

CONFUCIANISM

Is a religion, a philosophy and ethical system emphasizing how to build a just and orderly society based upon a harmonious way of life. In many areas of Asia Confucian moral teachings are blended with Taoist emphasis on blending with nature and with Buddhist concepts of afterlife to form a complimentary and peacefully co-existent set of religions.

One source estimates that there are approx. 6 million Confucians in the world, with about 26,000 living in North America.

BELIEFS:

K'ung Fu Tzu called for personal moral development and obedience to proper rules which would create social decorum and harmonious relationships.

Emphasized 5 ethical relationships: Father - son [parent-child] Husband - wife
Older brother - younger brother [sibling-sibling] Emperor - subject [minister]
Friend - friend (only equal one)

Yin - Yang: everything in the universe is made up of 2 opposite qualities which need to be kept in balance:
e.g. feminine - masculine, receptive - active, yielding - unbending.

PRACTICES:

Emphasized the Chun-Tzu or moral ideal of the noble individual.

Emphasized key virtues including:

1. Hsiao or love within the family, causing happy and secure families as the Confucian ideal and the essential basis for a harmonious society. In such families children should respect and obey parents without question.
2. Ancestor worship: done in home or public shrines and temples.
3. Li: or ritualistic behavior establishing proper etiquette and celebrating the life cycle.
4. Yi: righteousness
5. Xin: honesty and trustworthiness.
6. Jen: uprightness, benevolence, compassion, goodness and respect for others. This is the highest Confucian virtue. It involves human-heartedness motivated by love not profit. It fosters self-improvement, not public fame. It fosters respect for parents. It speaks carefully but acts quickly. It sees human nature as basically good.
7. Chung: loyalty to the state.

Feng shui: "Wind & water" principles to align the use of space and furnishings with the earth's vital energy, called ch'i.

Hierarchical social order of classes with everyone playing an important role and working hard in their role. Special emphasis on farmers and scholar-officials.

HISTORY:

Founded by K'ung Fu Tzu (Master Kung) who lived 551-479 BCE. during the Chou dynasty in the state of Lu at a time of moral chaos and feudal conflict and bloodshed. He traveled through many states advising rulers and advocating reform based on humane principles of peace and equity. He taught individual morality and rulers' proper use of political power. He emphasized education, etiquette and loyalty. His effect on Chinese culture has been immense.

After Confucius came two of his followers who while they agreed on some basic Confucian teachings still diverged from his teachings.

1. Mencius emphasized the virtue of Yi (righteous conduct) for government rulers. He is seen as an early advocate of democracy since he believed that human intuition was basically good and should be used to make choices.
2. Hsun Tzu (312 - 230 BCE) saw Mencius as too idealistic. He said human nature was evil, that heaven was impersonal and doesn't intervene in human affairs. He taught that people will hate each other and be greedy unless the rules of Li and Yi were sternly taught and enforced.

Confucianism was developed during the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) especially by the scholar Tung Chun-shu into a state cult with Confucian virtues used the official civil exams to train new government workers. These Confucian ideals were used to unite the people in support of their rulers.

Later neo-Confucians incorporated ideas from Buddhism (especially Zen Buddhism) and Taoism, thus emphasizing metaphysics, meditation and dedication to becoming a noble person (Chun-Tzu).

SACRED TEXTS:

A. The Wu Jing or Five Classics (along with the Four Books) are the Confucian canon, China's oldest canon. The five Classics were composed before Confucius which he edited and emphasized. They were used to train government officials for thousands of years until Imperial Rule ended in China in 1911.

1. I Ching: book of changes, 64 hexagrams each made of 6 divided and undivided lines used for divination where one casts 49 sticks and reads the results to predict the future and ensure the god's approval of human action.

Carl Jung used it. It is among the oldest and most applied religious scriptures.

2. Shu Ching: History including writings and speeches from ancient Chinese rulers.

3. Shih Ching: Poetry including 300 poems and songs.

4. Li Ching: Rites, a collection of 3 books on the Li or rites of propriety.

5. Ch'un Ch'iu: Spring and Autumn Annals, a history of the state of Lu from 722 - 484 BCE.

6. Some sources refer to a sixth classic on music and dance and add that this classic has been lost.

B. The Si Shu or Four Books:

1. The Lun Yu or Analects of Confucius. If people pursue Jen and Li within each of the five relationships, harmony will exist at every level of society.

2. Meng Tzu or writings of Mencius (371 - 289 BCE) a philosopher who like Confucius traveled from state to state advising rulers.

3. Ta Hsueh or The Great Learning

4. Chung Yung or the Doctrine of the Mean.

DIFFERENT SCHOOLS: Han Confucianism Neo-Confucianism
 Korean Confucianism Contemporary Neo-Confucianism
 Japanese Confucianism Singapore Confucianism

Today: Confucianism has contributed to the moral and spiritual traditions of millions of people. It encourages proper relationships motivated by virtues of respect, goodness and understanding. These virtues are taught and developed internally, not externally forced.