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## THE SMALL ANALECTS

## Background Information



### CHINA

### KEY CHINESE VALUES: CONFUCIANISM AND ITS LEGACY

Many Chinese beliefs were formed early, as civilization emerged along the Yellow River before 1000 B.C.E. More formal systems of thought developed later, in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., during a divided and troubled period of Chinese politics. Of the resulting philosophies or religions, Confucianism proved the most durable and significant.

Deemed by students a "Divine Sage," Confucius (Kong Fuzi) (ca. 551-479 B.C.E.) was the founder of a humanistic school of philosophy that offered China, during the Zhou dynasty, a social and political ethos derived from idealized values of the past. As a remedy for the political chaos of his age, the famous teacher offered an ethical system focused on individual moral conduct, propriety, ritual, and benevolence. Arguing that the foundations of good government and the well-being of society rested on individual ethical behavior, Confucius urged the emperor and his assistants, the *junzi* (gentlemen), to provide moral examples for society at large. Confucius believed that the appointment of modest, wise, polite, and virtuous gentlemen scholars was essential for good government. In the selection from the *Analects*, which is a collection of sayings attributed to the "Master" and set down long after his death, one finds his views on gentlemen and their importance to the whole social order. Because scholars doubt that Confucius put his ideas into writing, it is impossible to determine whether these views are authentically his own or those of later Confucianists.

Confucian theories of government were adopted as state ideology during the Han dynasty (200 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), and many of his concepts proved fundamental to Chinese philosophy more generally. From the following passages, consider what the main interests and values of Confucianism were. Compare these with leading value systems in other ancient and classical civilizations. How do they compare, for example, with Hindu or Buddhist concepts developing during the same time period in India?

The Master said, If a gentleman is frivolous, he will lose the respect of his inferiors and lack firm ground upon which to build up his education. First and foremost he must learn to be faithful to his superiors, to keep promises, to refuse the friendship of all who are not like him. And if he finds he has made a mistake, then he must not be afraid of admitting the fact and amending his ways.

Selection 1 from *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. and anno. by Arthur Waley (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1984), 85, 90-91, 104-106, 121, 131, 152, 163, 167, 177-178, 181, 187-188, 197, 199, 200, 203-207, 233. Permission granted by the Arthur Waley Estate.

HW- Read, annotate, and answer questions 1-5 on a separate sheet in complete sentences.

Zigong asked about the true gentleman. The Master said, He does not preach what he practises till he has practised what he preaches.

The Master said, A gentleman can see a question from all sides without bias. The small man is biased and can see a question only from one side.

The Master said, A gentleman for his dealings with the world has neither enemies nor affections; but wherever he sees Right he ranges himself beside it.

The Master said, A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay.

The Master said, A gentleman covers the reputation of being slow in word but prompt in deed.

The Master said, A gentleman who is widely versed in letters and at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual is not likely, I think, to go far wrong.

The Master said, A true gentleman is calm and at ease; the small man is fretful and ill at ease.

At home in his native village his manner is simple and unassuming, as though he did not trust himself to speak. But in the ancestral temple and at Court he speaks readily, though always choosing his words with care.

At Court when conversing with the Under Ministers his attitude is friendly and affable; when conversing with the Upper Ministers, it is restrained and formal.

When the ruler is present it is wary, but not cramped.

When saluting his colleagues he passes his right hand to the left, letting his robe hang down in front and behind; and as he advances with quickened step, his attitude is one of majestic dignity.

When the guest has gone, he reports the close of the visit, saying, "The guest is no longer looking back."

On entering the Palace Gate he seems to shrink into himself, as though there were not room. If he halts, it must never be in the middle of the gate, nor in going through does he ever tread on the threshold.

While, holding up the hem of his skirt, he ascends the Audience Hall, he seems to double up and keeps in his breath, so that you would think he was not breathing at all. On coming out, after descending the first step his expression relaxes into one of satisfaction and relief. At the bottom of the steps he quickens his pace, advancing with an air of majestic dignity. On resuming his place he resumes his attitude of wariness and hesitation.

[The Gentleman] must not sit on a mat that is not straight.

When the men of his village are drinking wine he leaves the feast immediately after the village-elders have left.

Sima Niu asked about the meaning of the term Gentleman. The Master said, The Gentleman neither grieves nor fears. Sima Niu said, So that is what is meant by being a gentleman—neither to grieve nor to fear? The Master said, On looking within himself he finds no taint; so why should he either grieve or fear?

The Master said, The gentleman calls attention to the good points in others; he does not call attention to their defects. The small man does just the reverse of this.

The Master said, The true gentleman is conciliatory but not accommodating. Common people are accommodating but not conciliatory.

The Master said, The gentleman is dignified, but never haughty; common people are haughty, but never dignified.

The Master said, It is possible to be a true gentleman and yet lack Goodness. But there has never yet existed a Good man who was not a gentleman.

When the Master said, He who holds no rank in a State does not discuss its policies, Master Zeng said, "A true gentleman, even in his thoughts, never departs from what is suitable to his rank."

The Master said, A gentleman is ashamed to let his words outrun his deeds....

The Master said, A gentleman is distressed by his own lack of capacity; he is never distressed at the failure of others to recognize his merits.

The Master said, It is wrong for a gentleman to have knowledge of mental matters and proper that he should be entrusted with great responsibilities. It is wrong for a small man to be entrusted with great responsibilities, but proper that he should have a knowledge of mental matters.

Confucius said, There are three things against which a gentleman is on his guard. In his youth, before his blood and vital humours have settled down, he is on his guard against lust. Having reached his prime, when the blood and vital humours have finally hardened, he is on his guard against strife. Having reached old age, when the blood and vital humours are already decaying, he is on his guard against avarice.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the proper goals of life according to Confucius?
2. What was the Confucian definition of a gentleman? Why did Confucianism place so much emphasis on manners and ceremony?
3. Did Confucius judge human nature to be good or bad? What was his attitude toward human emotions?
4. What social structure did Confucianism imply? What were the key social classes, and how did they differ?
5. In what ways was Confucianism not a religion?
6. How does Confucianism compare with the political values and systems developed in Mesopotamia (Chapter 1)? What are the distinctive features of Confucianism as a basis for political life?

## ESSAY SUGGESTIONS

- A. What qualities in Confucianism and its popularization explain why Confucian values proved so desirable in Chinese culture? Why would ordinary people as well as "gentlemen" assimilate Confucian values?
- B. How did Confucian thinking define and justify social inequality? How could it be used to condemn social protest but also, at times, to justify protest?