Week 4: Reading 4: Confucius Reading

1. What were the proper goals of life according to Confucius?

First and foremost he must learn to be faithful to his superiors, to keep promises, to refuse the friendship of all who are not like him. And if he finds he has made a mistake, then he must not be afraid of admitting the fact and amending his ways.

2. What was the Confucian definition of a gentleman? Why did Confucianism place so much emphasis on manners and ceremony?

He does not preach what he practises till he has practised what he preaches.

A gentleman can see a question from all sides without bias. The small man is biased and can see a question only from one side.

A gentleman in his dealings with the world has neither enmities nor affections; but wherever he sees Right he ranges himself beside it.

A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay.

A gentleman covets the reputation of being slow in word but prompt in deed.

A gentleman who is widely versed in letters and at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual is not likely, I think, to go far wrong.

A true gentleman is calm and at ease; the Small Man is fretful and ill at ease.

3. Did Confucius judge human nature to be good or bad? What was his attitude toward human emotions?

Man should be in control of his emotions. Human nature is good, but only truly demonstrated in the behavior of a gentleman.

4. What social structure did Confucianism imply? What were the key social classes, and how did they differ?

The gentleman is dignified, but never haughty; common people are haughty, but never dignified.

He who holds no rank in a State does not discuss its policies, Master Tseng said, "A true gentleman, even in his thoughts, never departs from what is suitable to his rank."

Classes suggested: peasants, gentleman/nobles, scholar-gentry, royalty.

5. In what ways was Confucianism not a religion?

It’s a way of thinking and behavior rather than faith.
6. Why did Confucianism have such a deep impact on Chinese and East Asian history? What groups and institutions could benefit from it?

All could, it gained popularity because it helped provide a moral signpost for the people – how to behave and be good citizens.

7. What does the document tell us about early Chinese society? Discuss the POV of the document.

Demonstrates values held by society. (emphasis on specific values will vary)
POV - (Reading taken from: “The Analects of Confucious”), POV will vary (no right or wrong answer provided there is support.) can be demonstrated in these ways:

Authorial point of view:
Students show awareness that the gender, occupation, class, religion, nationality, political position, or ethnic identity of the author may well have influenced the views that are expressed.

Reliability and accuracy of source:
Students critically examine a source for its reliability and accuracy by questioning whether the author of the document would be in a position to be accurate and/or would likely be telling the truth. The student can also evaluate the type of source, e.g., a letter or official report, showing an understanding that different types of sources vary in their probable reliability.

Tone or intent of the author:
Students examine the text of a document to determine its tone (e.g., satire, irony, indirect political commentary) or the intent of the author. This may be particularly useful for visual documents.

8. Using the following web sites, describe and discuss the idea of the Mandate of Heaven. Answer the following question: could the ideas of Confucius be used in support of the Mandate of Heaven or not and explain the reasoning behind your answer:

Confucianism is based on relationships of filial piety – turning the emperor-citizen relationship into a variation of this. Information below provided by a link in one of the assignment websites: http://www.friesian.com/confuci.htm#six

Refusal to obey the emperor out of "true" obedience could, of course, get one put to death; and Chinese history celebrates such martyrs. An emperor who was no longer benevolent, however, could also be overthrown, and that is an interesting consequence of the conditional nature of obedience. In this area, the matter is usually stated as part of the theory of the Tian Ming, the "Mandate of Heaven." This means at least four things, the first two of which are already present in the thought of Confucius himself:

1. The moral order of the universe: Thus Confucius says, "At fifty I understood the Mandate of Heaven" [Analects II:4], i.e. knew what right and wrong were.
2. Fate: Thus, in the Analects one of Confucius's students is quoted as saying, "Life and death are the Mandate of Heaven," i.e. beyond our control [Analects XII:5].

3. The right to rule: This becomes the most important meaning of the "Mandate of Heaven." Knowing the moral order of the universe and actually observing it make one a worthy ruler. Otherwise one has no business, and no right, being in power. Such an idea is quite different from mediaeval European ideas about government, where the king (Pope, emperor, or whatever) often derived authority directly from God and was answerable only to God. There was therefore no right to rebellion in Western thought until the Protestant Reformation (which questioned the authority of Catholic rulers).

4. The judgment of history: This combines the "right to rule" with "fate," for the Chinese view was that losing the Mandate of Heaven as the right to rule would shortly be followed by the actual loss of power. The historical precedent for this was the brief and ferocious rule of the Qin Dynasty (255-207 BC) followed by the more benign and durable tenure of the Han emperors (the Former Han 206 BC-25 AD, the Later Han 25 AD-220). This becomes a principle that informs the writing of Chinese history: Beginning with the Later Han Dynasty, one of first acts of a traditional Chinese dynasty was the commissioning of an official history of the previous dynasty (in that case the great History of the Former Hàn Dynasty). Such a history in effect becomes the certificate of legitimacy for the new dynasty, showing how the previous dynasty was at first benevolent but then eventually lost the Mandate of Heaven, which means it was the obligation of the new dynasty to replace it. The history of the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing (1644-1912), was completed by the government of the Republic of China on Taiwan.

9. Write a brief biography of Confucius. (use web sites below for additional resources)

Biography for Confucius can be found at this website:
http://www.san.beck.org/CONFUCIUS1-Life.html