

Modern Day China and Confucianism: A Harmonious Society?

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"Harmony in the air causes spring. Harmony in principles begets humaneness."

Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799)

from the Supreme Chamber for Cultivating Harmony (*Yanghe Jingshe*)

Abstract

Who was Confucius? What was his impact on Chinese culture and why is his philosophy and writings still prevalent in modern day China after 2,500 years? An examination of his life will be discussed, along with the values, ethics and social code of modern day Chinese. He lived from 551 to 479 BCE (Before the Common Era, formerly BC, Before Christ) and believed that his philosophy could transform individuals and society into a more harmonious unit. Confucius studied the *I Ching*, or Classic Book of Changes, a Chinese manual of divination.

Confucius, a sage and a teacher, lived from 551 to 479 BCE. He died when he was seventy-two years old. Legends tell of him being born in a cave about sixty kilometers east of Qufu in the northern coastal province of Shandong (means "East of mountains") that lies across the Yellow Sea. Nishan Hill lies thirty kilometers outside Qufu and is said to be the place where the mother of Confucius prayed for a second son. Her first-born son was not in good health. She consequently did give birth to a second son, Confucius, but he was supposedly rather an ugly baby and so his father abandoned him on Nishan Hill.

Here, the story tells of Confucius being brought up by a tigress and an eagle who cooled the baby with her wings. On hearing these stories, Confucius's father took him back into his house as clearly this was a unique child, ugly or not. His father died, however, when Confucius was quite young and so his mother brought him up. He was poor and was never really recognized in his lifetime but his legacy remains to this day. Confucian teachings have influenced Chinese culture, education, politics and thought for the past 2,500 years. **The Classics of Rituals**, for example was used in part of the imperial examinations to educate government officials on the correct conduct and ethics.

When I was in China, the Mid-Autumn Festival (*Zhongqiu Jie*), a weeklong holiday provided an opportunity to see more of China so I decided to travel to Qufu, a small town in Shandong Province, the birthplace of Confucius, the First Sage Under Heaven. However, travel to Qufu is complicated as there is no direct train route. When a proposal for a train line into Qufu was made, the Kong family vigorously protested as they felt this would disturb the ambience of Confucius' tomb. As a result, train lines were diverted away from Qufu to the small town of Yanzhou, about twenty to twenty-five minutes away by minibus. The minibus deposited me in Qufu and with the help of a young Chinese student who went out of her way to get me a pedicab and accompanied me to my hotel despite my protests. Confucian values persist in modern day China.

Qufu is truly a piece of old China, an ancient walled town on the Shandong Plain and very different from the larger cities. I was delighted to see not even one McDonald's, no KFC, no Pizza parlours and I think I was the only Westerner in town. There was a street market near my hotel where people can dine on all kinds of seafood, fresh eel, steaming noodles – with vegetables and some spices, hot dumplings full of vegetables and fillings of an unknown variety. Breakfast, could be eaten while taking in all the local sights and sounds. Shouts of street vendors filled the air, people scurried through the narrow streets, mothers with children in tow, all carrying bags full of fresh green vegetables and fruit. That night loads of fireworks were set off lighting up the night sky, exploding bubbles of colour in celebration of the fifty-seventh anniversary of China's independence. I took a walk outside to discover a street fair and festival complete with large inflated plastic red and yellow dragons stretched across the entryway to the street market with loud music blaring forth, toot-toots from scooters, people yelling at each other and Grandmothers with grandchildren treating them to delicious street food.

Qufu means “winding hill” and at one time was the capitol of the state of Lu from 1060 to 259 BCE. It may have been in existence even longer as earlier settlements have been found in Dawen kou and Longshan Neolithic cultures that date from 4000 BCE. There are three major sites in Qufu, Confucius' temple, his home, or mansion and the family graveyard in a forest, all UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Confucius' birthday is September 28 but celebrations continued through the first week of October.

It was Confucius who said, *“Harmony is something to be cherished.”* In 2005, President Hu Jintao, quoted Confucius and laid out plans to build a *“harmonious society” (héxié shèhuì)*. He also remarked, *“Scientific development and social harmony are integral to each other and neither is possible without the other.”*

I lived in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province in China, an old water-town, once part of the Silk Road. Suzhou is noted for its classical gardens and these gardens exhibit harmony between all the elements –water, bridges, pavilions, latticed windows, rocks and plants. Harmony was reflected everywhere.

The emphasis that Confucius placed on education and the family, respect for the elderly and a particular code of ethics on human relationships, honesty, harmony and goodwill permeates modern day China. Once when I was in Xi'an several years ago to see the Terracotta Warriors, I was buying some street food, spicy tofu on a stick, from a small stand. The vendor charged me five Yuan, about sixty cents. A passer-by stopped, listened to the exchange and then proceeded to yell at the vendor, waving his arms and pointing at me. “He is charging you too much,” he told me in English. “You should pay him only three Yuan.” He stayed there to ensure I only paid three Yuan (US\$0.41).

Another time, a Chinese friend took me to a shoemaker to have my sheepskin boots mended as they leaked. It would cost me five Yuan he told me – less than a dollar. We sat down and talked to him as he worked on my boots. His wife came in with a small child, but apparently he has another wife in a different province, also with a child, a son. Forty-five minutes later, the boots were repaired so I gave him ten Yuan for his efforts. At this he became quite indignant and told us that it was a five Yuan job only and that was all it was worth. An animated discussion followed with my friend translating. I suggested that the extra money was a gift for his son, his wife, a gift from me. In the end, with great reluctance he took the money. This would never happen in the West. Confucian values prevail.

Confucius made his mark on modern day China by parental commitment to the education of their children. I discovered that this focus on education often occurs to the total exclusion of other things. One day when staying with some Chinese friends, it was noticeable that the education of their daughter,

Li Chang, was a primary, major concern, to the exclusion of everything else. I'd been helping her with her English homework but now it was late so I suggested she brush her teeth and get ready for bed. The teeth cleaning was ignored. As long as she did her homework that was the only thing that mattered.

Parents scrimp and save to pay for their child's education. Some of the more affluent parents are now buying apartments as future investments to pay for possible education abroad for their pride and joy, their one and only child. People do what they have to do, "for a better life." Recently in the past several years this has even included parents selling their blood in order to send their children to good schools. Parents of primary and secondary school students in Huai'an County in Hebei Province in Northern China have been doing this for several years.

The high esteem people felt for Confucius possibly led to Chiang Kai-shek in the 1930's and the Japanese invaders, or "aggressors" as they are referred to in China, to seek support from the Kong family in order to give legitimacy for their actions. The Cultural Revolution, however, did not look on Confucianism in such a positive light, as many of the Confucian Temples and the statues were destroyed and the followers of Confucian thought took severe beatings by rampaging Red Guards (*Hóng Wèibīng*). The following poem written by Mao in 1936 during the Yenan years, reveals how he regards himself compared to Confucius:

"White Snow."

*"How beautiful these mountains and rivers,
enticing countless heroes to war and strife.
Too bad that Emperors Qin Shihuang and Han Wudi lacked culture
and that Emperors Tang Taizong and Song Taizu lacked romance.
Genghis Khan was the pride of his time,
though he was only good at shooting eagles with his bow.
They all belong to a time gone by,
Only today is a True Hero present.
Please don't slander Emperor Qin Shihuang, Sir
For the burning of the books should be thought through again.
Our ancestral dragon, though dead, lives on in spirit,
While Confucius, though renowned, was really rubbish.
The Qin order has survived from age to age. . . ."*

Mao Zedong.

Confucius held various governmental jobs but never got a promotion to a higher level. Stories tell of a rather fussy, finicky man. The *Analects* reveal how Confucius avoided dark purple and maroon silk for collars and cuffs, did not wear red and how he lifted his robes and held his breath when he entered his master's hall. His diet was frugal and his one rule was to stop drinking when he became confused. Mats had to be straightened before sitting on them and he refused to talk in bed. However, he loved to go swimming in the Spring with a group of friends and to return home chanting poetry. (Wood, F. & Taylor, N. 2001).

One of his objectives was to restore the moral codes of the State of Zhou and place them in his hometown of Lu. He then traveled to different states trying to influence the rulers at the time to higher moral standards. At the end of the Zhou period there was a lot of warfare between various landlords leaving large numbers of people in poverty and morality was in decline. Confucius felt that it was important for everyone to know their place in society and to act accordingly, as illustrated in a famous quote, "*Let the ruler be a ruler and the subject a subject; the father a father and the son a son.*" Confucius advocated strong family values with a definitive social hierarchy and felt that a good

government should rule by virtuous example, not by strict laws and harsh punishments. This social hierarchy was established with the anticipation that if people knew what was expected of them they would behave correctly. Consequently he set up five principal relationships which were as follows:

1. Ruler and subject
2. Father and son
3. Elder brother and younger brother
4. Husband and wife
5. Friend and friend.

All, except friend and friend consist of authority of one person over another. Power and the right to rule belong to superiors over subordinates as in older people over younger people, to men over women. Each person has to give obedience and respect to "superiors"; the subject to his ruler, the wife to her husband, the son to his parents, and the younger brother to the older brother. The "superior," however, owes loving responsibility to the inferior (Wood, F. & Taylor, N. 2001).

Government ruled by ethics and morality and of 'gentlemen' (*jun zi*) knowledgeable in literature, music and the rites were important aspects of Confucianism. The success of Confucianism lay in providing a strong philosophical base and the subjects that people were expected to be knowledgeable became the basis of the exams for the imperial bureaucracy. Large amounts of Confucian classic texts were memorized and regarded as an excellent basis for good government, along with written commentary.

When Confucius was in his thirties, he began to teach his philosophy and his followers wrote down his teachings, now known as **The Analects** (*Lunyu*) and each section of the book always begins with "Kongzi yue" or "Master Kong says" or "Confucius says." There are five Confucian classics, the **Book of Changes** (*I Ching* or *Yi Jing*), the **Book of Songs**, the **Book of Rights** and the **Spring and Autumn Annals**.

In ancient China, oracles were read from cracks in a heated turtle shell. The eight trigrams, or eight groups of lines in various combinations, were attributed to Fu Hsi during the 29th Century BCE. The cracked lines in the shell form the basis of the 64 hexagrams of the **I Ching**, the oldest Chinese classical text. The hexagrams are based on the binomial system. A few authors have written books relating the sixty-four hexagrams to the structure of DNA (Yan, J. 1993, Schonberger, M. 1979). Confucius used the **I Ching** frequently to consult on various questions and it helped define his philosophy and values. He is said to have used it so often in his lifetime that he wore out the silk that he wrapped his yarrow stalks in, the traditional method of consulting the **I Ching**. There is a story that the Japanese regularly used the **I Ching** to consult on their military maneuvers, but in WWII for some reason they stopped doing that. They reckon that is why they lost the war.

My husband has studied the **I Ching** for over twenty years. As a student at the C.G. Jung Institute of Analytical Psychology in Zurich, Switzerland, he studied under a Chinese scholar. Jungians work with dream symbols with their analysands (people in analysis) and the Ching also uses symbolic material. Swiss Psychoanalyst, Dr. Carl Gustav Jung, used the Ching frequently and wrote the "Forward" to the English translation of the **I Ching** by Richard Wilhelm, the son of German missionaries who lived in China.

Dennis uses the **I Ching** in his private practice as a psychoanalyst and has found it to be extremely helpful when people get stuck in relationship problems, career issues, creativity problems and family problems to name a few. He has also given many workshops nationally on utilizing the **I Ching** with yarrow stalks, *Achillea millefolium*, a ubiquitous plant. The ancient character for the **I Ching** is that of

the Sage listening to the inner King, very appropriate for the psychological profession. His approach to using the Ching in his analytic practice was translated into Chinese and published in **Psyche: Analysis and Experience**. (Ed. Dr. H. Shen, Guanzhou. 2002). Chinese wisdom prevails. One time he got involved in a big discussion on the **I Ching**, with a Chinese Professor who taught a university course on the **Book of Changes** at a respected Midwestern university. The students in his classes were never shown how to use the **I Ching** in a traditional manner. All theory, no practice. In fact, the Professor was rather negative about the entire process. It sounded a bit like studying zoology without any labs.

Despite Mao's views of Confucius, the story is that he consulted the **I Ching** and came up with numbers 8341. "Did he use yarrow stalks or coins?" I asked the Chinese students. Nobody knew, but in breathless tones they told me that Mao died when he was 83 years old and he had been Chairman for 41 years.

I set out to explore Qufu. Descendants of Confucius, the "First Family Under Heaven" lived in the Confucian Mansion (Kongfu) for over 2,500 years, all of seventy-seven generations. The seventy-seventh duke, Kong Decheng, the last of Confucius' descendants to live in the Mansion, fled to Taiwan about 1940 when the Japanese invaded. Although Confucius was poor, the Kong family were quite affluent. They owned large amounts of land that were taxed. The Mansion has a "Department of Punishments" where various items were given as gifts by Emperors. These items included a tiger tail baton and a goose-winged pitchfork that were used on those poor souls who were unable to pay their burdensome high taxes.

I decided to go and see Confucius's grave, a short taxi ride away. The Confucian Forest contains the largest family cemetery (*Kong Lin*) in China and it is indeed huge. This is where Confucius and his descendants are buried amidst large pine trees and cypresses. Although there were many tourists wandering around, you can walk a long way amongst the graves and the trees without seeing anyone. Quite a peaceful place. Like the old town of Qufu, the forest is surrounded by a stone wall, containing about 200 hectares of land. All of Confucius's students apparently planted trees from his hometown, but now after 2,500 years the forest has grown and matured. Many of the graves are unmarked and some are circular mounds in the forest with the vegetation clipped on top. Cicadas sang their noisy songs and bird cries echoed through the trees. Family members are still being buried there today as I saw several round conical earth mounds decorated with brightly coloured shiny wheels glinting in the sunlight and a square wooden frame with various coloured flags and cloth on top. Over two hundred thousand individuals rest inside the graveyard walls.

Confucius's tomb (*Kongzi Mu*) has pairs of stone panthers, tomb guardians and griffins lining the way (*shen sao*). His son, Kong Li, lies close by and a grandson, Zisi, who reputedly taught Mencius, the second sage. In front of Confucius's tomb is a large stone stele from the Ming Dynasty. Characters inscribed on the stone read, *Dacheng zhi shengwen xuan wang mu* meaning, Tomb of the Ultimate Sage of Great Achievements.

I wandered along the paths for quite some distance stumbling across some other stone animals partly submerged under creeping green vines and vegetation. Interestingly only the wives of Confucian family members are allowed to be buried there, but no daughters as they have to be buried outside the compound. However, one of the graves has the concubine, Madame Wang, mother of the seventy-seventh generation Kong, buried there in the Tomb of the seventy-sixth Duke Kong Lingyi. Graveyard rules do not allow concubines to be buried with family members but somehow she was the exception. In 2009 it was reported there were 1.8 million descendants of Confucius, but now it is believed there are 3 million descendants.

Confucius is supposed to have chosen the site for his tomb according to *feng shui*. However, as there was no running water his followers objected, but Confucius stated that someone would take care of that at some point. The First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, attempted to remove all elements of Confucianism with book burning and persecution of scholars and the Literati. He decided to destroy the *feng shui* of Confucius's burial place by demanding that a river be placed through the burial ground. This was done proving Confucius to be indeed correct.

Mencius (or Mengzi) known as the Second Sage (372-289 BC), was the main follower or disciple of Confucius who held to the philosophy that essentially human nature was basically good. His book espousing these ideals is entitled, **The Book of Mencius**. This perspective became the prime component of later Confucian thought. Interestingly, the Wushu or Kung Fu movies in China are in contrast to the usual Western 'shoot 'em up' movies, where the aim in these movies is not to kill the bad guys, but to turn the bad guy into the good guy by "*cultivating a peaceful mind.*"

A short bus ride away from Qufu, is Zoucheng, or Zouxian, I decided to visit the Meng Family Mansion for thirty Yuan where all of Mencius's direct line of descendents lived to the Ming Dynasty. The first gate in the mansion is the "Gate of Politeness" which leads to the "Great Hall of the Mansion of Mencius," where a tablet states in both English and Chinese that this is the office for the inherited imperial doctor for the Meng family. The "Hall of Hereditary Bounties" has the original furniture and was the residential home for the Meng family and used by the 74th son of Mencius. "The Building of Bestowed Books" dates from the Ming Dynasty and is regarded as an architectural flower. Exhibits there show the cultures and customs at that time in pictures and pottery models.

The Meng Family Mansion has excellent bathrooms, or loos, complete with soap, toilet paper and hot air hand dryers. It is the small things that you appreciate while abroad. (The Chinese graduate students at Suzhou University, seem to like the English word 'loo' and have adopted it. They use it all the time with great laughter – my English legacy to China.) The buildings at the Meng Family Mansion are very well cared for. This place is also a Centre for Confucian Study at Shandong University. The names of the various halls and buildings are always fascinating. *Jian Shan* Hall is where guests are greeted and the name is from a Chinese saying translated as, "*Come straight to the point.*"

The "Hall of the 2nd Sage" is the main building of the Temple of Mencius, originally built in 1121 during the reign of Emperor Xuantle in the Northern Song Dynasty. There is a statue of Yue Zhengzi, one of Mencius's disciples. The "Hall of Mencius's Father", originally constructed in 1327 during Emperor Tai Ding's reign (Yuan Dynasty) was reconstructed in 1492 in the reign of Hong Zhi (Ming Dynasty). There is a statue here of Meng Sunji, Mencius's father. In 1316, Emperor Yan Yau posthumously awarded Mencius's father with the title, "Duke of the State of Zhu." Behind the hall of the father is a smaller hall, the "Hall of Mencius's Mother." The Hall of Mencius's Wife (*Mengzisheng jiz han*) is behind the Temple to Mencius and full of pictures.

On the site is the "Pool for Burning Funeral Orations" built in 1873 during Emperor Tong Zhi's reign (Qing Dynasty). This was a sacred place for the Meng family as here they gave orations to memorialize their ancestors. To the left of the pool is the Ancestral Temple of the Meng Family built in 1496. Ancestral wooden tablets are on display of the entire Meng family dating back five generations until the second generation. At the front of this temple is the "Gate for showing Solution to Saints," reconstructed in 1836. Before leaving one must go through the "Gate of Righteousness of Mount Tai" (1207-1307, Emperor Dade, Yuan Dynasty), reconstructed during the Ming. The name comes from a great scholar, Cheng Hao, who stated,

"Confucius is characterized as earth and heaven, Yanhui is characterized as gentle breeze and fine rain; while Mencius is characterized as righteous man as Mount Tai."

Outside the Temple there were a number of shopkeepers selling rather ancient looking artifacts, ink stones, calligraphy brushes, ancient dragon locks and nice chops or seals. For once in this small town, I wasn't bothered by the usual "Chipper, chipper," calls to entice me to buy their wares. I was left alone to look and touch without items shoved in my face yelling "lookee, lookee!"

In one tiny cramped shop, hidden away in a back alley, I found a turtle shell with old traditional characters inscribed on the shell. In the early days of divination, a hot poker was plunged into the shell of a turtle and the cracked lines would have particular meanings. This was prior to using yarrow stalks to consult the **I Ching**. The shopkeeper was very honest and I kept meeting such people in China. He told me that his brother had caught the turtle and cleaned the shell so it wasn't old. He could have sold it to me as an ancient artifact, but we agreed on a price after much bargaining. He bundled it in newspaper and off I went with a unique present for my husband. Recently, there was a major discovery of ancient artifacts that included some divination items. From these discoveries, they established that divination occurred five thousand years ago, much earlier than previously thought.

Before leaving this delightful town, I wandered around the museum in Zouxian which has a small collection, but with many empty spaces yet to be filled. What they do have is nicely laid out with porcelain and pottery upstairs and a display of all the Chairman Mao buttons and various coins. Time to leave this quiet town of the Second Sage, so I took a pedicab to the bus station (five Yuan - US\$0.69) and then the bus (six Yuan - US\$0.83) back to Qufu. All the seats on the bus were eventually filled but the driver pulled out folding stools and placed them in the middle aisle for the other passengers. When they filled up, he pulled out some newspapers and covered the raised metal ledge behind the driver's seat where a couple of older women squeezed together amidst much laughing and joking.

Eventually on Wednesday, it was time to leave Qufu but not before buying two pita bread rounds full of delicious chopped meat, vegetables and spices for two Yuan (US\$0.27) each from one of the street stalls near my hotel. Caught a pedicab (five Yuan - US\$0.69) to the bus station and then a bus to Yangzhou again. The hotel had suggested I take a taxi to Yangzhou but I prefer to travel with the local Chinese – far more interesting. On the bus, the guy sitting next to me was with his teenage son. Between them they had a sandalwood fan and he carried a dragon-headed walking stick. He pulled the fan out of its box to show me the delicate carved cranes and insisted that I smell the sandalwood aroma. His English was pretty good and he introduced himself.

"My name is Chen Wu and I work for Dow Chemical but I needed good English in order to progress through the company ranks and get my promotion. Every day, I work hard at English for a better life." He wanted his son to see the birthplace and resting place of Confucius and to learn Confucian values. The goal of his thirteen year old son though, was to earn lots of money in a good job – a common sentiment over here and probably in other parts of the world too. We had a long conversation on following your passion, your interests and what are the most important aspects of everyday life. All that would have been missed in a taxi.

Later, one of the Chinese graduate students told me Suzhou's Deputy-Mayor, Zhu Yongxin, wants a national reading day to be celebrated on September 28, Confucius's birthday. The fascination by young students with computers and video games has led to a decline in reading in China. A national survey showed that less than 50% of Chinese read. Zhu Yongxin, member of the Chinese People's Political

Consultative Conference, has persistently submitted this proposal every year since 2003.

At the Yangzhou train station, the upper walls are covered with scenes from Confucius, or *Kongzi*, all rather aesthetic. I was sorry to leave ancient Qufu but Confucianism is now a hot topic in China. In May 2007, the local newspaper reported that there will be a cartoon series on Confucius and a call went out for designers and animators. The China Confucius Foundation was working on 100 episodes portraying the life of Confucius, in collaboration with Shenzhen Phoenix Star, a subsidiary of Phoenix Satellite TV based in Hong Kong. The Shenzhen group offered 500,000 Yuan (US\$65,000) for the best design. A good script will cost 2 million Yuan (US\$260,000).

The China Confucius Foundation, established in 1984 in Jinan, Shandong Province, is backed by the Chinese Government. Their goal is to promote Confucianism both in China and other countries. The first Confucius Institute was set up in 2004, and eighty campuses have since opened in thirty-six countries. The worldwide development of Confucian Institutes, with an estimate of 500 in 2010, has also stimulated more interest in Confucian thought. The movie, "Confucius" with Chow Yun-Fat playing the philosopher came out in 2010.

The revival of Confucianism in modern-day China extends to pre-school and kindergarten classes. Students from one and a half to six years of age recite poems by Confucius listing the virtues of being polite and respecting your elders, a re-affirmation of Chinese identity, values, love of learning and culture. A well known Confucian quote is:

"To study and at times to practice what one has learned, is it not a pleasure?"
(*Zi yue, xue er shi xi zhi, bu yi yue hu*).

A biennial China-Europe Forum was held in Brussels in 2007 for scholars, lawmakers and NGO representatives. One conclusion that emerged from this Forum was that Confucianism and Taoism perspectives could help the government's anti-poverty policies and also aid in the big divide between the wealthy and the poorest of the poor, in both Europe and China. A Chinese professor, Luo Guoxiang, from Wuhan University was quoted as saying that, "*We should go back to Chinese traditional values, such as caring for others, to improve the situation.*" He remarked that strong cultural values and social beliefs would provide a sound foundation for a harmonious society. (*China Daily* October 6-7, 2007). Also in 2007, Wang Jinhua, Deputy Director from the Grassroots Political Power Building Department (Ministry of Civil Affairs), reported that China is examining ways to create a system to quantify a harmonious society. Resident satisfaction will be an important priority.

In the city of Suzhou, I was delighted to discover the Confucius Temple on *Renmin Lu* (人民路 People's Street – the main street in every city). This was the best place I had seen. In trying to find the place, I saw a statue of Confucius (*Kongzi*) through wide gates and thought it was the Temple so I wandered in. It was in fact a girls' high school and one student slipped outside to show me the way – the back-way to the Temple through the antique stalls. I imagined it to be packed after the gardens but it was all very beautiful and peaceful with not a tourist in sight. No entrance fee, and a large group of women plus a couple of older guys, at one end were learning *tai chi*, gesturing with red fans. Their teacher was singing to them, an ancient song. A very peaceful, calming place and it was pleasant to sit and watch the women, laughing and giggling, clicking their fans, beckoning for me to join them, but I chickened out this time. An escape from the hurly-burly of the outside main street and very soothing to the senses.

This temple to Confucius (*Kongzi*) was almost destroyed during the Taiping rebellion but rebuilt in 1864. Originally, a building from the Song Dynasty (1034), the only surviving hall, the main hall, is from the Ming Dynasty (1506). Inside are gigantic drums and rows of elaborate bronze bells (*chung*),

ranging in size from the smallest to quite large bells suspended in a frame, a *pien-chung*, that holds usually 16 bells and where it is said, “*the bell speaks, the stone answers.*” Musical instruments play a role in numerous ceremonies and Confucius was a strong advocate of such celebrations and rituals.

A massive statue of Confucius lies in the grounds outside the main hall, a gift from Chinese living abroad. The temple gardens are full of bonsei and large stone *bixi*, one of the nine sons of the dragon, mythical beasts that look like giant tortoises, while the walls of the garden courtyard have many stone steles on them. The serene silence was impressive, only the chirping songs of birds could be heard, the teacher’s lone song and the clack clack of the fans.

I came out onto Renmin Lu and found the Foreign Language Bookstore. A helpful shop-girl actually took me to the right bus-stop to get the bus back to campus. The Chinese really go out of their way to help you, all those good Confucian values in modern China.

One of the things I miss most from China is the sense of community over meals. China has become a focal point for business, but in order to be successful, one must understand the culture. Americans like to do business quickly and one Chinese student told me that when Americans hand out their business cards with one hand it is as if they are throwing them away and it is regarded as insulting. Business cards, gifts, should be offered with both hands as a sign of respect. One must develop relationships in China first of all and the best way is over a meal, where business is not discussed. Confucius regarded eating a meal as far more than the act of eating. Various social aspects were involved and one such purpose was the “strengthening of kinship and friendship.” This was an integral part of society and still prevalent today.

Confucius lived in a feudal society and the giving and eating of food played a huge role in demonstrating this hierarchical structure. For example, the arrangement of seating with family, friends and social/governmental dining situations, provided a visual demonstration of their status within that particular group. A decree issued by Emperor Zhenzong of the Jingde Reign during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) gave rules and banquet etiquette concerning the type and time of appropriate language, dress, behavior and seating order. Dining etiquette had been in place in the Chinese empire long before this decree but it was strongly advocated by Confucius as it was believed that this dining structure would help “rule the country and educate its people”. These rules kept in mind hierarchical status and the order in which one sat being central. Thus, the seating arrangement was always clearly outlined.

When dinner was served, it was the job of the host to offer a toast to his guests. One time I was invited to dinner by a friend who worked for the government in international trade. A group of suited colleagues from other Provinces were visiting, also involved in trade. It was a hot day and the restaurant had been selected, so the men rolled up their trousers and sat around the table. I was the only Western guest and to show their respect, they toasted me with loud *gambei's* (dry glass), with small glasses containing a strong liquid (red rice wine) similar to German schnapps. America and England were also toasted but there were twelve of them and one was supposed to toss the drink back after each toast. Not wanting to lose face, I downed a small portion of each toast as I wanted to be able to walk straight afterwards and I toasted each of the men. It is important not to refuse any drink or food offered to you. Frequently people would often place a morsel of food on my plate with their chopsticks and I would smile and nod and eat it. Confucius believed that using eating to promote health and social cultivation was the appropriate way to dine and rules and etiquette were implemented to demonstrate a respect for the food being consumed.

One of the most important rules involved chopsticks and these rules, established through ancient

etiquette, are still valid today. Chopsticks should not be used upside down and never placed vertically into a dish, as this was the way of making sacrifices to the dead. Diners could not tap or push a dish with chopsticks, or use a chopstick as a fork by poking it into a piece of food. When taking food, they could not go from one dish to another or let their chopsticks cross over those of others. When diners wanted to put down their chopsticks during a meal, they would place them lengthways on a chopstick holder, or on the plate, or spoon on their right hand side. The above rules demonstrate some of the requirements concerning appropriate dining and provide a guideline of how involved eating a meal really is when following ancient Chinese dining etiquette prescribed by Confucius.

Filial piety, respect for the ancestors is prevalent in China today and a Confucian edict. Every home I visited always had one wall with pictures of their ancestors and every year in April there is the Qing Ming Festival – (Pure Brightness or Tomb Sweeping Day). Here, people visit their family graves, clean the gravesite and set off fire crackers to scare away the evil spirits. Offerings are provided and my friends left a packet of cigarettes next to their father's grave stone, a beautiful carved dragon, as he was a smoker. Food and wine is also offered and paper money is burnt. The edict being that if you don't show respect and take care of your ancestors, bad luck will follow you in life.

Thus, Confucian ethics expound the concept of *li*, that is, the balance between good and bad. *Li* facilitates both the production and continuation of an ethical society. This ethical society was based on traditional concepts and ceremonies concerning ancestral sacrifice, respect towards the social, political, and familial institutions, and correct etiquette and protocol concerning the actions of everyday happenings. It is important to note that *li* does not constitute a set of rules and can even be transgressed if the goal of the offense is to produce further ethical good. In the U.S.A., an atmosphere of viciousness and hateful diatribe seems to have taken over our cultural, social and political discourse. We need to learn from the Chinese and also develop a harmonious society based on Confucian values.

Confucius wrote,

“A young man should serve his parents at home and be respectful to elders outside his home. He should be earnest and truthful, loving all, but become intimate with humaneness. After doing this, if he has energy to spare, he can study literature and the arts.”

中国

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Confucian Quotes (*Selected*)

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest;
Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitter

rest.

Confucius

Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.

Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.

In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of.

Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.

If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people.

Without feelings of respect, what is there to distinguish men from beasts?

The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell.

Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.

Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men.

An oppressive government is more to be feared than a tiger.

I hear, I know. I see, I remember. I do, I understand.

Old age, believe me, is a good and pleasant thing. It is true you are gently shouldered off the stage, but then you are given such a comfortable front stall as spectator.

Wherever you go, go with all your heart.

Study the past, if you would divine the future.

The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home.

You cannot open a book without learning something.

Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.

Instead of being concerned that you have no office, be concerned to think how you may fit yourself for office. Instead of being concerned that you are not known, seek to be worthy of being known.

To see and listen to the wicked is already the beginning of wickedness.

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 faults of a superior person are like the sun and moon. They have their faults, and everyone sees them; they change and everyone looks up to them.

The firm, the enduring, the simple, and the modest are near to virtue.