



*Roger Keller standing in front of the tomb of Confucius in Qufu, China. Confucius is the founder of Confucianism.*

## CHAPTER 7

# CONFUCIANISM

*Confucianism's emphasis on a disciplined life and the centrality of the family makes it feel quite comfortable to Latter-day Saints.*

No tradition has influenced China more than Confucianism. For two millennia, the teachings of Confucius served as the foundation for civil service examinations. The Chinese ethos is permeated with the thought of Confucius. Even the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 was unable to remove its influence, and so today Chinese proudly see Confucius as a great figure of their history. His tomb is in a lovely, well-cared-for area in Qufu, and the Confucian temple there is beautifully restored and maintained. While many people in China and other Asian countries may not claim to be “Confucianists,” the values and relationships of the Confucian ethic are maintained. Confucius and his teachings have practically been transmitted in the DNA. He is simply part of them. Today there are in the world 394 million<sup>1</sup> practitioners of what one website calls Chinese traditional religion. Included in this category is Confucianism, but no matter what other religion Chinese persons and other Asians may claim, they usually live the Confucian values. It is the author’s belief

that Confucianism impacts far more people than the above number suggests.

---

— ORIGINS —

---

*FOUNDER*

Confucius was born in 551 BCE and died in 479 BCE. He came from a poor but respected family. His father, Shu-liang He, a soldier and district steward in Lu, died when Confucius was three.<sup>2</sup> After her husband's death, Confucius's widowed mother did everything she could to keep them alive, taking in laundry and doing other odd jobs. She wanted Confucius to be a gentleman and did what she could to see that he was educated. It is not clear whether she was able to pay for formal education, but somehow he gained knowledge through interacting with people around him. At age fifteen, Confucius made the decision to become a great scholar. At the age of eighteen, Confucius was married and had a son and later a daughter.<sup>3</sup> About the same time, he began a career in government, beginning with some accounting and looking after livestock. From there, he gradually moved up.<sup>4</sup>

In Confucius's early twenties, his mother died, and he went into three years of mourning. The power of this account is that the extended mourning period is exactly what Confucius would have done based on his philosophy of life, and we will examine this later as we look at his basic precepts. Following the mourning period, Confucius in his midtwenties began his teaching career.

Confucius taught a wide variety of subjects, something much easier to do in his day than now, because his library consisted of what are known as the Five Classics. Based on these, Confucius taught history, poetry, government, moral conduct, and music. The goal of all this teaching was to enable his students to become government officials, since in Confucius's mind this was a privilege for those trained in the values of a Confucian society, not something simply inherited by birth. Government would not change unless his students assumed governmental posts, for they would bring the values required to govern.

Lest one think that Confucius was merely a bookworm, we should note that he loved hunting and fishing, and it is said that he could knock down a duck in flight with a bow and arrow. Many cannot do



*Confucius's goal was to train students to become moral  
government officials.*

that with a shotgun! Basically, Confucius enjoyed life and probably would have been pleasant company.

Confucius's students were primarily from royal or wealthy families because they could pay for their children's education. Confucius had to live. But if a student really wanted to learn, whether he could pay or not, Confucius would accept him, perhaps reflecting his own desire to learn as a young man but being thwarted from formal education because of his poverty. Fundamentally, Confucius believed that anyone who wanted to learn should be permitted to do so. Thus, 2,500 years ago, he believed in universal public education, something which first occurred in the twentieth century in the United States with the growth of public school systems, community colleges, and state universities.

A divergence in the story occurs when Confucius is approximately fifty years old. Some accounts say that although Confucius sought all

his life for a government position for himself, he never found one. Thus, at the end of his life, he felt that he had failed in his life mission.

The other tradition, represented by Annping Chin, holds that at age fifty, Confucius gained the major position of Minister of Crime in the government of Lu.<sup>5</sup> Some ancient writers paint the five years that Confucius held this position as almost a golden age, but that is probably overdrawn, since Confucius was forced after five years to flee Lu due to court intrigue and perhaps his own involvement in a plot to change the power structure of Lu.<sup>6</sup> Much of that attempt may have been due to his belief in “moral government.” Sadly, to both ancient and modern ears, that may sound like an oxymoron. Probably the idea of moral government was no more popular 2,500 years ago than it is today, and to suggest that a ruler should rule for all his subjects and not for just a few may have caused Confucius to have to leave Lu. According to this tradition, Confucius wandered for thirteen years, teaching here and there and looking for a government position. Finally through the good offices of one of his students, he was invited to return to Lu. There he lived the last three years of his life teaching a little and giving occasional counsel to the duke. He died, however, feeling that he had failed.

How does one determine which of these two stories is historically correct? What creates a sense of failure? From the author’s perspective, it is failure in a job, rather than never having it, that creates this sense. Suppose a person wanted to be president of an organization, submitted his or her résumé, but never received a call back. That certainly need not cause a sense of failure. One can just say the organization did not know what it was missing and go on with life. If one gained the position, however, and then failed to lead others to catch his or her vision, that would create a sense that one had failed. It is the author’s belief that this is what happened to Confucius. Confucius truly believed that one Confucian gentleman in the midst of a barbarian society, merely by his presence, could change that society. If Confucius was Minister of Crime and was forced out of office through court intrigue, that would create a strong sense of failure, given his belief in the influence of the Confucian gentleman. In both accounts, he had to leave Lu around the age of fifty-five. The first account has no reason to explain this, while the second does. Thus it seems most likely that Confucius did have an opportunity to serve in government

between the ages of fifty and fifty-five but failed to create the environment he had hoped to create. Hence, his life ended with a feeling that he had not succeeded as he had hoped he would.

#### *AFTER CONFUCIUS*

Confucius, however, did not live long enough to see his dreams realized. After his death, China entered what is called the Period of the Warring States, which lasted from 480 to 221 BCE. During this period, a pivotal figure was born who prepared the way for stabilization in China. The name of this person was Mencius (Meng-zi), who lived from 370 to 286 BCE. Mencius's story is somewhat like Confucius's. According to the traditional account of Mencius's life, his father died when Mencius was quite young, and his mother exemplified the ideal of motherhood. Initially, they lived near a cemetery. When Mencius's mother discovered that he was reenacting the funeral rituals which he watched, she decided to move near a market, but then Mencius showed an inordinate interest in buying and selling. To avoid this, she moved near a school, hoping that he would copy the behavior of the teachers and students, and this seems ultimately to have led to Mencius becoming a great scholar like his model, Confucius. He firmly believed in the goodness of human beings and their ability to follow the good when they saw it in others because he believed each person is predisposed to that which is good. He also believed, like Confucius, that he was following the guidance of heaven in his teaching.

During the reign of emperor Wu Di (156–87 BCE), Dong Zhong-shu, a Confucian scholar, encouraged the emperor to look closely at the principles of Confucianism in order to end confusion among the people concerning what school or standard they should follow. The emperor agreed and established an academy for the teaching of Confucian values. From this point until the fall of the Manchu-Ching dynasty in 1912 CE, Confucianism was the philosophy that guided China.

#### *SCRIPTURES*

As noted earlier, Confucius's teaching was based primarily on the Five Classics, texts from ancient Chinese thinkers and philosophers.

Tradition says that Confucius edited these, and they are as follows, beginning with the oldest. The first is the *Classic of Changes* and is used by diviners to determine whether persons should do things at certain times. Confucius recommended it for finding moral and metaphysical meaning in life. The second book is the *Classic of History* and contains material from the early Chou dynasty (1100–1000 BCE), which Confucius held to be the golden age in China. The third book is the *Classic of Poetry*, containing about three hundred poems all set to music. The fourth book is the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which contains a chronology of events in the principality of Lu, Confucius's home province, from 720 to 480 BCE. Finally, there is the *Classic of Rites*, which contains an account of rituals that were both public and private.

In addition to the Five Classics, there are also the Four Books. Most of these postdate Confucius, and the first of the books is the *Analects*, the sayings of Confucius. While loosely organized, the *Analects* capture the essence of Confucius's thought on relationships, what is proper, the true man, and so on. Second is the *Book of Mencius*, which is well organized and about twice as long as the *Analects*.<sup>7</sup> Third is the *Great Learning*, which was a chapter in the *Classic of Rites*. The introductory chapter is considered to be from Confucius, with the following ten chapters being commentaries on the first by Tseng-tzu. The focus is on the moral ruler as an example for his people. Finally is the *Doctrine of the Mean*, also a chapter in the *Classic of Rites*, which teaches that persons should avoid going to the extremes in any aspect of life.<sup>8</sup>

---

## — CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY —

### HISTORY

As we have seen, the period from 1100 to 1000 BCE was China's golden age in Confucius's eyes. His model ruler was the Duke of Chou, who ruled in this time frame. Thus, the place to look for the values that had been lost from China, whose loss had led the country to the edge of the Warring States Period, was the discipline of history. History was not some irrelevant discipline but rather the very heart of insight into the future, which explains Confucius's love of the Five Classics.

MODEL

According to Confucius, persons cannot teach until they embody that which they teach. It is not good enough to say “Do as I say, but not as I do.” In the end, learning should lead to self-improvement, and only then does a person have the right to teach, rule, or guide others.

VIRTUES THAT FOSTER COMMUNITY

*Li* (“observing ritual propriety”). *Li* is the foundational principle of Confucianism. It is the glue which holds society together. Failing to practice *Li* is much like having a stack of canned corn in a grocery store. Someone decides to pull out a bottom can, and the whole structure tumbles down. So it is with *Li*. If *Li* is not practiced, society will disintegrate and fall apart. Confucius puts it this way:

What I have learned is this, that of all the things that people live by, *li* is the greatest. Without *li* we do not know how to conduct a proper worship of the spirits of the universe; or how to establish the proper status of the king and the ministers, the ruler and the ruled, and the elders and the juniors; or how to establish the moral relationships between the sexes; between parents and children, and between brothers; or how to distinguish the different degrees of relationships in the family. That is why a gentleman holds *li* in such high regard.<sup>9</sup>

The word *Li* originally meant “sacrifice,” and then it was used for “ritual.” In Confucius’s hands, it came to mean observing ritual propriety, politeness, or good form and was related to the five relationships that Confucius believed were foundational to society. These five relationships are the following:

Ruler-Subject  
Husband-Wife  
Father-Son  
Elder Brother-Younger Brother  
Friend-Friend

It is within actual relationships that *Li* functions. Each person understands how a relationship is to take place, for *Li* defines the

role of each partner. For example, I may be a subject of a ruler who calls me into his presence, and we both know the script. I do not speak until spoken to. When the sovereign addresses me, he does so in very condescending language. In response, I must use language that exalts him and minimizes me. As I leave, I never turn my back on the ruler. Returned missionaries from Asian countries report the reality of this situation. When they are out on the street, local people will talk to them using the forms of address for cats, dogs, and little children. The missionaries are on the bottom of the totem pole. However, on Wednesday night, the missionaries teach an English class, and all of a sudden they are teachers, the most respected vocation in a Confucian society! Now the language used in relationship to them is from below to above. They are in the position of “the rulers,” and the whole structure of language switches, but to underline their position as servants of the people, they have been asked by mission presidents not to receive the exalted terminology of a superior.

In the husband-wife relationship, the husband is to treat his wife with righteousness and provide for and support her. She in return is to show righteous behavior before him and be obedient to his will, but it is not a harsh relationship. Similarly, a father is to teach and guide his son. The son in return is to be obedient to his father and respect him, meaning that he would do nothing that would bring shame to his father or the family.

The relationship between brothers in a Confucian society is more formal than that in the West. The eldest brother has the responsibility of caring for his younger siblings, and therefore the younger brothers and sisters are to respect and obey him. As we went over this in class one day, an Asian-American student put up her hand and said that she finally understood her father and her uncle. She had never understood why her father was so formal to his brother. Of course, the brother was the elder of the two, and her father gave the prescribed deference to him, which would puzzle most Western persons. Finally, in the friend-friend relationship, if there is a difference in age, the older one takes the lead and the younger one follows behind, figuratively speaking. Thus, as with brothers, age plays a role. These five relationships can also be applied to women, with age being

a major determinant in how the relationship proceeds. In the end, Li governs all life.

*Li* is based on heaven, patterned on earth, deals with the worship of the spirits, and is extended to the rites and ceremonies of funerals, sacrifices to ancestors, archery, carriage driving, “capping” [the ceremony of putting a cap on a boy when he is considered to have entered manhood], marriage, and court audience, or exchange of diplomatic visits. Therefore the Sage shows the people this principle of a rationalized social order (*li*) and through it everything becomes right in the family, the state and the world.<sup>10</sup>

Latter-day Saints certainly do not have anything that is as formal as *Li*, but there are expected proprieties within the church. For example, respect is shown for seniority in various councils of the church. The President of the church always precedes his First Counselor, who is then followed by the Second Counselor. Likewise, in the Quorum of Twelve, the Apostles sit in order of seniority at general conference and in meetings. While not demanded in the church handbooks, it is normal for priesthood holders to wear white shirts as a symbol of purity when performing sacred duties. Males who serve in leadership positions or in the temple normally do not have mustaches or beards. Thus there are certain “proper” things to do in the church, but human relationships are generally not defined as they are with *Li*.

*Jen (Ren)* (“humaneness”). The danger of *Li* is that persons may go through the ritual motions but have no real concern for the other. This is where the supreme virtue of *Jen* enters the stage, for *Jen* is a virtue of reciprocity. It takes what potentially could be very stale and meaningless *Li* and makes it a virtue filled with concern for the other. *Jen* is the supreme human virtue and is such that no one, not even Confucius or the Duke of Chou, fully realized it.

I have not seen a person who loved virtue, or one who hated what was not virtuous. He who loved virtue would esteem nothing above it. He who hated what is not virtuous would practice virtue in such a way that he would not allow anything that is not virtuous to approach his person.

Is any one able for one day to apply his strength to virtue? I have not seen the case in which his strength would be sufficient. If there might be any such case, I have not seen it.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this assessment, Jen is still the goal, as is perfection for Latter-day Saints, and is the ideal to be manifest. There are several translations of the word Jen—goodness, humaneness, humanness, and love. Jen recognizes that all of us are facing similar conditions and that we should make life better for each other. By doing so, we make life better for ourselves, since the wants and needs of others are also our wants and needs.

As noted, Jen humanizes Li because it is a virtue of inclusion and concern for other people. In Latter-day Saint terms, it is charity or love, meaning the pure love of Christ. It captures very well the idea of the Golden Rule (i.e., “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”). The pure love of Christ means that all people have value and that we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves on their behalf. There should be no self-interest, for that was how Christ loved us. He gave himself, without a thought for himself, that we might have life.

*Hsiao* (“*filial responsibility*”). *Hsiao* is “filial responsibility,” or obligations to parents and ancestors. It was the loss of *Hsiao*, along with other virtues, that created the cultural slide from the golden age to Confucius’s day with its political anarchy. The Master said, “If the son for three years [after his father’s death] does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial.”<sup>12</sup> If the descendants of the Duke of Chou had done this, the virtues practiced by him would have been passed on. Sadly, from Confucius’s point of view, they did not imbibe this virtue and changed the moral value of society. In this vein, mourning for one’s parents, as did Confucius for his mother, means that for three years the children do not change the way the parent did things in business, in government, or in the home. Not to follow this admonition is a violation of both *Hsiao* and of *Li*. The following passage gives a sense of how *Hsiao* would work itself out in daily life:

While his parents are both alive, at their regular meals, morning and evening, the eldest son and his wife will encourage them to eat

everything. They themselves will eat what is left. When the father is dead, and the mother still alive, the eldest son should wait upon her at her meals. The wives of the other sons will do with what is left as in the former case. The children should have the sweet, soft, and oily things that are left.<sup>13</sup>

Underlining the importance of the respect for parents and ancestors was a poll that was taken a decade ago of which the author was told. Asians and Westerners were asked the question "If you, your wife, and your mother-in-law fell off a ferry and you could only save one of them, who would it be?" The universal answer for Westerners was the wife, while the answer for Asians was the mother-in-law. Older people have a very special place in Confucian society.

Given this, there is certainly nothing more central to Latter-day Saint theology than the family. There is usually clear respect for the patriarchs and matriarchs when families gather. The authority of parents is affirmed by the church, but any kind of abuse of that authority is strongly condemned. The authority must be tempered with love in the same way that Li is tempered by Jen. Ancestors are especially important when it comes to temple work, for the ordinances of the temple bind generation after generation together. Those imbued with Confucian values should find the message of the temple very exciting because most of these persons have ancestral lineages that go back numerous generations. To know that they can be bound to these ancestors for eternity through the temple ordinances is very comforting to Asian peoples who accept the fullness of the gospel.

*Cheng Ming* ("rectification of names"). The translation of Cheng Ming is "rectification of names." In other words, persons should be what they are called. Names should correspond to realities. If people are peasants, they should be good peasants. If they are rulers, they should be good rulers. If they are merchants, they should be good merchants. The doctrine is not, however, to keep the huddled masses in their places. This is not a doctrine of castes, because there is mobility in a Confucian society. Mobility is accomplished through education. Persons may be born peasants, but through education they can become officials in the government. After all, this is why Confucius was teaching young men, and we should

remember that he would take a promising student, even if that student could not pay. Thus, Cheng Ming identifies people by their role in society.

*Chung Yung* (“*the golden mean*”). *Chung Yung* is often translated as “the golden mean.” It is the concept that persons should not go to extremes in any aspect of life. In our language, it would mean that we should not be too conservative or too liberal; too poor or too rich; too slow or too fast; too strict or too permissive. There should simply be moderation in all that individuals and groups do.

*Chun Tzu* (“*the superior man*”). A final concept is that of the *Chun Tzu*, the “superior man” or the Confucian gentleman. This is precisely what Confucius is seeking to create—a man who embodies all the virtues listed above so that he can rule with integrity and morality. Ruling is not a matter of birth or right but rather of nobility of spirit and righteousness, hardly items which are sought in the political arenas of today in any country. The Confucian virtues have all too often been replaced by wealth, power, and cynicism, to the detriment of societies.

#### GOVERNMENT

Confucius’s goal was to bring harmony to a Chinese society that was on the verge of 260 years of chaos. As we have seen, it was the failure on the part of China’s rulers for the better part of five hundred years to maintain the virtues of the golden age that had led, in Confucius’s view, to this sorry state of affairs.

Confucius believed that just and moral government would lead to the respect, loyalty, and support of the people, and this would certainly be so, if it were possible to find one. Mencius articulates what such a government might look like:

By benevolence the three dynasties gained the empire, and by not being benevolent they lost it. By the same means are determined the decaying and flourishing, the preservation and perishing, of states. If the emperor is not benevolent, he cannot preserve the empire from passing from him. If the sovereign of a state is not benevolent, he cannot preserve his kingdom. If a high noble or great officer is not benevolent, he cannot preserve his ancestral temple. . . . Therefore, an intelligent ruler will

regulate the livelihood of the people, so as to make sure that they shall have enough to serve their parents, and enough to support their wives and children. He ensures that in good years they shall always be abundantly satisfied, and that in bad years they shall escape the danger of perishing. Then he may urge them to what is good, and they will do it, for in this case the people will follow after the good with ease.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, according to Confucius and Mencius, government was for the people. The ruler was to see that the littlest peasant was well fed, well housed, well clothed, and happy. He was to rule for all his people, not just for his cronies or the wealthy and powerful in society. To rule poorly was sufficient for the Mandate of Heaven to be withdrawn from the ruler and for the people to revolt against his rule. In addition, the ruler was to consult with his people to determine what they wanted and needed. For that day and time, and even today in many places in the world, this was and would be a radical thought. So while government was to be for the people and in consultation with them, Confucius left it to Abraham Lincoln to say “by the people” because he did not believe this. Government was to be carried out by the superior man or the Confucian gentleman schooled in Confucian ethics, virtues, and morality. No one had a right to rule. Rather, the privilege was earned through study of the Confucian classics and finally through an examination on them. Then one could embark upon rulership.

#### *NEO-CONFUCIANISM*

Because traditional Confucianism does not contain a transcendent element, Confucianism has usually been held in combination with another religion. Persons may be Confucian and Buddhist. They may be Confucian and Taoist. They may be Confucian, Shinto, and Buddhist. They add to Confucianism a religion or religions which deal with elements beyond the social and which provide the missing transcendent dimension. This is still the way Confucianism functions in today’s world, for the most part. However, historically, some Confucian scholars tried to address the issues raised by Buddhists and Taoists and gave rise to what is termed “Neo-Confucianism.”

There are two principal figures in this movement: (1) Chu Hsi (1130–1200 CE) and (2) Wang Yang-ming (1473–1529). Chu Hsi



*Hall of prayer for good harvest located on the Temple of Heaven compound, where the emperor came to worship and make sacrifices.*

believed that nature contained the laws and principles of the universe. He held that there was the Great Ultimate, which was the law or rational principle of the universe. It was the rational principle Li elevated to the cosmic level, and while he did not personify it, Chu Hsi did say that it was like a universal ordering will. The Great Ultimate impelled the Universal Vital Force, which seems to generate matter and to cause movement and change in that matter, thereby bringing into being yin and yang and the five elements.

Thus Chu Hsi saw something outside the human being as producing the world of reality. While exploring the transcendent dimension of life, Chu Hsi denied what most Chinese held as absolutely sacred, that the souls of one's ancestors continue to exist beyond death. The rituals honoring them were still appropriate acts of respect, but there was no reality to them after death. Finally, he incorporated meditation into his Confucianism, but it was self-examination to evaluate his own moral situation.<sup>15</sup>

Wang Yang-ming held a contrasting view. Wang held that reason was not external to human beings but rather resided in the mind, thereby giving order and reality to the world and objects in it. This reason was moral reason and was born with us, meaning that humans

are good. He, like Chu Hsi, practiced a form of meditation he called “tranquil repose” that was similar to Zen and thus in reality quite different from Chu Hsi’s meditation.

### — WORSHIP AND RITUALS —

As noted earlier, it is very hard to separate Confucianism, Taoism (which we will treat in the next chapter), and Buddhism from one another in the Chinese world. A single individual may practice all three simultaneously. Thus in this section we will look at rites and rituals that are closest to Confucian emphases, and reserve other rites and rituals for the Taoism chapter.

#### *OFFICIAL RITUALS*

Worship may be categorized as official or popular.<sup>16</sup> Official worship fits with Confucianism, while popular worship will be reserved for the Taoism chapter. Official worship has fixed times and places as well as fixed gods or ancestors. The center of formal worship in China became Beijing, where the emperor resided. Surrounding the Forbidden City were four major shrines at which the emperor worshiped and made sacrifices on behalf of himself and the nation.<sup>17</sup> The most important of these was the Altar of Heaven located to the south of the Forbidden City. Here the emperor came on the winter solstice to offer sacrifices to Shang Ti (“Sovereign on High” or “High Lord”) or to T’ien (“Heaven”). As he did so, he sought help to avoid droughts, the blight of insects, or the scourge of invasion. On the other hand, he sought Heaven’s blessing for a good harvest, peace within the land, and permission to rule. Besides the offerings, music, dance, and the reading of prayer documents were part of the service, and only the emperor could perform these acts. The Altar of Heaven was round, focusing on the infinite, and was associated with the yang principle. On the summer solstice, the emperor went to the Altar of the Earth, where he offered sacrifices to the earth. The architecture was square, in contrast to the Altar of Heaven, symbolizing finitude, yin, and the five elements.

To the east was the Temple of Ancestors. Once again, the emperor would perform annual sacrifices to the royal ancestors, offering a bull, a sheep, a pig, vegetable products, and crops from the field to them. He also provided wine for the earth. Divinations were performed in

the presence of the imperial ancestors. The enthronement of a new emperor was announced here, as well as imperial marriages and states of war.<sup>18</sup> To the west were the Altars of Land and Grain, to which the emperor came twice yearly. In the spring he would offer sacrifices for a good harvest, and in the fall he would offer sacrifices of thanksgiving. Confucius would have wholeheartedly approved of all these sacrifices, for if they were not done, Li would be violated, harmony broken, and the nation endangered.

### *CONFUCIUS*

It may surprise many, since Confucius simply does not tell us about his personal religious beliefs, that he himself became an object of worship, apparently beginning among his disciples shortly after his death. With the rise of the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 9 CE), Confucianism became the guiding philosophy with Confucius being worshiped at a state level. By the seventh century CE, he was worshiped as the greatest teacher and the perfect moral model for ten thousand generations, and sacrifices were made to him. Many Confucian temples were established across East Asia, but the most important was the one in his hometown of Qufu in today's Shandong Province. Annually, the emperor went there to honor Confucius. Xinzhong Yao notes that "in many of these temples there was an inscription: 'He forms a triad with Heaven and Earth.'" <sup>19</sup> The "he," of course, is Confucius.

At this point I add a Latter-day Saint reflection because Latter-day Saints are sometimes mistakenly believed to worship Joseph Smith. Latter-day Saints, however, understand that there is a difference between worship of a person and reverence for what that person did and was. This is the case with Joseph. Latter-day Saints revere him because he was God's chosen vessel to restore, at this time in history, the very same gospel that had been given to Adam and Eve. D&C 135:3, written by John Taylor shortly after Joseph's martyrdom, says, "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it." To some, this may sound almost blasphemous, but when we consider what Joseph did, if his message is true, then it is just a simple statement of fact. Through Joseph, God made

available all the effects of the Atonement of Christ to every member of the human race who has lived on this earth—past, present, or future. Without Joseph or someone like him, what Jesus did for us would have been available to only a few persons who lived when he was on the earth. With Joseph, however, the keys of the authority were restored to him to bind in heaven the saving ordinances of the gospel done on earth. Those ordinances could be done both for the living and the dead, thereby extending the Atonement of Christ to the entirety of this earth's human family. It is little wonder that Latter-day Saints *reverence* Joseph, but they *worship* their Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, whom they also worship.

### *rites of passage*

As already noted, rituals of all kinds were exceptionally important to Confucius because they were manifestations of Li. They reflected the binding principle of society without which the very foundations of the social order were endangered. Thus rites of passage are appropriate to the Confucian chapter.

Birth rites reflect the union of yin and yang and the production of an heir, if the child is male. Celebrations occur on the third,



*Entrance to the temple of Confucius and his tomb  
located in his hometown, Qufu.*

thirtieth, and one hundredth days after the birth, as well as the year anniversary. They are joyous rites, although perhaps a bit muted for a girl. Offerings and reports are made to the ancestors. The only negative aspect of birth arises from the polluting character of the birth blood, which makes the mother ritually impure for a month. She is thus isolated from all but her husband and other women. Xinzhong Yao suggests that the practical aspect of this was to protect her from disease.<sup>20</sup>

The rite of passage into adulthood was “capping” or “hairdo or coiffure,” the former for boys and the latter for girls. As with so many rituals or acts in Chinese society, the propitious time for the transition to adulthood is determined through divination. There is disagreement about the age of maturity, some indicating that it is sixteen, while others assert that it should be eighteen or even twenty. The boy is capped three times as blessings are sought from heaven, the earth, and the water under the world. A new name is also given, symbolizing the attainment of maturity. The formula used at the capping ceremony is instructive:

In this auspicious month and on this lucky day, we endue you with the cap for the first time. Put away your childish thoughts from now on, and see that you keep guard upon the virtues of your manhood. Then shall your years all be fair, and your good fortune grow from more to more.<sup>21</sup>

Marriage is the next rite of passage. It is a bond between families and is arranged by a go-between or matchmaker. It begins with a request for the girl’s “eight characters,” meaning the year, month, day, and time of her birth. If the girl’s family provides these, they indicate that they would look upon the union favorably. These eight characters are balanced with the male’s eight characters to see if the match would be a good one. One gets a little sense of what this is about by looking at the Chinese zodiac on a restaurant place mat. Some combinations are fortuitous while others are seen as problematic. Upon marriage, the wife moves in with the husband’s family.<sup>22</sup>

The final rites relate to death. The mourning period upon death may be only three days, ninety days as in Taiwan, or up to three years. The latter was what Confucius practiced, and for him to

do less would have been to fail in practicing filial responsibility. Traditionally, coarse, white clothing was worn as a symbol of mourning, and thus a white wedding dress in the West would cause some confusion for a person from the Chinese culture. Today, black clothing may also be worn as a sign of mourning. The things that will be needed in the afterlife were buried with the body, such as clothing and paper money, which is special money to be used at funerals. It is also burned to send it to the world of the ancestors, who are kept fully informed of the events through reports, sacrifices, and offerings.<sup>23</sup>

---

—WOMEN—

---

The Confucian society was definitely patriarchal. Women played a secondary role to men but found their role in the bearing of children, particularly male children, who would become the heirs of the family resources. According to Confucius, a man was to treat his wife with righteousness and was to support her and care for her. She in return was to support her husband and be obedient to him. But with the family being central, she had a powerful position, although she was always more in the background than was her husband. These values still hold, although Western values are causing the two roles to be equalized.

Among Latter-day Saints, men and women are equal before God, but in daily life they may have different responsibilities. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” makes this statement:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, there are differences in roles in life with the husband being the provider while the wife cares for the home and children. Some outside the Latter-day Saint community see the woman’s role as demeaning, but from the Latter-day Saint perspective, this is the way God designed the world to be. There is simply no greater role in life than

raising the next generation, and as the Proclamation states, this is the responsibility of both the father and the mother “as equal partners.” Perhaps the terms “partner” and “companion” capture best the Latter-day Saint understanding of the relationship between husband and wife.

---

— CONCLUSION —

Confucianism is a powerful philosophy for regulating society and has more influence on Chinese and Chinese-influenced cultures than does any other system. Its emphasis on a disciplined life and the centrality of the family makes it feel quite comfortable to Latter-day Saints.

---

— NOTES —

1. “Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents,” Adherents.com, last modified August 9, 2007, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html).
2. Annping Chin, *The Authentic Confucius: A Life of Thought and Politics* (New York: Scribner, 2007), 24–25.
3. Chin, *Authentic Confucius*, 25.
4. Chin, *Authentic Confucius*, 25.
5. Chin, *Authentic Confucius*, 26.
6. Chin, *Authentic Confucius*, 28–29.
7. Robert E. Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*, 6th ed. (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 141.
8. Van Voorst, *Anthology*, 141.
9. David S. Noss and John B. Noss, *A History of the World’s Religions*, 9th ed. (New York: Macmillan College, 1994), 320.
10. Noss and Noss, *History*, 321.
11. Van Voorst, *Anthology*, 148.
12. Van Voorst, *Anthology*, 150.
13. Van Voorst, *Anthology*, 149.
14. Van Voorst, *Anthology*, 153–54.
15. Noss and Noss, *History*, 342–44.
16. Xinzhong Yao, “Chinese Religions,” in *Worship*, ed. Jean Holm with John Bowker (New York: Pinter, 1994), 159–60.
17. Xinzhong Yao, “Chinese Religions,” in *Sacred Place*, ed. Jean Holm with John Bowker (New York: Pinter, 1994), 176–77.
18. Yao, *Sacred Place*, 180.
19. Yao, *Worship*, 168.

20. Xinzhong Yao, "Chinese Religions," in *Rites of Passage*, ed. Jean Holm with John Bowker (New York: Pinter, 1994), 159–60.
21. Yao, *Rites of Passage*, 162.
22. Yao, *Rites of Passage*, 163–64.
23. Yao, *Rites of Passage*, 166–67.
24. The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, October 1995, <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,161-1-11-1,00.html>.