of followers he has to this day.