

Analects of Confucius

- Date** ■ Compiled after 450 B.C.
- Place** ■ Lu (modern Shandong Province, China)
- Type of Source** ■ Philosophical text (original in Classical Chinese)
- Author** ■ Great Master Kong (Kongfuzi, Confucius in Latin), compiled by later students
- Historical Context** ■ In the late Zhou dynasty, emperors held very little authority. Real power was in the hands of regional nobles. Law and order broke down while regional leaders fought against one another. Kong Qiu, later called Kongfuzi or Confucius, was born into a family of middle-level government officials. He believed that the social decay was caused by not following the example of the sage-kings, the legendary first kings of China. His followers compiled many sayings into *The Analects (Lun Yu)*, but they did not provide a clear structure to the book. The sayings explain how the ancient ways encouraged virtue through the example of the government. They became the basis of Chinese social and political thought.

Chapter 2—Wei Zheng (*The Practice of Government*)

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, "In the **Book of Poetry** are three hundred pieces, but the design of them all may be embraced in one sentence 'Having no depraved thoughts.'"

The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, 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."

The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind **bent** on learning.

"At thirty, I stood firm. "At forty, I had no doubts. "At fifty, I knew the **decrees of Heaven**. "At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth.

"At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."

Mang I asked what **filial piety** was. The Master said, "It is not being disobedient."

Master

Confucius is usually referred to as "the Master."

Book of Poetry

Also called the Book of Songs or Odes, the Shi Jing (Shih Ching) is one of the Five Classics of the Confucian curriculum. It was admired for its portrayal of human emotion.

bent

turned

decrees of Heaven

The decrees of Heaven are not a law code, but the perfect and natural order. "Heaven" in Chinese thought is not especially associated with the afterlife.

Mang I

a student of Confucius, also spelled Meng I

filial piety

respect for parents and elders. Confucians believe filial piety is the basis of all moral development.

Analects of Confucius

Soon after, as **Fan Ch'ih** was driving him, the Master told him, saying, "**Mang-sun** asked me what filial piety was, and I answered him, 'not being disobedient.'"

Fan Ch'ih said, "What did you mean?" The Master replied, "That parents, when alive, be served according to propriety; that, when dead, they should be buried according to propriety; and that they should be sacrificed to according to propriety..."

Tsze-yu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "The filial piety nowadays means the support of one's parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support; without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?"

Tsze-hsia asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "The difficulty is with the countenance. If, when their elders have any troublesome affairs, the young take the toil of them, and if, when the young have wine and food, they set them before their elders, is THIS to be considered filial piety?"...

The Master said, "If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others."

The Master said, "The accomplished scholar is not a utensil."

Tsze-kung asked what constituted the superior man. The Master said, "He acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions."

The Master said, "The superior man is **catholic** and not **partisan**. The **mean** man is partisan and not catholic."

The Master said, "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous..."

The Master said, "**Yu**, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to **allow** that you do not know it; this is knowledge."

Tsze-chang was learning with a view to official **emolument**.

The Master said, "Hear much and put aside the points of which you stand in doubt, while you speak cautiously at the same time of the others: then you will afford few occasions for blame. See much and put aside the things which seem perilous, while you are cautious at the same time in carrying the others into practice: then you will have few occasions for repentance. When one gives few occasions for blame in his words, and few occasions for repentance in his conduct, he is in the way to get emolument."

Fan Ch'ih
a student, also spelled Fan Chi

Mang-sun
a student, also spelled Meng Sun

Tsze-yu
a student, also spelled Ziyou, Tsze-yu also helped Confucius get his most important government position as Justice Minister of Lu.

Tsze-hsia
a student, also spelled Zixia

Tsze-kung
a student, also spelled Zigong

catholic
universal, impartial

partisan
partial, biased

mean
narrow-minded, low-class

Yu
Confucius is talking here to Tsze-yu. In Chinese, family names are given first and personal names or titles are given second, the opposite of the Western tradition.

allow
admit

Tsze-chang
a student, also spelled Zizhang

emolument
employment with a salary

Analects of Confucius

The **Duke Ai** asked, saying, "What should be done in order to secure the submission of the people?" Confucius replied, "Advance the upright and set aside the crooked, then the people will submit. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, then the people will not submit."

Chi K'ang 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 final 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."

Some one addressed Confucius, saying, "Sir, why are you not engaged in the government?"

The Master said, "What does the **Shu-ching** say of filial piety? 'You are final, you discharge your brotherly duties. These qualities are displayed in government.' This then also constitutes the exercise of government. Why must there be that making one be in the government?"

The Master said, "I do not know how a man without truthfulness is to get on. How can a large carriage be made to go without the crossbar for yoking the oxen to, or a small carriage without the arrangement for yoking the horses?"

Tsze-chang asked whether the affairs of ten ages after could be known.

Confucius said, "The **Yin** dynasty followed the regulations of the **Hsia**: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The **Chau** dynasty has followed the regulations of Yin: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. Some other may follow the Chau, but though it should be at the distance of a hundred ages, its affairs may be known."

The Master said, "For a man to sacrifice to a spirit which does not belong to him is flattery."

"To see what is right and not to do it is **want** of courage."

Duke Ai

The Duke of Lu, the region where Confucius lived. Duke Ai made Confucius the Justice Minister, Confucius found the Duke to be an unserious ruler and ultimately resigned over a trivial matter (to avoid humiliating a superior).

Chi K'ang

Chi K'ang's relation to Confucius is unclear. Also spelled Ji Kang.

Shu-ching

Also spelled Shujing, "Shu-ching" translates as the Book of History. The Shu-ching is one of the Five Classics of the Confucian curriculum.

Yin

Another name for the Shang dynasty that ruled China from 1766–1122 B.C. See Atlas of World History, page 21.

Hsia

Also spelled Xia, the Hsia is the name of the legendary first dynasty of China, traditionally said to have ruled from about 2205–1766 B.C.

Chau

Also spelled Zhou. The Zhou dynasty ruled China from 1122–256 B.C. By Confucius' time, the Zhou emperors were only ceremonial, with the real power in the hands of local nobles such as Duke Ai. See Atlas of World History, page 22.

want

a lack

Source: Confucius, "The Analects," *Internet Classics Archives*, 1994–2009, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Confucius/analects.1.1.html>> (May 17, 2011).