

Confucianism

1. Life of Confucius

Confucius lived from 551 to 479 B.C. E. (Zhou Dynasty) Before he was born, legends about Confucius state that his mother had a dream about an unicorn who gave her a jade tablet. On the tablet, it was written that her child would one day be as important as a king. He was born and raised in the state of Lu. Although his ancestors were aristocrats, by the time Confucius was born, his family had become poor. Even so, Confucius was given a sound education, and he proved to be a fast and eager learner.

In his mid-50's, he left politics when he realized his superiors were not interested in his ideas or policies

Confucius left the country and traveled among other warring states. Confucius had begun teaching at the age of 30, and a number of people he had taught continued to increase. He taught whoever wanted to learn, regardless of their rank in society. This differed from existing schools which affiliated with the government and taught only those of noble birth. Confucius finally returned to the state Lu when he was 67 years old to write and teach. By the time of his death at age 73, he supposedly had 3,000 followers.

2. Basic Tenet of Confucianism

Confucius was a great admirer of the early Zhou Dynasty rulers, particularly the Duke of Zhou. Having lived during the time of the decline of the Zhou Dynasty, Confucius thought that studying the ways of the early Zhou Dynasty when it was in its prime would lead to answers about how current society should be governed. Confucius believed in *li*, the ancient court rituals and etiquette of the early Zhou Dynasty. *Li* is also translated as "propriety"

The Five Basic Confucian Virtues

Confucius believed that humans are intrinsically good and that the only worthwhile goal human could have is to become as good a person as possible. The five:

Benevolence/ Humanity
Righteousness
Propriety (*li*)
Wisdom
Trustworthiness

The Importance of Education

Confucius believed that the goodness needed to be nurtured and cultivated and the best way to do so was through education.

Confucian Relationships

The five most important relationships in Confucianism are:

Parent and child
Ruler and ruled
Husband and wife
Elder sibling to younger sibling
Friend to friend

Belief in Hierarchy

Confucius believed in a set hierarchy. In Confucianism, every person had a place in society and each place in society has a set of norms, and behavior that one should follow. People are expected to be respectful of their elders and of people of superior rank or status.

Spirituality in Confucianism

Although he believed in spirits, Confucius did not concern himself with issues concerning what may or may not happen after death, In the *Analects* when one of Confucius' pupils ask about the nature of death, confucius replies, "You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?"

Confucian Texts

The Five Classics

Confucius taught from five ancient manuscripts, now known as the Five Classics:

Book of Poetry
Book of History
Book of Rites
Book of Changes
Spring and Autumn Annals

The Four books:

His followers continued to study his ideas through the Four Books, books that have been acknowledged as the classics of the Confucian tradition. They are:

Analects (a compilation of Confucius' teachings)
Mencius
Great Learning
Doctrine of the Mean

* Mencius was one of the most famous Confucian scholars.

Conclusion

Over the years, Confucianism adopted aspects of Chinese religions such as Daoism and Buddhism. Although Confucianism has changed, its basic tenets have endured. From the time of Confucius to the Han Dynasty when Confucianism became the state orthodoxy, through the time of challenges from outside religions, Confucianism has continued to influence and shape civilizations and individuals throughout Asia and other parts of the world.