

Confucianism



With no clergy and with no gods to worship, Confucianism is not a religion in the traditional sense. Rather, it is an ethical system that provides direction for personal behavior and good government. However, this ancient philosophy guides the actions and beliefs of millions of Chinese and other peoples of the East. Thus, many view it as a religion.

Confucianism is a way of life based on the teachings of the Chinese scholar Confucius. It stresses social and civic responsibility. Over the centuries, however, Confucianism has greatly influenced people's spiritual beliefs as well. While East Asians declare themselves to follow any one of a number of religions, many also claim to be Confucian. The yin and yang symbol shown above represents opposite forces in the world working together. It symbolizes the social order and harmony that Confucianism stresses.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

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▼ Celebration

While scholars remain uncertain of Confucius's date of birth, people throughout East Asia celebrate it on September 28. In Taiwan, it is an official holiday, known as Teachers' Day. The holiday also pays tribute to teachers. Confucius himself was a teacher, and he believed that education was an important part of a fulfilled life. Here, dancers take part in a ceremony honoring Confucius.



Learn More About Confucianism

The Five Relationships

Confucius believed society should be organized around five basic relationships between the following:

- 1 ruler ↔ subject
- 2 father ↔ son
- 3 husband ↔ wife
- 4 older brother ↔ younger brother
- 5 friend ↔ friend

Confucius's Golden Rule

“Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you.”

The *Analects*

PRIMARY SOURCE

The earliest and most authentic record of Confucius's ideas was collected by his students. Around 400 B.C., they compiled Confucius's thoughts in a book called the *Analects*. In the following selections from the *Analects*, Confucius (the Master) gives advice regarding virtue and pride:

The Master said: “Don't worry if people don't recognize your merits; worry that you may not recognize theirs.”

Analects 1.16

The Master said: “Do not be concerned that others do not recognize you; be concerned about what you are yet unable to do.”

Analects 14.30

Leadership ▶

Confucius was born at a time of crisis and violence in China. He hoped his ideas and teachings would restore the order of earlier times to his society. But although he was active in politics, he never had enough political power to put his ideas into practice. Nonetheless, his ideas would become the foundation of Chinese thought for more than 2,000 years.



▲ Ritual

A key aspect of Confucianism is filial piety, the respect children owe their parents. Traditionally, filial piety meant complete obedience to one's parents during their lifetime. It also required the performance of certain rituals after their death. In this 12th-century Chinese painting, a sage instructs a pupil on the virtue of filial piety.

11. Around what five relationships did Confucius believe society should be organized?
12. According to tradition, what does filial piety require of children?