Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies
The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies

Volume 3
Issue 2 *China Special*

Article 6

8-1-1999

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Recommended Citation
Tianchen, Li (1999) "New trends in the studies on Confucius and Confucianism," *Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cm/vol3/iss2/6

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New trends in the studies on Confucius and Confucianism

Abstract
Extract:
Since 1979, following the end of China's Cultural Revolution, academic studies on Confucius have resumed. In 1989, to celebrate the 2540th anniversary of the birth of Confucius, numerous academic activities were organised. As a result, the studies on Confucius reached a new stage. Since then, new trends have appeared in the studies on Confucius and Confucianism.

Keywords
Confucius, Confucianism, scholars, published

This article is available in Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies:
http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cm/vol3/iss2/6

Regions and Developments in China

New Trends in the Studies on Confucius and Confucianism

by Li Tianchen[1]

Since 1979, following the end of China's Cultural Revolution, academic studies on Confucius have resumed. In 1989, to celebrate the 2540th anniversary of the birth of Confucius, numerous academic activities were organised. As a result, the studies on Confucius reached a new stage. Since then, new trends have appeared in the studies on Confucius and Confucianism. The following is a general survey of the situation.

A. The study of Confucius has become internationalised.

By internationalisation, we mean that people in many other countries in the world are becoming increasingly involved in studying Confucius and Confucianism, and that a higher degree of academic exchange is occurring between China and the outside world. This situation is indicated in the following aspects: -

1. More international conferences on Confucius and Confucianism are held. Prior to 1986 there were none. In September 1987, a conference, sponsored by the *China Confucius Foundation* and the *East-Asia Philosophy Institute of Singapore*, was held at Qufu. Scholars and experts from twelve countries participated in the conference. It was the first international conference on Confucius and Confucianism since the founding of the People's Republic of China. In recent years, large-scale international conferences are held more frequently. In October 1994, the *International Confucian Association* held its inaugural meeting in Beijing to celebrate the 2,545th anniversary of the birth of Confucius. It was the largest conference on Confucius ever held. Prominent regional leaders, 300 scholars and 1,000 participants attended this important event. Key representatives included Li Ruihuan, one of the seven top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress, Gu Mu, the then Honorary President of the *China Confucius Foundation*, widely credited as a prime architect of Deng's economic modernisation program, and Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's Senior Minister. In 1997, two large international conferences on Confucius and Confucianism were held. In June, Singapore hosted the first conference, which was

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organised by the *Center for Research in Chinese Studies* of the Department of Chinese Studies, the National University of Singapore, in conjunction with the *International Confucian Association*. In September, the *Hong Kong Confucian Academy* hosted another International Academic Seminar on *Confucius' Thought and the 21st Century*, which Reg Little (representing the *Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies* in Australia's Bond University) and I attended. This year will be the 2550th anniversary of the birth of Confucius. Large international conferences on Confucius and Confucianism will be held, drawing scholars from around the world.

2. Before 1986, no foreign scholars of Confucianism had their articles or papers published in Chinese newspapers or journals. But during the five years between 1986 and 1991, the journal *Confucius Studies*, which is sponsored by the *China Confucius Foundation*, had published 33 articles by foreign scholars and experts. In recent years, more papers by foreign scholars have been published. Similarly, before 1988, no papers by foreign scholars were collected in Confucian anthologies. But in anthologies published in recent years, more and more papers by foreign scholars are collected. In the course of the above activities, both Chinese scholars and academic institutions in the PRC and those in the outside world have had greater opportunities to exchange viewpoints and information. As a result, connections and friendships have been established and promoted. The field of vision of both sides has been widened and therefore studies on Confucius have been greatly enhanced.

B. The study of Confucius has become popularised.

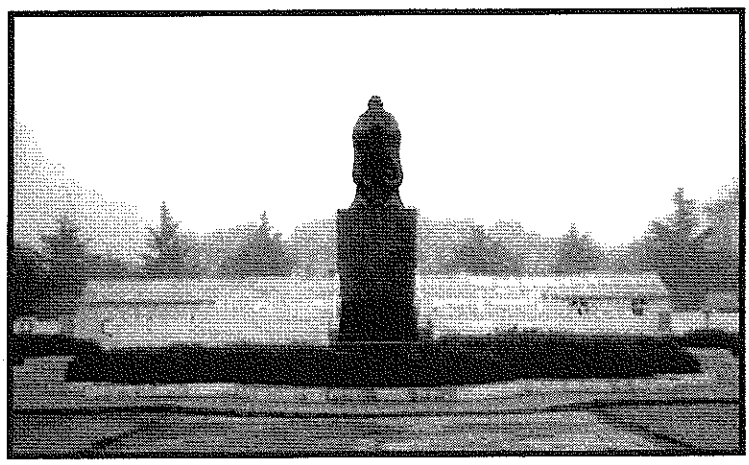
For a long time, all activities concerning the study of Confucian thought were solely the concern of scholars, experts and other intellectuals in higher educational institutions. Things, however, have changed in recent years.

1. Research organisations and academic associations with wider roles have begun to emerge over the last fifteen years. In September 1984 the *China Confucius Foundation* was established in Qufu, and in May of the following year, the *China Confucian Study Association* was established in Beijing. Both are nation-wide organisations. As noted above, in October of 1994, the International Confucian Association was founded in Beijing. It is a world-wide organisation. Moreover, organisations and associations at the local level were also established. For example, in the Zhouzhi County of Shaanxi Province, the *Confucius Philosophy Study Association* was established as the first association at the county level. Participants were no longer only scholars and college teachers. Retired workers, staff members and people from all walks of life joined in the association and its activities.

2. The number of popular books about Confucius is increasing. In the past, most books published on Confucius were primarily academic works, both the writers and readers of which were scholars, experts and college teachers. But in recent years, more and more popular books on Confucius have been published. I myself have been doing such work.

Since 1987, I have translated and published *A Collection of Confucius' Sayings*, *A Collection of Mencius' Sayings*, and *The Analects of Confucius* (Shandong University Press, 1991). To help readers both at home and abroad acquire a better understanding of Confucius and his thought, I first put the classical Chinese into modern Chinese, then from modern Chinese the passages are rendered into English. So all people, irrespective of nationality or degree of literacy, can read Confucius' saying and appreciate his ideas.

3. Works of art concerning Confucius come into being constantly and today the image of Confucius is presented on stage and screen. In recent years, people in literature and art circles have joined in the studies on Confucius. They have not only studied Confucius' principles in literature and art, but they have also created many literary and artistic representations of Confucius. For example, Shandong People's Press published *The Romance of Confucius* and *The Biography of Confucius*, while Shandong TV Station ran the film *Confucius*. In addition, carvings and sculptures of Confucius' image in all kinds of materials can be seen everywhere. On the campus of Qufu Teachers University stands the largest bronze statue of Confucius in the world.



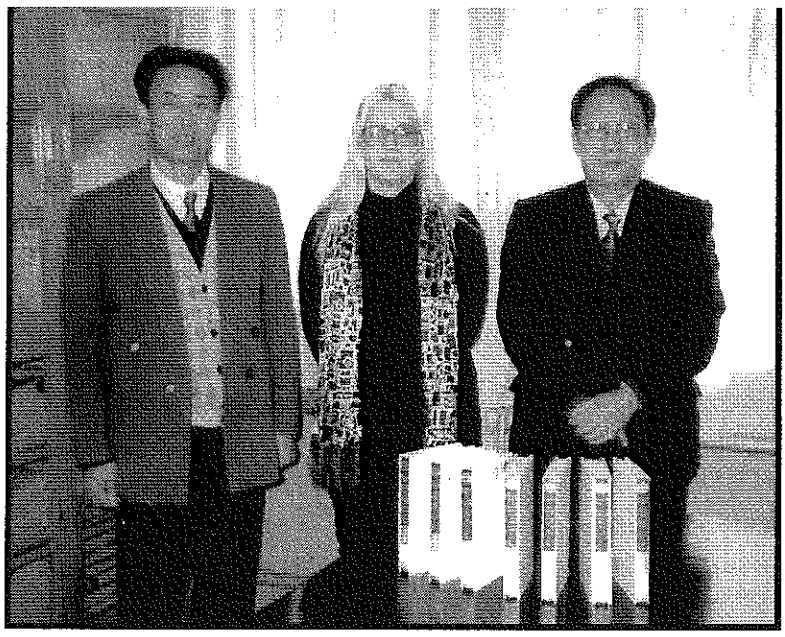
Statue of Confucius at Qufu Teachers University greets a misty Autumn morning.

The popularisation of the studies on Confucius has enabled the broad masses of the common people to know Confucius and learn about his ideas.

C. Subjects in the study of Confucian thought have become specialised and systematised.

Before 1986 people focused their attention towards the general evaluation of Confucius and his thought. This was shown in the names of published articles and books. These included *On Confucius*, *On the Thought of Confucius*, and *The Re-evaluation of Confucius and His Thought*. In recent years, studies on Confucius have deepened. People have turned their attention to more specific topics. This is also reflected in the names of published articles and books. Some of the more recent titles include *An Inquiry of Confucius' Thought in the Administration of Talented Persons* and *The Enlightenment of*

Confucius' Educational Theory to Contemporaries. Meanwhile, scholars are focusing their attention to systematic studies of Confucius. For example, in the past three years, Professor Jiang Linxiang, head of the *Confucius Culture Institute*, and six other professors, have finished the writing of *The History of Chinese Confucianism* and had it published only recently. The work consists of seven volumes and is 2.6 million words long. To date it is the most extensive work in China and globally on this theme. This work gives a detailed description of the development of Chinese Confucianism over the past 2,500 years.



Professors Jiang Linxiang, Rosita Dellios and Li Tianchen (right to left) inspect *The History of Chinese Confucianism*, a recently published comprehensive study, written by Jiang Linxiang and other scholars at the *Confucius Culture Institute*, Qufu.

D. The characteristics of Confucius' thought have been studied in the context of the comparison between Eastern and Western cultures.

Concerning relations between people, Western values place more emphasis on individual rights and the freedom 'to do one's own thing' while traditional Chinese values stress collective and group unity. The Western way of thinking often contributes to aggression in social and international conflicts, making conflict-resolution confrontational and even counter-productive. Confucianism, on the other hand, perceives life more elliptically, with the 'temporal' and the 'transcendent' complementing each other. The Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean* views the resolution as being integral within the process itself. Through such comparisons, people can see more clearly the characteristics of Confucian thought.

E. Confucius' thought and its value in modern society has become the theme in current studies.

Judging from the themes of published articles or the names of seminars, it can be easily seen that the relations between Confucius' thought and modern society have become the focus of people's attention. Many scholars around the world are searching for the connecting point between Confucian thought and modern society, often from many different angles. Articles such as *Confucius' Thought and Modernisation*, and *Confucius' Thought and Modern Society* have been published. As the 21st century is approaching, more and more people are becoming interested in the possible positive role that Confucianism can play. As mentioned above, in 1997 the Hong Kong Confucian Academy hosted an international academic seminar on *Confucius' Thought and the 21st Century*. In September of 1995, Qufu Teachers University hosted an international seminar entitled *Social Ethics and Morality in the 21st Century*. With the former economic success of the East Asian countries, international scholars examined more closely the values of East Asian culture in industrial development and modernisation, and the role of the Confucian legacy in economic development became an important topic of discussion.

Beyond the above five points, there are some other trends and characteristics in current studies on Confucius. It is not necessary to mention them all. What should be emphasised is the application of Confucian doctrines to industrial development and the modernisation of our society. One of the most important aims in the study of the Confucian legacy is to explore Confucian values that serve the present and the future.

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