



Confucius: The Life and Legacy of China's Greatest Philosopher

Charles River Editors

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"At 15 my heart was set on learning; at 30 I stood firm; at 40 I had no more doubts; at 50 I knew the will of heaven; at 60 my ear was obedient; at 70 I could follow my heart's desire without overstepping the boundaries of what was right." (Confucius)

"Confucius has no interest in falsehood; he did not pretend to be prophet; he claimed no inspiration; he taught no new religion; he used no delusions; flattered not the emperor under whom he lived..." (Voltaire)

Many people argue that Confucius is the most influential person of all time, and if having a significant effect on the greatest number of people is the criterion, he may very well be. China is one of the largest and oldest civilizations on earth, and Confucius has been influential there from almost the beginning: the first Chinese dynasty was founded around 1600 BCE, and Confucius lived from 551-479 BCE.

Although he is still one of history's most famous philosophers, Confucius was in many respects an unremarkable man, and even his physical features were said to be unattractive. There is little evidence that he thought of himself as a harbinger of any kind, but shortly after his death, writings, sayings, and theories based on his life and ideas spread throughout China and even took hold of the imperial court of one of the most powerful and important dynasties, the Han (206 BCE-CE 220). It was during the Han Dynasty that Confucianism became closely tied to state affairs, and it would remain so until the fall of the last dynasty in 1912.

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