Confucianism: Its influence on East Asian Society

Peng
Review of the key concepts in Confucianism

1. **Ren**: humaneness, virtue, benevolence, kindness, love
2. **Junzi**: noble man
3. **Li**: propriety & rites
4. **De**: Power of virtue
5. **Wen**: the art of peace
6. **Yi**: righteousness, justice (Mencius)
Confucianism

- Further developed by Mencius
- Mengzi (Meng Tzu), BC 372? ~ BC 289?
- Human nature originally, essentially good
- Virtues arise from innate feelings
Mencius’ Intuitionism

- Morality stems from feelings, not from reason alone
- We have an innate capacity to tell right from wrong
- Pluralism: goods, virtues, and feelings differ in kind
Ancient China
Way of Life- Confucianism

- Moral and ethical code highly developed treat everyone with consideration
- Advocated paternalistic government
- Value on family head- ancestor respect
- Values- loyalty, righteousness, wisdom, sincerity
- very practical and humanistic Gentility
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China

- Persecuted in Qin Dynasty
  - 221 B.C. ~ 206 B.C.
  - Why?

terra-cotta warriors in Xi’an
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China

- During the Han Dynasty (206BC - 220 AD), Confucianism → state doctrine (→ orthodox & rigid)
  - Only the well-read Confucian scholars could become administrative officials.
  - The officials provided emperors with the needed Heaven approved authority to lead the government of the empire.
  - The dynastic calendar and yearly ritual offerings to Heaven and Earth all based upon the old Confucian classical writings.
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China

- After the end of Han Dynasty, war and short lived dynasties ruled over a divided China. People took refuge to *Daoism* and *Buddhism*.

- Again under the *Tang Dynasty* (618 - 907AD), Confucianism could gain back its former place as state doctrine, but it was now only one of three systems of thought, side by side with Daoism and Buddhism.
Confucianism

reinforced by the civil examination system
“keju”: civil examination
from 605 to 1905
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China

- From the **Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD)** on, when Confucianism run through a renaissance after the great age of Buddhism, it became a bonding agent for intellectual and national unity, an exhibit for the exclusivity of conservative Chinese culture.

- Confucian scholars of the **Song & the Ming Dynasties (1368-1644 AD)** developed philosophical systems that showed a much wider world view than that of the old ritual experts of the Han Dynasty.

  → **Neo-Confucianism** (*lixue 理學*).
Neo-Confucianism

- Tang Dynasty - Han Yu (767-824 AD)
- Song Dynasty - Cheng Hao (1032-1085); Cheng Yi (1033-1108); Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi) (1130-1200)
  - unity of the three creeds
  - too extreme/complicated: It’s better to die than to lose your nobility/moral integrity. [women’s chastity]
  - his notations: national examination guide
- Ming Dynasty - Wang Yang-ming (1473-1529)
  - combination of knowledge & application
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China

- State examinations under the Qing Dynasty were still infertile and unchangeable interpretations of the 2500 years old books.

- Late Qing scholars & the intelligentsia of the young Republic in China saw Confucianism as an instrument of backwardness and wanted to get rid of everything old.

- The ritual system & the belief in the old classical texts remained intact until the end of the Chinese empire in 1911.
Historical Influence of Confucianism in China

- **The 4th May movement 1919** wanted to crash the "Confucian Stall" (*Kongdian* 孔店), and even the Red Guards during the *Cultural Revolution* denounced the "traitor" Lin Biao as a reactionary follower of Confucius.

- Nowadays, many Chinese see Confucianism as something that gives people a background of social stability, and somebody who can not cite at least a few sentences of the Confucian classical writings, is almost seen as illiterate.
Confucianism in Japan

- In Japan, as earlier in China, Confucian ideals played a major role in the development of ethical and political philosophies.
- especially during Japan's formative years (6th to 9th centuries), when Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced to Japan from Korea and China (285 AD).
- Prince Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (547 to 622), the first great patron of Confucianism and Buddhism in Japan, enacted a 17 Article Constitution that established Confucianist ideals and Buddhist ethics as the moral foundations of the young Japanese nation. This served for centuries as the Japanese blueprint for court etiquette and decorum.
Confucianism in Japan

Much later, in Japan's Edo Period (江戸江戸 (+1600 to 1868), also known as the Tokugawa era, Confucian ethics experienced a revival of sorts.

Neo-Confucianism (Jp. = 朱熹学 Shushigaku) gained great appeal among the warrior class and governing elite. Neo-Confucianism brought renewed attention to man and secular society, to social responsibility in secular contexts, and broke free from the moral supremacy of the powerful Buddhist monasteries.

Zhu Xi’s teachings were brought to Japan by Japanese Zen monks who had visited China in the 15th and 16th century.
Confucianism in Japan

- Zhu Xi stressed the "unity of the three creeds," the unity of the three great philosophies of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, which had until then been considered mutually exclusive and contradictory.

- This three-way unity was called **Sankyō 三教** in Japanese (Sān Jiào), and literally means "Three Religions." In Chinese and Japanese artwork, it spawned the pictorial theme known as the Three Patriarchs, along with two other related themes (see next section), each emphasizing the notion that "the three creeds are one." In Japan, some prefer an alternative trio that includes Shintō, Confucianism, and Buddhism.
Confucianism in Korea

- Confucianism came to Korea in the Three Kingdoms period alongside of Buddhist teaching. (37BC - 688 AD)
- The Goguryeo Kingdom was inspired and strengthened by Chinese culture and Confucianism, but initially maintained its own customs and traditions. The Baekje Kingdom, on the other hand, adopted Confucianism. This shaped the administrative system and the culture and arts. Silla was the last kingdom to accept the Confucian way of life at the highest levels of administration.
- In 1398, the establishment of the Seonggyungwan - an academy with a Confucian curriculum - and the building of an altar at the palace, where the king would worship his ancestors.
Confucianism in Korea

During the Joseon Dynasty, from 1392 on, Confucianism was the primary system of belief amongst the scholarly yangban classes and generals.

Koreans historically have found religions natural and easy, and have maintained an overlap between all religions – the Yi family generals, thus restrained Buddhism, maintained shamanism in rural areas, but encouraged Confucianism for its use in administration and social regulation; as well as integrating a civilised society very quickly on Chinese bureaucratic models to increase cultural transference from China.
Confucianism in Korea

Today the legacy of Confucianism remains a fundamental part of Korean society, shaping the moral system, the way of life, social relations between old and young, high culture, and is the basis for much of the legal system.

Confucianism in Korea is sometimes considered a pragmatic way of holding a nation together.
Confucianism in Art

- became the popular subject of Chinese painting during the Southern Song and Yuan periods.
- gained popularity in Japan during the Muromachi (1392-1568) and Edo periods (1600 to 1868).
- In Japanese & Korean paintings, the three patriarchs -- Confucius (Confucianism), Buddha (Buddhism), and Lao-tzu (Taoism) -- are portrayed together, often in a lighthearted manner, to reflect the ecumenical Neo-Confucian doctrine.
Confucianism in Art

Three Patriarchs, Mt. Kongtong 崆峒山, China
Famous Taoist Mountain, Gānsu Province, China
Buddha (curled hair), Lao Tzu (center), Confucius

崆峒山 = Japanese = Mt. Kōtōsan or Mt. Kotosan
Confucianism in Art

Confucius statue at Tokyo's Yushima Confucius Shrine

Three Laughers by Syōhaku Soga 曽我蕭白 1730-1781
Revival of Confucianism

- Interview
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcnxRdrUjzc&NR=1
- The Ceremony of Sacrifice for Confucius in China
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v4gl4n-ahk
Key points

- Ren, Junzi, Li, De, Wen, Yi
- Confucius, Mencius, Zhuxi
  [Neo-Confucianism; Women’s Chastity]
- Reinforced by civil examinations starting from Tang Dynasty
- Sankyō 三教 in Japanese