

**Review of *The Analects of Confucius*
By Simon Ley
Review by Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.**

Confucius was born in approximately 551 B.C. Considered by many as a master; he was a teacher and political advisor in pre-imperial China. He lived in a time of transition. He saw his world sinking into violent behavior and barbarity. Confucius believed that he was chosen by Heaven to become the spiritual heir to the Duke of Zhou who had established a universal feudal order five hundred years before him, unifying the civilized world. In addition to his interest in politics, Confucius was also skilled at outdoor activities, such as handling horses and archery and was fond of hunting and fishing. While he is best known as a teacher, Confucius' true occupation was politics. He advised government officials on foreign affairs, diplomacy, finances, administration, and defense.

In his introduction to the book, Simon Leys writes, "The Analects is the only place where we can actually encounter the real, living Confucius. In this sense, the Analects is to Confucius what the Gospels are to Jesus." Confucius promoted humanist ethics and the universal brotherhood of man, inspiring many nations. Chinese emperors have promoted the official cult of Confucius for more than two thousand years. It became a sort of state religion. The Analects became the spiritual foundation of the Chinese world. This classic book gives the reader an understanding and appreciation of a philosophy that has survived throughout the ages and is just as pertinent today as it was when it was written.

The word analects is defined as a collection of excerpts from a literary work. The Analects of Confucius are a collage of short dialogues, anecdotes and brief statements, mostly attributed to Confucius. Some of the statements are attributed to his disciples or rulers of the time. They were compiled around 400 B.C., about seventy years after Confucius' death, by two consecutive generations of his disciples and became what is considered the teachings of Confucius. The general intent of the text is to aid the reader in self-improvement so that the one might become a moral example for others. One might find the proper way to live and behave by practicing various virtues, thereby becoming a humane person or a gentleman. Confucius says that humanity is an accomplishment; one is not born humane, but one must learn to become so. Another definition of humanity is to love others. The practice of ritual action is the best way to express one's human kindness. Ritual action is not limited to state and religious functions, but covers the spectrum of human behavior. The book is organized into two parts. The first part contains the quotes of Confucius and others. The second part contains notes written by Simon Leys that explain words and concepts presented.

Perhaps the true strengths of *The Analects of Confucius* are evident in the examination of the Confucian themes. The ideas of ethical behavior, moral conviction, self-improvement through education have stood the test of time and are evident in many other religions. As one reads the dialogues and anecdotes of this master, one gets the impression that he is speaking about the very problems of our

day. The Analects are intended for an audience seeking, what Confucius called, "the supreme virtue of humanity." In that sense, the book is intended for all of us.

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