

**SELECTIONS FROM THE CONFUCIAN ANALECTS:  
ON CONFUCIUS AS TEACHER AND PERSON**

**Introduction**

Confucius (the Latinized version of Kong Fuzi, “master Kong”) or, to call him by his proper name, Kong Qiu (551-479 BCE) lived during the time when the Zhou kingdom had disintegrated into many de facto independent feudal states which were subject to the Zhou kings only in theory. Confucius was a man of the small feudal state of Lu. Like many other men of the educated elite class of the Eastern Zhou, Confucius traveled among the states, offering his services as a political advisor and official to feudal rulers and taking on students whom he would teach for a fee. Confucius had an unsuccessful career as a petty bureaucrat, but a highly successful one as a teacher. A couple of generations after his death, first- and second-generation students gathered accounts of Confucius’ teachings together. These anecdotes and records of short conversations go under the English title of the *Analects*. The selections below illustrate Confucius as a teacher and as a person.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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*Selections from the Confucian Analects:  
On Confucius as a Teacher and Person*

2:4           The Master said, “At fifteen, my heart was set upon learning; at thirty, I had become established; at forty, I was no longer perplexed; at fifty, I knew what is ordained by Heaven;<sup>1</sup> at sixty, I obeyed; at seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without transgressing the line.”

7:1           The Master said, “I transmit but do not create. In believing in and loving the ancients, I dare to compare myself with our old Peng.”<sup>2</sup>

7:8           The Master said, “To one who is not eager I do not reveal anything, nor do I explain anything to one who is not communicative. If I raise one corner for someone and he cannot come back with the other three, I do not go on.”

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<sup>1</sup> In Chinese, tianming, also translated in other contexts as the Mandate of Heaven.

<sup>2</sup> The identity of “our old Peng” is unclear, but he is usually taken to be the Chinese counterpart to Methuselah.

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on  
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7:15           The Master said, "Having coarse rice to eat, water to drink, a bent arm for a pillow -- joy lies in the midst of this as well. Wealth and honor that are not rightfully gained are to me as floating clouds."

7:21           The Master said, "Walking along with three people, my teacher is sure to be among them. I choose what is good in them and follow it and what is not good and change it."

15:38          The Master said, "In education there should be no class distinctions."

**Questions:**

1. What qualities of Confucius do you think might have made him a good teacher? Do you think he would still be considered a good teacher if he were alive today in our own society? Why or why not?
2. What qualities do you think Confucius would look for in an educated person?
3. Was Confucius an egalitarian or an elitist?
4. What is Confucius' attitude toward life and toward himself

**Longer Selection or Complete Document**

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2:4            The Master said, "At fifteen, my heart was set upon learning; at thirty, I had become established; at forty, I was no longer perplexed; at fifty, I knew what is ordained by Heaven;<sup>3</sup> at sixty, I obeyed; at seventy, I could follow my heart's desires without transgressing the line."

2:15           The Master said, "To learn without thinking is unavailing; to think without learning is dangerous."

2:17           The Master said, "You,<sup>4</sup> shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know something, to know that you know it. When you do not know, to know that you do not know it. This is knowledge."

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<sup>3</sup> In Chinese, tianming, also translated in other contexts as the Mandate of Heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Zhong You, also known as Zilu, was known especially for his impetuosity.

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4:15           The Master said, "Shen! In my Way there is one thing that runs throughout." Zengzi said, "Yes." When the Master had gone out the disciples asked, "What did he mean?" Zengzi said, "The Master's Way is loyalty and reciprocity, that is all."

4:16           The Master said, "The noble person is concerned with rightness; the small person is concerned with profit."

5:11           Zigong said, "What I do not want others to do to me, I also want to refrain from doing to others." The Master said, "Zi, this is not something to which you have attained."

7:1            The Master said, "I transmit but do not create. In believing in and loving the ancients, I dare to compare myself with our old Peng."<sup>5</sup>

7:7            The Master said, "From one who brought only a bundle of dried meat<sup>6</sup> on up, I have never declined to give instruction to anyone."

7:8            The Master said, "To one who is not eager I do not reveal anything, nor do I explain anything to one who is not communicative. If I raise one corner for someone and he cannot come back with the other three, I do not go on."

7:15           The Master said, "Having coarse rice to eat, water to drink, a bent arm for a pillow -- joy lies in the midst of this as well. Wealth and honor that are not rightfully gained are to me as floating clouds."

7:18           The Duke of She asked Zilu about Confucius, and Zilu did not answer him. The Master said, "Why did you not simply say, 'This is the sort of person he is: so stirred with devotion that he forgets to eat, so full of joy that he forgets to grieve, unconscious even of the approach of old age?'"

7:21           The Master said, "Walking along with three people, my teacher is sure to be among them. I choose what is good in them and follow it and what is not good and change it."

7:24           There were four things the Master taught: culture, conduct, loyalty, and trustworthiness.

7:37           The Master was mild and yet strict, dignified and yet not severe, courteous and yet at ease.

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<sup>5</sup> The identity of "our old Peng" is unclear, but he is usually taken to be the Chinese counterpart to Methuselah.

<sup>6</sup> Dried meat, or other food, was offered as a present for teachers. Here it suggests the least one might offer.

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9:4 Four things the Master eschewed: he had no preconceptions, no prejudices, no obduracy, and no egotism.

9:10 Yan Yuan, sighing deeply, said, "I look up to it and it is higher still; I delve into it and it is harder yet. I look for it in front, and suddenly it is behind. The Master skillfully leads a person step by step. He has broadened me with culture and restrained me with ritual. When I wish to give it up, I cannot do so. Having exerted all my ability, it is as if there were something standing up right before me, and though I want to follow it, there is no way to do so."

15:28 The Master said, "A human being can enlarge the Way, but the Way cannot enlarge a human being."

15:38 The Master said, "In education there should be no class distinctions."

17:2 The Master said, "By nature close together; through practice set apart."<sup>7</sup>

18:6 Chang Ju and Jie Ni were working together tilling the fields. Confucius passed by them and sent Zilu to inquire about the ford. Chang Ju said, "Who is it who is holding the reins in the carriage?" Zilu said, "It is Kong Qiu." "Would that be Kong Qiu of Lu?" "It would." "In that case he already knows where the ford is."

Zilu then inquired of Jie Ni. Jie Ni said, "Who are you, sir?" "Zhong You." "The follower of Kong Qiu of Lu?" "Yes." "A rushing torrent -- such is the world. And who can change it? Rather than follow a scholar who withdraws from particular men, would it not be better to follow one who withdraws from the world?" He went on covering seed without stopping.

Zilu went and told the Master, who sighed and said, "I cannot herd together with the birds and beasts. If I do not walk together with other human beings, with whom shall I associate? If the Way prevailed in the world, [I] Qiu would not be trying to change it."

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<sup>7</sup> This simple observation attributed to Confucius was agreed upon as the essential truth with regard to human nature and racial difference by a group of international experts in the UNESCO "Statement on Race" published in July 1950.