

Belief systems are philosophical ideas or religious faiths that a group of people choose to follow. Many times belief systems are diffused into other cultures through commerce and the support of those in authority. Two very prominent belief systems that diffused into other regions of the world were the religious faith of Islam in its introduction to West Africa and the philosophy of Confucianism to Japan by way of Korea.

Muslims demonstrate submission to Allah through the Five Pillars. They publicly state their belief in one God and that Mohammed is his messenger. Prayer five times a day facing Mecca, Islam's most sacred city, is a daily ritual for all Muslims. Charity for the less fortunate (alms) is expected of all Muslims capable of giving. Fasting from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan further emphasizes submission to the will of God. A pilgrimage to Mecca called the Hajj is to be attempted by all Muslims at least once in a lifetime. Islam was founded in 622 by the prophet Muhammed in present day Saudi Arabia. After many years of conquering territory across northern Africa by the Umayyad Dynasty, many leaders in West Africa were converted to Islam as a result of trade. Merchants brought Islam to western Africa, but the religious leaders who followed them converted nonbelievers. Once West African leaders converted, they often used Islam to reinforce their authority by merging Islam with local culture.

By the 14th century in the Niger River valley Islam was an important force because it was tied to the trade of salt for gold across the Sahara. Because Mali controlled the gold mines it became a powerful Islamic state. One of Mali's kings, Mansa Musa, made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Not only did this stimulate commerce but it also

brought about a great flourishing of Islamic culture. Muslim scholars made Timbuktu a center of Muslim learning. Mansa Musa built numerous mosques and schools and used Islamic law to maintain order.

The philosophical idea of Confucianism appeared in China near the end of the Zhou dynasty following the era of warring states.

Confucius believed that the key to social order was to be found in everyone accepting their positions and responsibilities as found in the Five Relationships. The Analects discuss how, no matter what position a person holds, there are responsibilities at every level. A just ruler is owed loyalty by all subjects but he owes them just rule. The father is head of the family and is owed the loyalty of the son. The wife must respect the husband, the older brother is owed respect by the younger, and a friend must respect another friend. This idea influenced the social and political structure of China.

Throughout history China had much influence in Japan. The nearness of the Korean peninsula formed a link between mainland China and the islands of Japan. Confucianism travelled overland through Korea and then by sea to Japan largely by trade and foreign missions. It arrived at about the same time Japan was trying to centralize its government under dynastic rule. Rulers adapted Confucianism to Japanese conditions. Giving everyone responsibilities paralleled what China was doing in creating roles for the good of society. The teaching of filial piety influenced Japanese social life and family relationships. This provided structure for maintaining order. It also emphasized the authority of the ruler and ensured loyalty to the state. The spread of Confucianism to Japan was aided by use of the

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Chinese writing system as the means of carrying it to Japan.
The Five Pillars of Islam were carried to Mali and the Niger River valley through trade across the Sahara. The Five Relationships of Confucianism were carried from China to Japan through trade across the Korean Peninsula. Both belief systems had social, political and economic influence in the areas they were spread.

Score: _____ (0 to 5, with 5 being the highest score)

Why? _____

