



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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by

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HCR 244 and HR 195 DECLARING SEPTEMBER 28 AS CONFUCIUS DAY IN HAWAII

Recently the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa established a Confucius Institute on campus. The Institute has many bold initiatives particularly in enhancing our students' and our society's understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese language, some of which have already been noted in the resolution. The passing of the current resolution will further enhance the work of the university and help promote mutual understanding and respect between the people of the United States and China. However, I would like to offer testimony that may not yet have been entertained, and that may shed light on the importance of Confucius, not just to our institute or to Chinese people, but to our own society, culture and state.

The thoughts and writings attributed to Confucius, a person that many recognize as having been a profound philosopher, scholar and teacher, has without question influenced many different civilizations and cultures found in Asia, especially in East and Southeast Asia. Today, one can see the voluminous amounts of scholarship produced in the U.S. that tie directly to the interest that still surrounds this one figure. Many past Asian states adopted Confucian ideals to maintain legal, political and familial institutions. Although those states and institutions have long since waned, the ideals of Confucius penetrated their society and left an indelible mark in the collective consciousness of the generations that followed.

Here we are today in Hawai'i, a modern state built up and maintained in part by people who were and are a part of that heritage. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa leads in Asia-Pacific scholarship, and its origins and strength stem from early Chinese and Japanese leaders who carried Confucian principles in their everyday life. For example, it was a Chinese immigrant who spearheaded the effort to transform the UH into a university. Whether we see it or not, our university and our state are a product of the diverse cultural populations that have come to the Islands, and many of those who came from Asia are still affected by the traditions that stemmed from Confucian thought.

The proposal to recognize Confucius and his birthday, September 28, highlights the importance of this ancient figure and his thought in our everyday lives. Today we like to use words like family or 'ohana to express the cooperative and moral fortitude of the society to which we all contribute. Let us not forget, however, that Confucius greatly also emphasized the family structure many centuries ago. Those ideals and traditions traveled far across the ocean, carried by generations of immigrants, first from East Asia and later Southeast Asia, and came to link with notions of family rooted here among the Hawaiians, and together augment the values and beliefs now shared among us all. To honor Confucius is to honor our own people and our own history.