

**Introduction:**

To many of us, the words "Confucius say" are the preamble to a witticism, but to billions of Chinese people over thousands of years the sayings of the master have been words of highest wisdom, to be received with respect, if not with reverence. As a result, Confucius has molded the Chinese mind and character in a manner and to an extent that has hardly been equaled by any other single figure in the history of a major civilization.

Although it is difficult to summarize briefly the teachings of Confucius, certain of their basic features are apparent. He was an optimistic moralist; believing people to be fundamentally good, he thought that with proper education and leadership they could realize their potential and achieve the form of life which he described as that of "the superior man." A social order composed of such individuals, including particularly its political leaders, would constitute the ideal society. Although he also believed that such a society is in harmony with the will of heaven, Confucius, unlike many early social philosophers, did not found his ideal society on principles derived from theology. On the contrary, he is well described as a humanist.

Many of the details of the moral and social ideals of Confucius appear in his Analects, or "Collection" (of sayings). This collection, which is rambling, ill-arranged, and repetitious, contains twenty "Books," which include the master's sayings, descriptions of contemporary Chinese society, excursions into past history, and stories about various political leaders.

Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was born of a poor family that apparently had ancestors of substance. Early in life he decided to become a scholar and teacher. He soon gathered a group of disciples about him, and, because he believed that society could be reformed only if those who were properly educated held the reins of government, he sought public office and encouraged his students to do so as well. During his career he held a number of government posts, some of consequence. But practical politicians were suspicious of his lofty ideals and he was finally dismissed. He spent the twilight of his career wandering about China while still teaching.

Near the end of his life he wrote the following succinct autobiography: "At fifteen, I set my heart on learning. At thirty, I was firmly established. At forty, I had no more doubts. At fifty, I knew the will of Heaven. At sixty, I was ready to listen to it. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing what was right." The moral teachings of the Analects, which Confucius did not actually originate but which he edited and molded to reflect his own ideals, were gathered together, mainly after his death, by his admirers.

Source: Legge, James, trans. *The Chinese Classics*; with a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960.

**Document: The Analects****GOVERNMENT**

The Master said, "To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons."

The Master said, "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it."

The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishment, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good."

Ji Kang asked how to cause the people to reverence their ruler, to be faithful to him, and to go on to nerve themselves to virtue. The Master said, "Let him preside over them with gravity; then they will reverence him. Let him be filial and kind to all; then they will be faithful to him. Let him advance the good and teach the incompetent; then they will eagerly seek to be virtuous."

Zigong asked about government. The Master said, "The requisites of government are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler." Zigong said, "If it cannot be helped, and one of these must be dispensed with, which of the three should be foregone first?" "The military equipment," said the Master. Zigong again asked, "If it cannot be helped, and one of the remaining two must be dispensed with, which of them should be foregone?" The Master answered, "Part with the food. From of old, death has been the lot of all men; but if the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the State."

Ji Kang asked Confucius about government, saying, "What do you say to killing the unprincipled for the good of the principled?" Confucius replied, "Sir, in carrying on your government, why should you use killing at all? Let your evinced desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it."

The Master said, "When a prince's personal conduct is correct, the government is effective without the issuing of orders. If his personal conduct is not correct, he may issue orders, but they will not be followed."

Zizhang asked Confucius, saying, "In what way should a person in authority act in order that he may conduct government properly?" The Master replied, "Let him honor the five excellent, and banish away the four bad, things; then may he conduct government properly." Zizhang said, "What are meant by the five excellent things?" The Master said, "When the person in authority is beneficent without great expenditure; when he lays tasks on the people without their repining; when he pursues what he desires without being covetous; when he maintains a dignified ease without being proud; when he is majestic without being fierce."...

Zizhang then asked, "What are meant by the four bad things?" The Master said, "To put the people to death without having instructed them; this is called cruelty. To require from them, suddenly, the full tale of work, without having given them warning; this is called oppression. To issue orders as if without urgency, at first, and, when the time comes, to insist on them with severity; this is called injury. And, generally, in the giving pay or rewards to men, to do it in a stingy way; this is called acting the part of a mere official."

**Introduction:**

Han Fei (280-233 BCE) was a lesser member of the Han royal family. He apparently suffered from a severe stutter, so he concentrated more on writing rather than success at court. He became one of the founders of the Legalist school. During a period of intense political upheaval in China, the Legalists argued for firm control of the state by the ruler and for strict rule of law and order to bring about peace. The Legalist approach helped the Qin achieve power and unify China. Afterwards, their ideas were vilified until Mao Zedong revived them in the twentieth century. Han Fei himself was ultimately forced to commit suicide in 233 as the result of a palace conspiracy.

Source: The Writings of the Han Fei, from the Chinese Text Project.

**Document: Legalism: Selections from The Writings of Han Fei****HAVING REGULATIONS**

No country is permanently strong. Nor is any country permanently weak. If conformers to law are strong, the country is strong; if conformers to law are weak, the country is weak...

Any ruler able to expel private crookedness and uphold public law finds the people safe and the state in order; and any ruler able to expunge private action and act on public law finds his army strong and his enemy weak. So, find out men following the discipline of laws and regulations, and place them above the body of officials. Then the sovereign cannot be deceived by anybody with fraud and falsehood...

Therefore, the intelligent sovereign makes the law select men and makes no arbitrary promotion himself. He makes the law measure merits and makes no arbitrary regulation himself. In consequence, able men cannot be obscured, bad characters cannot be disguised, falsely praised fellows cannot be advanced, wrongly defamed people cannot be degraded. To govern the state by law is to praise the right and blame the wrong.

The law does not fawn on the noble...Whatever the law applies to, the wise cannot reject nor can the brave defy. Punishment for fault never skips ministers, reward for good never misses commoners. Therefore, to correct the faults of the high, to rebuke the vices of the low, to suppress disorders, to decide against mistakes, to subdue the arrogant, to straighten the crooked, and to unify the folkways of the masses, nothing could match the law. To warn the officials and overawe the people, to rebuke obscenity and danger, and to forbid falsehood and deceit, nothing could match penalty. If penalty is severe, the noble cannot discriminate against the humble. If law is definite, the superiors are esteemed and not violated. If the superiors are not violated, the sovereign will become strong and able to maintain the proper course of government. Such was the reason why the early kings esteemed Legalism and handed it down to posterity. Should the lord of men discard law and practice selfishness, high and law would have no distinction.

**THE TWO HANDLES**

The means whereby the intelligent ruler controls his ministers are two handles only. The two handles are chastisement and commendation. What are meant by chastisement and commendation? To inflict death or torture upon culprits is called chastisement; to bestow encouragements or rewards on men of merit is called commendation.

Ministers are afraid of censure and punishment but fond of encouragement and reward. Therefore, if the lord of men uses the handles of chastisement and commendation, all ministers will dread his severity and turn to his liberality. The villainous ministers of the age are different. To men they hate they would by securing the handle of chastisement from the sovereign ascribe crimes; on men they love they would by securing the handle of commendation. From the sovereign bestow rewards. Now supposing the lord of men placed the authority of punishment and the profit of reward not in his hands but let the ministers administer the affairs of reward and punishment instead, then everybody in the country would fear the ministers and slight the ruler and turn to the ministers and away from the ruler. This is the calamity of the ruler's loss of the handles of chastisement and commendation.