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Religion and Faith in China

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Confucius as a Moral Teacher and Leader

Baoyan CHENG

China is making major efforts to increase national and global awareness of the ideas of Confucius (551–470 BCE), which are being applied to business and political leadership as part of a long-standing and influential philosophical tradition.

As a scholar, philosopher, teacher, academic leader, and government minister, Confucius was naturally concerned with leadership and deliberated about it deeply. His thoughts on leadership constitute an important part of his doctrine; they laid a theoretical foundation for the establishment and development of China's political system and the management of social life for more than 2,000 years.

The Life of Confucius

The word *Confucius* is the Latin rendering of the Chinese term *Kǒng Fūzǐ* (孔夫子), meaning Master Kong. Confucius lived during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE), when the power of government had fallen into the hands of a hundred or so feudal lords, each of whom controlled his own state. Despite an impoverished childhood, Confucius mastered the six arts that were required for a fully educated person of his day—ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic. He started teaching in his 30s, setting up a school that was open to all people regardless of their social class; historians consider it to be the first school in Chinese history. With a style similar to that of Socrates, Confucius taught his students through storytelling and conversation, often debating with them.

Confucius was not only a scholar and teacher, however; he was determined to participate in politics and to put his ideas into action. He dreamed of seeing a world in which a justified social order was established and people's consciences were awakened and fully cultivated. Such a social order would mean the realization of *lǐ* (righteous social order; 礼) and *rén* (love for humanity; 仁), the two most essential values in Confucius's doctrine.

Confucius held several government posts in his home state of Lu, including magistrate and minister of justice. Unfortunately, although the king of Lu admired Confucius's scholarship, he was not really interested in his political views, so Confucius eventually left Lu and attempted to find a feudal state where his ideas not only would be heard but also practiced—a search that proved fruitless. In the last years of his life, Confucius concentrated on writing and editing books on history, philosophy, ritual, poetry, and music. Some of his works have been lost, but most have remained as classics of Chinese culture.

Confucius's Thoughts on Leadership

While it is a complex system, Confucius's doctrine can be understood basically as a philosophy of life and a social ethic, both based in *rén*. Confucius believed that human nature endowed human beings with *rén*, but that each individual needs to cultivate it. *Rén* is the essence of humanity and thus the foundation for any individual's self development, and for any

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Christian Missionaries in China

Ralph COVELL

Introduced during the Tang dynasty, Christianity played a significant role in China's intellectual life through the founding of missionary schools and colleges and seems likely to have a growing role in 21st-century China.

From the 1990s onward, a great migration has been taking place in China, as millions flock to the cities in order to find jobs and a

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The State of Faith in Contemporary China

Jinghao ZHOU

Modern-day China is home to diverse but strictly regulated religions, surveyed here to provide accurate information about their historical and cultural backgrounds and current practices as context for reports in the Western press.

Most world religions are or have been at one time practiced in China, and several (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) either originated in China or underwent history-altering transformations

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A Nuanced Look at Religion in China

Not long ago I met a retired philosophy professor who had been appointed during the 1970s to represent China in science and technology, not because he knew those subjects but because, thanks to a missionary education, he understood Western culture and spoke good English. This led me to reflect upon how ironic it is that in the past, there have been those who talked about "Godless China," when some of the world's major religions evolved there and prestigious universities, such as the acclaimed University of Nanjing, were founded by U.S. missionary institutions.

The articles in this issue challenge the widespread idea that China does not allow the practice of religion. In fact, the statistics show considerable growth and much variety of belief and practice. While indeed China imposes religious restrictions that don't exist in most Western countries, it is hardly unique; many religious restrictions exist in the Islamic world, for example, though the relationship between religion and state is quite different there. For many observers, the situation in China is confusing, as evidenced by the widely circulated story in the Western press that Bibles would be banned at the Olympics. In fact, the restriction is on imports of Bibles to be used for missionary activities.

And what are the business implications of faith? Religious belief generally declines as a nation becomes wealthier and more educated, but the United States is an exception. U.S. citizens spend $225 billion on religious and spiritual books, music, films, collectibles, travel, worship aids, and education. Will China follow a path similar to the United States, or a European secular path? The articles in this issue show that religion is, though a minority interest, of importance in China. Readers who are working in China need to know that they may meet or employ Chinese Christians or Muslims, as well as Buddhists and agnostic Party members.

In this issue, we highlight Confucius, one of the world's most influential thinkers, whose position as a scholar, philosopher, teacher, academic leader, and government minister informed his doctrine and his ideas on leadership. Those ideas laid a theoretical foundation for the establishment and development of China's political system, and understanding them is essential for the 21st-century professional working in China. Our other articles offer a historical overview of religion in China and cover such complex topics as missionary activity and China's Muslims—all with the aim of giving readers a more nuanced view of the state of religious belief and faith in China.

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Confucius as a Moral Teacher and Leader

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just social order, or *lǐ*. *Lǐ*, a key principle for Confucius, literally means "ritual," but also refers in a more general sense to order and justice. As Confucius put it in the *Analects*, "The realization of *rén* is to conquer oneself and reestablish *lǐ*" (*Analects* 12:1). This fundamental relationship between individuals and society is profoundly reflected in Confucius's thoughts on leadership.

Becoming a *jūnzǐ*

Whether one was destined to be a leader or not, Confucius emphasized that one should cultivate oneself to be a *jūnzǐ* (君子), or noble man. Like Plato's philosopher-king, only a *jūnzǐ* can be a leader in an ideal society. Yet, whereas a philosopher can only be decided, according to Plato, by a "divine dispensation," any human being can become a *jūnzǐ*. This difference points to the humanistic nature of Confucius's doctrine.

According to Confucius, being a *jūnzǐ* required certain virtues. First was *rén*, the love for mankind. That love is specific and practical for Confucius. Since the people one loves most dearly are one's parents, filial piety is the core of *rén*. Next to filial piety is one's care and feelings for siblings, then friendship. Thus, *rén* is presented in ever wider circles from family to community, state, and eventually the whole world. To strengthen the belief in *rén* and enhance its practice in life, a *jūnzǐ* should also have the virtues of honesty to oneself and to others, loyalty to community and society, intelligence and rationality, credibility and reliability, cleanness in service, and a sense of shame. These qualities having been acquired, a *jūnzǐ* is "one whom riches

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and honors cannot taint, poverty and lowly station cannot shift, majesty and power cannot bend" (*Mencius* 3B2). So said Mencius (372–289 BCE), the second-most-prominent figure in the Confucian tradition.

Further Requirements for Leadership

Confucius believed that a leader, in addition to needing to be a *jūnzǐ*, needed to fulfill other requirements as well. Above all, leadership requires commitment to and responsibility for others and in a broader sense for the world. A leader must have the persistence to maintain that commitment no matter how difficult it is. As Zeng Shen, one of Confucius's favorite students, put it, "A leader must be resolute and steadfast, for his burden is heavy and his road is long. To practice the virtue of benevolence in the world is his burden, is that not heavy? Only with death does his journey come to an end, is that not long?" (*Analects* 8:7). Leadership also requires comprehensive education, diligence, and modesty; a good leader should always try to learn from others. "Wherever there are three people," said Confucius, "there must be one who can be my teacher" (*Analects* 7:22). A good leader can also "work with people who have different ideas" (*Analects* 13:23); a leader "does not recommend a man on account of what he says, neither does he dismiss what is said on account of the speaker" (*Analects* 15:23). Along with modesty comes self-examination: "When you meet a man of virtue, turn your thoughts to becoming his equal; when you meet a man without virtue, look within and examine your own self" (*Analects* 4:17).

All these requirements for a leader illustrate Confucius's axiomatic belief that although law and rules are necessary for order and formality in any society, government and leadership can only be built upon *rén*, for the underlying function of any society and organization is to promote it. To govern is not only to regulate people's behavior, but more importantly, to guide their minds. The art of leadership, accordingly, requires first a virtuous leader. To lead others, one must be morally a good example for others; to urge people to work hard, "the leader should work hard first" (*Analects* 13:1). "If the leader acts in an upright way, the people will obey him without being ordered to; if the leader does not act uprightly, the people will not obey him even after repeated injunctions" (*Analects* 13:6). When a state minister asked Confucius how he could make people respect and be loyal to their superiors and inspire each other in service, Confucius replied, "Be upright in their presence, and they will hold you in respect; be filial and benevolent, and they will be loyal to you; use the righteous and instruct the unqualified, and they will inspire each other in service" (*Analects* 2:20).

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The Confucian Golden Rule

The art of leadership requires respecting and understanding people. "You do not have to worry that others do not know you well; you may worry that you do not know others well" (*Analects* 1:16). And respecting and understanding lead to forgiving and encouraging. When Zeng Shen was asked by his fellow students what was the key lesson that he had learned from Confucius, he answered, "Nothing but honesty and forbearance!" (*Analects* 4:15). Understanding and forgiving, however, are not the essense of leadership; it is the display of *rén* that makes a good leader. The golden rule of Confucius is "Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you!" (*Analects* 15:23). Logically, the other side of the rule also holds: "A man of humanity, wishing to establish himself, also establishes others, and wishing to enlarge himself, also enlarges others" (*Analects* 16:28).

When Zeng Shen was asked by his fellow students what was the key lesson that he had learned from Confucius, he answered, "Nothing but honesty and forbearance!"

Baoyan Cheng (not pictured) received her doctoral degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in November 2007.

Christian Missionaries in China

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better life. China's Protestant and Catholic churches have reached out to these migrants, often in cooperation with the government and nongovernmental organizations, to help in job searching, education for children, and medical needs. These outreach activities, along with education through video tapes, the Internet, and television programs, serve as means of introducing the Christian faith to the Chinese. This flourishing shows the resilience of Christianity in a country from which the faith seemed to die out four times—first after 845, when Nestorian Christianity was persecuted after relative acceptance earlier in the Tang dynasty (618–907), then at the end of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), following a period of early Roman Catholic missionary work, again in 1724, following Jesuit missionary work, and finally, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

The Early Christian Efforts

The Nestorians were the first Christians to come to China, arriving during the Tang dynasty, but although warmly received, their faith did not survive the persecution that began in 845. The Franciscans followed, during the Yuan dynasty, and gained perhaps as many as 100,000 converts—but the faith again passed from the scene with the end of the dynasty. Of the Roman Catholic missionary efforts, the most successful were those of the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and his colleagues, who realized that by establishing themselves as equivalent to Confucian scholars, they could reach the elite at the top of the Confucian value hierarchy. Ricci and his colleagues had long discourses with Chinese scholars on many aspects of Chinese

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