

Review of Confucius' Analects

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Confucius' *Analects* have long been considered the most revered sacred book in the Confucian tradition, and it is believed to have been compiled by successive generations of Confucius' pupils over centuries. The *Analects* of Confucius are a compilation of his teachings that have been handed down through the ages from generation to generation. This work, following the master's own words that have remained via both oral and written transmissions, represents the Confucian spirit in both form and content, just as the Platonic dialogues represent the teaching of Socrates. In light of critical inquiry, Confucius' *Analects* reveal some of his traits, such as his ambitions, concerns (including jealousy), joys (including contentment), duties (including responsibilities to others), and, most significantly, his understanding of oneself. Aiming for something more than simply presenting arguments or documenting occurrences, the condensed comments on Confucius seem to have been intended to invite readers into a continuing debate at the time they were compiled. The *Analects* may be regarded as a book that includes moral ideas as well as advice on how to improve one's own life and character.

The *Analects* is a collection of 20 books or chapters that acts as a sort of life guidance for the reader. The *Analects*, a collection of writings by one of the world's greatest ancient thinkers, serves as the basis for intellectual thought in Chinese and East Asian civilizations and is considered to be the most important collection of writings in the world. Included inside the book is a collection of Confucius' views and opinions that were later rectified by his pupils shortly after he died. This series of teachings developed itself as one of the most historically important and long-lasting quotes in the history of humanity. Book 1 of The *Analects* provides a short introduction to Confucianism's core ideas, which include the qualities of a gentleman (or ideal person), filial piety, humaneness, virtuous governance, and ceremonial observances ¹. On a variety of topics, the

¹ Confucius and William Edward Soothill, *The Analects of Confucius*, (Yokohama: author; Agent in U.S.A., the F.H. Revell Co., 1910).

Master stresses the need of focusing on one's development rather than trying to influence others, as well as the importance of studying and having a "fondness for learning": "Yu, I shall tell you what it is to know. To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge."² Book 2 begins with a consideration of how a nation should be governed following moral principles. It serves as a moral example for the people over whom it has power by acting morally. After a brief introduction to ritual, the master's teaching turns to the topic of distinction between civilized people and barbarians in Book 3. He also addresses the significance of ritual in differentiating civilized people from barbarians³. Observing procedures while dealing with subordinates helps leaders avoid abusing their positions of power. Confucianism's Book 4 is primarily concerned with the virtue of humaneness, which is believed to be the ultimate goal of a person and is thus linked with success: "The Book of History says, 'Oh! Simply by being a good son and friendly to his brothers a man can exert an influence upon government.' In so doing a man is taking part in government. How can there be any question of his having actively to 'take part in government'?"⁴ The significance of self-reflection as a key component of the practice is stressed throughout the book. Examples of how the Master talks about humaneness and other issues of character include students, current political leaders, historical heroes and rulers, and historical figures and rulers. Others come later in the narrative, with some appearing in Book 5 and others in Book 6⁵. In Book 6, the master's assessment of individuals continues, with a significant focus placed on his students in particular. Readers learn more about Hui, a disciple who seems to have achieved the pinnacle of humaneness before sadly dying away at a young age because of his actions. A picture of himself is painted by the Master in Book 7, showing his dual nature as both teacher

² Confucius and Soothill.

³ Confucius and Soothill.

⁴ Confucius and Soothill.

⁵ Confucius and Soothill.

and student while also painting an image of himself as a teacher. It starts with the statement "I transmit but do not create," showing his dedication to repurposing the best methods of the past to benefit people and society as a whole ⁶. The teachings of Master Zeng are also included within Book 8 of the Confucian Classics. Master Zeng seems to be more concerned with the outward indications of gentlemanly conduct than with the internal signs of gentlemanly behavior ⁷. He emphasizes the need of comprehending the purpose or effect of rituals, as well as the requirement of doing them properly consistently. Hui likes the master's teaching because it provides a tantalizing challenge to his pupils, which he finds appealing.

Unlike the other parts of *The Analects*, book ten onwards includes descriptions of a gentleman, acting in line with etiquette. There are rituals that control everything from eating and dressing habits to how to interact with different types of government officials, and the level of detail that goes into them may be seen: "There is no point in seeking the views of a gentleman who, though he sets his heart on the Way, is ashamed of poor food and poor clothes" ⁸. Book 15 explores a bulk of the instruction that focuses on how a gentleman may utilize humaneness in public service, with a special emphasis on looking inside oneself. Despite his warning against rejecting great ideas or decent individuals because of their origins or backgrounds, he encourages the gentleman to be courteous and avoid confrontation on the one hand and to be courteous and avoid conflict on the other. The later books of *The Analects* seem to have more in common with Books 1–10. There are many quotations from famous disciples of the Master in the book, and it is possible to see the variations in their interpretations of his teachings and ways of passing them on

⁶ Confucius and Soothill.

⁷ Confucius and Soothill.

⁸ Confucius and Soothill.

to others throughout the book's chapters. Book 20 is the concluding book of the *Analects* which serve as a model for rulers rather than a source of teaching from the Master.

Confucius lived at a time in Chinese history when little of the past had been preserved, beginning with the unification of China in 221 CE. According to historical sources, Confucius was born about 551 BCE in the town of Zhou, which is situated near modern-day Qufu in the eastern Chinese province of Shandong. Confucius is the father of Chinese philosophy. Even though some sources say he is descended from the Song royal line, others have cast doubt on this assertion. His family had fallen on hard times and was living in the state of Lu at the time of his birth⁹. Even though he grew up in poverty, his remarks indicate that he has valued education since he was fifteen or sixteen years old. He sought out teachers and learned the main texts, rituals, and skills from them. He ultimately became a teacher himself at the age of thirty-three, when he was known as the "Great Teacher"¹⁰. Unfortunately, throughout his lifetime, Confucius was never able to find or establish his perfect virtuous state, as he desired. When he returned to Lu after spending almost 12 years overseas, he devoted the rest of his life to teaching and editing renowned ancient literature, such as the *Book of Songs*, which is mentioned many times in *The Analects*¹¹. Confucius died at the age of 72 in 479 BCE, leaving behind a legacy of wisdom. However, even though *The Analects* makes many references to real figures and events, it cannot be considered a reliable historical source. It dates to a time when there were few historical records, and it is likely that it was compiled and updated by a number of different people over a lengthy period of time, including the author. More than anything, it was intended to preserve memories and important lessons, rather than to accurately describe every person, place, and relationship that was referenced in the book. There

⁹ Jonathan Clements, *Confucius: A Biography* (Indus Source, 2010).

¹⁰ Clements.

¹¹ Clements.

may be allusions to real or mythological people and places, and there may be disagreements between multiple references to the same event made by different writers who are all referring to the same event.

This collection of writings by Confucius is designed to expose readers to "the Way," also known as the Tao, which is a strict rule of moral behavior that Confucius wanted to disseminate to both government authorities and laypeople. The *Analects* of Confucius are split into three sections: the Introduction, the Tao, and the *Analects* of Confucius. The Introduction is broken into three sections: Confucius, also known as "the Master," believed that through following the Way, individuals might attain moral purity and so become what he refers to as "gentlemen." This belief is expressed throughout the *Analects*. Developing self-restraint is one of the most important habits that Confucius suggests people cultivate. This practice may be used for both the acquisition of monetary goods and the pursuit of social status and recognition for one's achievements, as Confucius explains. Confucius shows throughout the course of the book how self-control is necessary to help people in morally bettering not just themselves but also their communities by discussing different types of self-control in detail throughout the book. Confucius emphasizes the importance of material limitation as to the main type of self-restraint throughout the *Analects*. When it comes to people who follow the Way, Confucius continually praises them for their willingness to forego material luxury or even comfort to accomplish their objectives. He says in Book 1 that "the gentleman wants neither to have a full stomach nor to have a beautiful home," but that he "desires both"¹². The term "gentleman" is often used to characterize people who are of relatively high social standing and who, in addition to their wealth, have refined tastes and habits. For Confucius, however, money is not one of the qualities that define a gentleman, instead of

¹² Confucius and Soothill, *The Analects of Confucius*,.

linking this distinguished status with self-control, inner strength and fortitude, as well as inner fortitude, and inner fortitude. I agree with Confucius's ideas that virtue, rather than wealth, defines a gentleman and that abstaining from accumulating wealth is a smart choice. As a last point of focus, Confucius stresses the need of being truthful with his students, even if this involves accepting an unpleasant reality: "Yu, would you like me to teach you everything I know?" Confucius inquires of his most prized student ¹³. When you assert that you are knowledgeable about anything, that is your knowledge; when you are not, it is your ignorance. This text by Confucius describes honesty as a moral virtue, as well as a quality that aids in the effective acquisition of new knowledge and skills. In addition, by requiring people to "rectify" themselves, I believe that he is essentially requesting that they be honest with themselves and with others, as well as with him ¹⁴.

Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, believes that honesty is a necessary quality for politicians in order for them to be effective and ethical leaders in their respective countries. "Raise the upright and elevate them over the crooked," he asserts, and "the common people will look up to you"¹⁵. Anyone engaged in politics must, in his words, "raise the upright and elevate them above the crooked"¹⁶. Confucius argues in this text that leaders must protect their own integrity by identifying and appreciating those within their ranks who exhibit the same qualities as themselves. Furthermore, one of the most significant parts of the book is Confucius' focus on the significance of family and community in one's life, which is one of the book's most important themes. Throughout his book, he stresses the significance of loyalty to one's parents as a defining trait that

¹³ Confucius and Soothill.

¹⁴ Confucius and Soothill.

¹⁵ Confucius and Soothill.

¹⁶ Confucius and Soothill.

defines one's character. He also emphasizes how important it is for political leaders to behave in ways that are helpful to the whole group of people they are representing. This is significant because, throughout the *Analects*, Confucius often laments the fact that the We have gone out of favor in modern culture, which is a situation that should be avoided. It follows that returning to previous traditions is helpful to his aim of spreading love to the greatest number of people feasible. Family relationships thus serve as an important conduit for the transmission of traditional values, which Confucius considers to be vital for the survival of humankind. According to Confucius, those who are straight are quite different in our society in answer to the question. In the same way that dads offer protection for their sons, sons protect their fathers. It is only by such behavior that one may achieve straightness." Due to Confucius' frequent emphasis on the importance of honesty and integrity in the *Analects*, and this is one of those occasions, this is a particularly interesting occasion in the case of a son who reports his father to the police after discovering that he has committed a criminal crime, these qualities seem to be shown. For Confucius, however, loyalty to one's family is more important than honesty in the eyes of the law and therefore is the most important virtue. I agree with his views that having a strong feeling of belonging to one's family is the most important element of having a decent moral character.

Evaluating the writing and composition of the book, its success can be attributed to the book's division into twenty digestible sections, each of which discusses key concepts from Confucius's philosophy. Additionally, the book's writing style can successfully focus and keep audience members engaged with the narrative throughout the entire book's storyline. It is via the use of dialogues and references that Confucius' points of view are validated, and so the narrative becomes more complicated and interesting. Confucius was writing during the time of the Chinese cultural revolution. Rather than concentrating only on living and surviving to the next day,

Confucius wanted to concentrate people's attention on intellectual pursuits and the acquisition of knowledge, which he believed would motivate them to pursue these goals. According to Confucius, knowledge began with a thorough grasp of oneself, which was then followed by a developing understanding of the rest of the universe, and so on. The *Analects* provided the people with a greater grasp of the most essential life teachings, especially when it comes to how one should behave oneself in social settings to create a robust and honest social framework in which people interact with one another in harmony. I think that reading the *Analects* has helped me get a deeper grasp of some of the most essential truths that life has to teach. To completely comprehend the idea of wisdom in its entirety, it will take a lifetime of study and research to achieve complete understanding.

The *Analects*, without a doubt, is a masterpiece of art, authored by some of the most famous academics of Confucius' day and have had a significant influence on succeeding generations of Chinese scholars. For thousands of years, the Confucian school of thought has served as the foundation for Chinese tradition and cultural values, and it continues to do so now. While presenting a universal moral norm, the *Analects* also provide a window into the war-torn and conflict-ridden Chinese civilization that existed at the time of their composition. As a result of the widespread practice of civil obedience as well as the frequent outbreak of warfare, restoring social order became more challenging. I concluded that the country portrayed in The *Analects* is a little too perfect, particularly when seen in the context of the political and social circumstances that existed in China during the Warring States era, as a result of my study of the book. According to Confucius' vision, civil disorder would be eradicated via the establishment of a structured hierarchical society, the practice of compassion, and the pursuit of knowledge, among other measures. These ideas would then become accepted by the public as part of mainstream culture as

the Chinese tried to realize their goals in the years to come. Following that, there will be a period of transition and growth for mankind.

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