

Creating china's just society

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Creating a Just Society in China

In early China, many authors, philosophers, and thinkers sought to forge a society that was just for the common good. Different people had different beliefs in regards to what it meant to be human, access to education, and how to run a government. Two influential figures of the roots of Chinese society were Confucius and Xunzi. Confucius was a teacher, politician, and philosopher who's beliefs stemmed from the idea that human beings are born equal and good by nature, it is through teachings and practices that set them apart (Confucius 16). Confucius said himself that he was not born with knowledge, but he and other men were born with the desire to seek it out and not let the goodness they innately have slip away. (Confucius 7). Xunzi was a Confucian philosopher but he believed that human nature is to be evil (Xunzi 1) and has to be altered through teaching to function properly and well in society. Both of these men proposed what they supported to be true in creating a society that was just for the common good.

Confucius' teachings were written in the Analects; it was a written collection of his beliefs to contribute to a justified society. He sought to teach others what it meant to create a society that was proper in all ways including through education, humanity, and government. He functioned as an ultimate example of human excellence. Confucius wanted all people to properly cultivate themselves, discuss their knowledge, move toward the righteousness of knowledge, and fix all that is inferior. (Confucius Page 7)

Confucius believed that human beings were born with innate goodness. One of teachings was that social order, harmony, and a well run government

could be achieved if the society was constructed around five basic relationships. They were: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, and friends. Confucius taught his students that an important part of learning was observing the differences that exist between people in daily life. He didn't believe that human beings needed to be educated to become good like Xunzi did. However, Confucius did believe that seeking out knowledge and education was vital to becoming a positively functioning member in a just society. Only a certain type of person could even become a teacher in the eyes of Confucius. " If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of knowledge." (Confucius 2). A teacher was expected to have an absolute love for gaining, retaining, and then spreading knowledge.

A superior man in society is one who can continually seek knowledge while retaining what he has already learned and makes skilled judgments. " The superior man, extensively studying and learning, and keeping himself under the restraint of the rules of propriety, may thus likewise not overstep what is right." (Confucius 6). A superior man will not act mean or unkind like an inferior man will, he will act accordingly to what is proper, filial, and justified. A superior man will emulate moral exemplars such as the sages from earlier times. Superior men are concerned with absolute righteousness while the mind of inferior men contain selfish thoughts and are only concerned with their own gains (Confucius 4). A younger person should also try to act the same, nobody should slip and become inferior.

" A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all,

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and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.” (Confucius 1). Before even starting to receive a proper education as a young member of society it is important to develop the proper set of moral standards. At home the youth must be filial to those around and when not at home it is required that he or she shows respect to those that are older and befriend those that are good or superior.

Confucius did not believe in having a government that punished people, he supported enforcement of laws and rules without means of violence. The government was to be run through virtue, and if done properly, the people will follow it as if it were the North Star. (Confucius 2). There would be no need for punishments. “ If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover become good.” (Confucius 2). Leading the people through virtue will help them to gain knowledge of what is right and wrong.

He also states that when those who have positions of power perform all their duties in the just and proper way, the others will emulate them and become “ aroused to virtue,” (Confucius 8).

If the government is run properly as Confucius teaches it to be, it will bring out the best in all the people under it. Good men will not live or move into a “ tottering state, nor dwell in a disorganized one. When right principles of government prevail in the kingdom, he will show himself; when they are prostrated he will keep things concealed.” (Confucius 9).

The most important part of a well-run government is the support and faith from the people. With support from the people other necessities could be done away with. It is obviously very important that there is sufficient food as well as military power in a country. But those two could be done away with if they had to be, as long as there is support, confidence, and belief from the people things would work out. “ If the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state.” (Confucius 11).

“ Human nature is evil. That people can become good is a result of conscious effort. Now the nature of man is such that to live is to love profit. If people follow that instinct, those who strive to seize things will live, while those who withdraw from competition and yield to others will perish. To live is to have the instinct of hate.” (Xunzi 1). Although Xunzi was a Confucian philosopher, he believed that humans were born with an innate evil that needed to be curbed. He taught that following our basic instincts would create competition for survival and chaos. Without the proper teachings and laws people will be uncivilized and never become good. “ Now if people do not have teachers and laws they will be lopsided and unfinished,” (Xunzi 1). It is wrong to make a judgment that the nature of all things is good. Xunzi says that would be like claiming something to be beautiful without even looking at it and that it doesn't need to be changed in order to be beneficial (Xunzi 2).

We do not have the ideas of rites, righteousness, law, and standards. It takes a conscious effort and discussion among others to develop rites, righteousness, laws and standards because they do not exist in nature. (Xunzi 2).

We consciously desire to be good because we know that we are innately evil. Man must struggle to learn and continue to seek out what is proper in society. Without the proper rules, laws, standards, and knowledge there will be chaos from the pursuit of instincts. (Xunzi 3).

In ancient times it was known that the nature of man was to evil and to greedy. In order to stabilize the state of society they had to give rulers so much power that they merely looked down upon the others, used rituals to change the nature of society, used laws to bring peace, used heavy punishment to serve as a constraint of following evil instincts, and in turn made everything harmonious. (Xunzi 3). “ Now, if we were to try to do away with the power of the ruler, not have the transformative influences of rites and righteousness, forgo the order enforced by laws and regulations, eliminate the constraints imposed by harsh punishments, and watch to see how the people of the realm would behave toward one another, we would see that the strong would harm the weak and snatch their property, the many would do violence to the few and create turmoil, all under heaven would be in rebellion, and within a short period of time all would perish.” (Xunzi 3). Unlike Confucius, Xunzi believed that a strict government was literally vital to the survival of men let alone the cultivation of a just society. If the government could not stop humans from following their evil instincts there would be nobody left.

Education is another important tool in the quest to become good and in the effort against evil instincts. Like Confucius, Xunzi says that it is very important to find the right teacher to learn from and to befriend those that are knowledgeable and good. It is through the right teacher and right friends

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that we can learn the ways of “ Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang.” (Xunzi 6). Through befriending the knowledgeable and good we can develop moral principles such as loyalty, faithfulness, respect, and modesty.

There were many different views on how to create a just society in China. They revolved around education, humanity, and government. There were different views on human nature and how a government should be ran. However, both Confucius and Xunzi felt that education and knowledge were very important in forging a proper society. They had different views on human nature and the power of government but both were very influential philosophers who contributed to the development of Chinese society.