

Ideology in China

## Confucius makes a comeback

BEIJING

“**S**TUDY the past”, Confucius said, “if you would define the future.” Now he himself has become the object of that study.

Confucius was revered – indeed worshipped – in China for more than 2,000 years. But neither the Communist Party, nor the 20th century itself, has been kind to the sage. Modern China saw the end of the imperial civil-service examinations he inspired, the end of the imperial regime itself and the repudiation of the classical Chinese in which he wrote. 9, during the Cultural Revolution Confucius and his followers were derided and humiliated by Mao Zedong in his zeal to build a “new China”.

Now, Professor Kang Xiaoguang, an outspoken scholar at Beijing’s Renmin University, argues that Confucianism should become China’s state religion. Such proposals bring Confucius’s 10 into the open. It is another sign of the struggle within China for an alternative ideological underpinning to Communist Party rule in a country where enthusiasm for communism waned long ago and where, officials and social critics fret, anything goes if money is to be made.

Explicit attacks on Confucius ended as long ago as 1976, when Mao died, but it is only now that his popularity has really started rising. On topics ranging from political philosophy to personal ethics, old Confucian ideas are 11.

With a recent book and television series on *the Analects*, the best-known



collection of the sage’s musings, Yu Dan has tried to make the teachings accessible to ordinary Chinese. Scholars have accused her of oversimplifying, but her 12 has clearly struck a chord: her book has sold nearly 4m copies, an enormous number even in China.

Further interest is evinced by the Confucian study programmes springing up all over the Chinese education system. These include kindergarten classes in which children recite the classics, Confucian programmes in philosophy departments at universities, and even Confucian-themed executive education programmes offering sage guidance for business people.

But perhaps the most intriguing – albeit ambivalent – adopter of Confucianism is the Communist Party itself. Since becoming China’s top leader in 2002, President Hu Jintao has promoted a succession of official slogans, including “Harmonious Society” and “*Xiaokang Shehui*” (“a moderately well-off society”), which have Confucian undertones. 13, says one scholar at the party’s top think-tank, the Central Party School, official approval is tempered by suspicions about religion and by lingering concern over the mixture of Buddhism and other religious elements in Confucian thinking.

The relevance of Confucian ideas to modern China is obvious. Confucianism

emphasises order, balance and harmony. It teaches respect for authority and concern for others.

For ordinary Chinese, such ideas must seem like an antidote to the downside of growth, such as widening regional disparities, wealth differentials, corruption and rising social tension. For the government, too, Confucianism seems like 14. The party is struggling to maintain its authority without much ideological underpinning. Confucianism seems to provide a ready-made ideology that teaches people to accept their place and does not challenge party rule.

As an additional advantage, Confucianism is home-grown, unlike communism. It even provides the party with a tool for 15 abroad. By calling China's overseas cultural and linguistic study centres "Confucius Institutes", the party can present itself as something more than just an ideologically bankrupt administrator of the world's workshop.

Yet despite this, Confucianism is not an easy fit for the party. It says those at the top must prove their worthiness to rule. This means Confucianism does not really address one of the 16, that while all will be well so long as China continues to prosper, the party has little to fall back upon if growth falters.

Writing last year, Professor Kang nevertheless argued that a marriage of Confucianism and communism 17. He argued that the party has in reality allied itself with China's urban elite. "It is", he wrote, "an alliance whereby the elites collude to pillage the masses," leading to "political corruption, social inequality, financial risks, rampant evil forces, and moral degeneration." The solution, he argued, was to "Confucianise the Chinese Communist Party at the top and society at the lower level."

But Stephen Angle, a Fulbright scholar at Peking University and a philosophy professor at Wesleyan University in America, argues that Confucianism may not be as useful to the party as it thinks. For a start it has little to say about one of the party's biggest worries, the tension in urban-rural relations. More important, a gap in Confucian political theory should alarm a government seeking to hold on to power in 18. "One big problem with Confucianism", says Mr Angle, "is that it offers no good model for political transition, except revolution."

*The Economist, 2007*

## Tekst 5 Confucius makes a comeback

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*Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.*

1p **9**

- A Even more curiously
- B Harsher still
- C Paradoxically
- D To be fair

1p **10**

- A degradation
- B rehabilitation
- C vulnerability

1p **11**

- A gaining new currency
- B highly controversial
- C opening up new fields of study
- D seen as outworn clichés

1p **12**

- A ideology
- B popularity
- C response
- D treatment

1p **13**

- A After all
- B For this same reason
- C Indeed
- D Moreover
- E On the other hand

1p **14**

- A a blessing
- B a new religion
- C a risky gamble

1p **15**

- A** advancing commercial interests
- B** gaining goodwill
- C** promoting the study of Chinese
- D** re-establishing Confucianism

1p **16**

- A** government's main worries
- B** most widespread misconceptions
- C** principles of Chinese ideology

1p **17**

- A** could be made to work
- B** had already proved results
- C** was out of the question

1p **18**

- A** a country with many religions
- B** a fast-changing situation
- C** an era 2500 years after Confucius
- D** an industrialised country such as China

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**Bronvermelding**

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