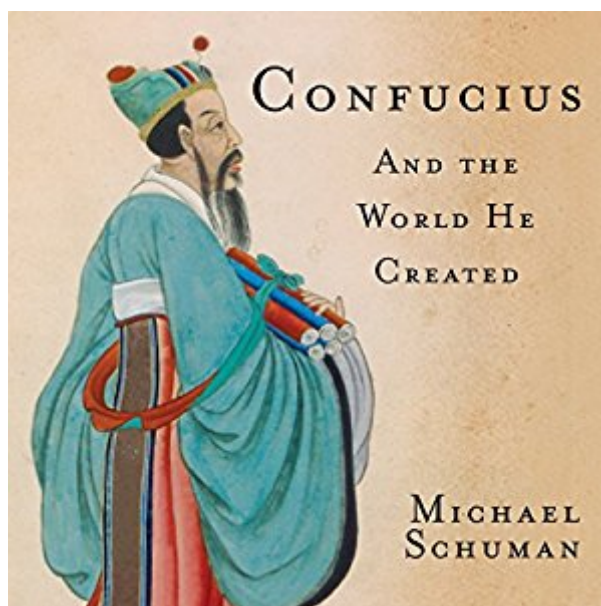


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Confucius: And The World He Created



Synopsis

Confucius is perhaps the most important philosopher in history. Today his teachings shape the daily lives of more than 1.6 billion people. Throughout East Asia, Confucius' influence can be seen in everything from business practices and family relationships to educational standards and government policies. Even as Western ideas from Christianity to Communism have bombarded the region, Confucius' doctrine has endured as the foundation of East Asian culture. It is impossible to understand East Asia, journalist Michael Schuman demonstrates, without first engaging with Confucius and his vast legacy. Confucius created a worldview that is in many respects distinct from and in conflict with Western culture. As Schuman shows, the way that East Asian companies are managed, how family members interact with each other, and how governments see their roles in society all differ from the norm in the West due to Confucius' lasting impact. Confucius has been credited with giving East Asia an advantage in today's world by instilling its people with a devotion to learning and propelling the region's economic progress. Still, the sage has also been highly controversial. For the past 100 years, East Asians have questioned if the region can become truly modern while Confucius remains so entrenched in society. He has been criticized for causing the inequality of women, promoting authoritarian regimes, and suppressing human rights. Despite these debates East Asians today are turning to Confucius to help them solve the ills of modern life more than they have in a century. As a wealthy and increasingly powerful Asia rises on the world stage, Confucius, too, will command a more prominent place in global culture. Touching on philosophy, history, and current affairs, Confucius tells the vivid, dramatic story of the enigmatic philosopher whose ideas remain at the heart of East Asian civilization.

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Customer Reviews

Confucian societies have arguably been the world's most successful since WWII. Confucian values such as thrift and a devotion to hard work have gotten much of the credit. However, the truth is much more complex - for example, East Asian countries have further benefited from exceptionally strong governance compared to most developing nations, partly due to a Confucian-inspired preference among the most talented to seek public service. Confucius has also been blamed for suppressing women, stifling innovation by junior staffers (suppressed by top-down decision-making), impoverishing peasant, encouraging despotism, and sparking financial crises. Reality, Confucianism has evolved over the 1,500+ years since its originator died. Born in the sixth-century B.C., Confucius considered filial piety the foundation of a peaceful and prosperous society. Per Confucius, there is no more important relationship within society than that between father and son. His adherents contend that the morals and rules of propriety learned within the family are easily transferable to society at large. Confucius never claimed his teachings were divinely revealed, never wove tales about the creation of the world or the origins of man, nor did he speculate on the afterlife. His goal was to teach people to be virtuous and put that virtue to use building a better society. The benefit received for doing a good deed was the knowledge that you'd behaved honorably and perhaps done some good for the world. Per Confucius, a minister in a government should administer his responsibilities wisely and serve his ruler loyally.

Schumann traces the teachings and influence of Confucius over a period 2,500 years. Confucius was born about 551 BCE and died in 479 BCE. Though clearly not a deity he has been revered almost as one. Confucius believed in character development as a means of attaining man's inherent goodness. He taught how one can achieve moral uprightness (without which no emperor would be mandated by heaven to rule). Filial piety and education are some of Confucianism's notable precepts but perhaps the most enlightening and universal one is the "Golden Rule", "Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you". That has not only found its way into the thoughts of Western philosophers like Immanuel Kant, but also Western religions such as Christianity. During his lifetime when the rulers of China were preoccupied with armies and military prowess Confucius tried to tell them that they were going about nation-building the wrong way. He taught that benevolence was the only correct way to rule. He left behind great scholars

like Mencius and Xunzi who have become as well-known as he was. Schuman tells us that Confucianism went through a period of change after the Sage's death, and what might today be regarded as Confucianism are in fact, Neo-Confucianism. That is not a fault but a strength because the Neo-Confucians brought Confucianism to the masses. Much of Neo-Confucianism occurred in the Song Dynasty, but Schuman points out later in his book, changes to Confucianism continue to be made. Indeed it is his hope that as we learn more about Confucianism we might invent a new Confucius for our age. Schuman's view that Confucianism has much to offer in modern times, and he points to the economic and political development in East Asia as examples.

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