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Life's Many Sides

CONFUCIUS

By TON THAT THIEN

It is useful to go back to Confucius, at least once in a while. Reading him in the context of the present situation in Viet Nam is quite inspiring.

Confucius, as everyone knows, lived at a time when his own state and the whole of China was in a state of upheaval and chaos, when morality, especially political morality, was at its lowest. Confucius was so impressed by the relationship between the absence of morality, virtue, and knowledge in man and political and social chaos in the state that he advocated a philosophy which equated ethics with politics, and made the cultivation of the individual's moral character the basis of good government.

Confucius' teachings are as much relevant today, especially in this country, as they had been for hundreds of years. Nobody would quarrel with him on the following, for example:

- 1) "When the ruler pays attention to the cultivation of his personal conduct, there will be respect for moral law. When the ruler honours worthy men, he will not be deceived (by the crafty officials). When the ruler cherishes affection for his kindred, there will be no disaffection among the members of his family. When the ruler shows respect to the high ministers of state, he will not make mistakes. When the ruler identifies himself with the interests and welfares of the body of public officers, there will be a strong spirit of loyalty among the gentlemen of the country. When the ruler becomes a father to the common people, the mass of the people will exert themselves for the good of the state...."
- 2) "With the right men, the growth of government is as rapid as the growth of vegetation is in the right soil. Indeed, good government is like a fast growing plant... "
- 3) "Unless social inequalities have a true and moral basis, government of the people is impossible.
- 4) "If the people in inferior positions do not have confidence in those above them, government of the people is an impossibility."
- 5) "The ruler loves what the common people love and hates what the common people hate. That is how to be a parent to the common people".
- 6) "For every one called to the government of nations and empires there are nine cardinal directions to be attended to:"
 1. Cultivation of his personal conduct.
 2. Honouring worthy men.

3. Cherishing affection for, and doing his duty toward, his kindred.
 4. Showing respect to the high ministers of state.
 5. Identifying himself with the interests and welfare of the whole body of public officers.
 6. Showing himself as a father to the common people.
 7. Encouraging the introduction of all useful arts.
 8. Showing tenderness to strangers from far countries.
 9. Taking interests in the welfare of the princes of the Empire!
- 7) " Among the means for the regeneration of mankind, those made with noise and show are least importance".
- 8) "When a ruler gains his personal wealth, he loses his people; and when he loses his personal wealth, he gains the following of his people".
- 9) "If the ruler himself does what is right, he will have influence over the people without giving commands, and when the ruler does not do what is right, all his commands will be of no avail".
- 10) "People must have sufficient to eat; there must be a sufficient army; and there must be confidence of the people in the ruler... I would rather go without sufficient food for the people. There have always been deaths in every generation since man lived, but a nation cannot exist without confidence in its rulers".