



# Confucianism

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# Confucianism



- Confucianism, also known as Ruism or Ru classicism, is a system of thought and behavior originating in ancient China, and is variously described as a tradition, philosophy, (humanistic or rationalistic) religion, theory of government, or way of life.
- Confucianism developed from what was later called the Hundred Schools of Thought from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE). Confucius considered himself a transmitter of cultural values inherited from the Xia (c. 2070–1600 BCE), Shang (c. 1600–1046 BCE) and Western Zhou dynasties (c. 1046–771 BCE).
- Confucianism was suppressed during the Legalist and autocratic Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), but survived. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), Confucian approaches edged out the "proto-Taoist" Huang-Lao as the official ideology, while the emperors mixed both with the realist techniques of Legalism.

# Confucianism



- Confucianism regards texts such as the Five Classics as examples that should be followed to increase the harmony of the family, social order as a whole, and the world.
- A Confucian revival began during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). In the late Tang, Confucianism developed in response to Buddhism and Taoism and was reformulated as Neo-Confucianism. This reinvigorated form was adopted as the basis of the imperial exams and the core philosophy of the scholar-official class in the Song dynasty (960–1297).
- The abolition of the examination system in 1905 marked the end of official Confucianism. The intellectuals of the New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century blamed Confucianism for China's weaknesses. They searched for new doctrines to replace Confucian teachings; some of these new ideologies include the "Three Principles of the People" with the establishment of the Republic of China, and then Maoism under the People's Republic of China. In the late twentieth century, the Confucian work ethic has been credited with the rise of the East Asian economies.

# Confucianism



- With particular emphasis on the importance of the family and social harmony, rather than on an otherworldly source of spiritual values, the core of Confucianism is humanistic.
- According to American philosopher Herbert Fingarette's conceptualisation of Confucianism as a philosophical system which regards "the secular as sacred", Confucianism transcends the dichotomy between religion and humanism, considering the ordinary activities of human life—and especially human relationships—as a manifestation of the sacred, because they are the expression of humanity's moral nature (性; xìng), which has a transcendent anchorage in tian (天; tiān; 'heaven').
- While the Confucian concept of tian shares some similarities with the concept of a deity, it is primarily an impersonal absolute principle like the tao or the Brahman. Most scholars and practitioners do not think of tian as a god, and the deities that many Confucians worship do not originate from orthodox Confucianism. Confucianism focuses on the practical order that is given by a this-worldly awareness of tian.

# Confucianism



- The worldly concern of Confucianism rests upon the belief that human beings are fundamentally good, and teachable, improvable, and perfectible through personal and communal endeavor, especially self-cultivation and self-creation. Confucian thought focuses on the cultivation of virtue in a morally organised world.
- Some of the basic Confucian ethical concepts and practices include ren, yi, li, and zhi. Ren is the essence of the human being which manifests as compassion. It is the virtue-form of Heaven.
- Yi is the upholding of righteousness and the moral disposition to do good. Li is a system of ritual norms and propriety that determines how a person should properly act in everyday life in harmony with the law of Heaven. Zhi (智 ; zhì) is the ability to see what is right and fair, or the converse, in the behaviors exhibited by others. Confucianism holds one in contempt, either passively or actively, for failure to uphold the cardinal moral values of ren and yi.

# Confucianism



- Traditionally, cultures and countries in the East Asian cultural sphere are strongly influenced by Confucianism, including China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, as well as various territories settled predominantly by Han Chinese people, such as Singapore and Myanmar's Kokang.
- Today, it has been credited for shaping East Asian societies and overseas Chinese communities, and to some extent, other parts of Asia. Most Confucianist movements have had significant differences from the original Zhou-era teachings, and are typically much more complex because of their reliance on "elaborate doctrine" and other factors such as traditions with long histories. In the past few decades, there have been talks of a "Confucian Revival" in the academic and the scholarly community, and there has been a grassroots proliferation of various types of Confucian churches.
- In late 2015, many Confucian personalities formally established a national Confucian Church (孔圣会; 孔聖會; Kǒngshènghuì) in China to unify the many Confucian congregations and civil society organisations.



# Terminology

- Strictly speaking, there is no term in Chinese which directly corresponds to "Confucianism". The closest catch-all term for things related to Confucianism is the word ru (儒; rú). Its literal meanings in modern Chinese include 'scholar', 'learned', or 'refined man'. In Old Chinese the word had a distinct set of meanings, including 'to tame', 'to mould', 'to educate', and 'to refine'. Several different terms, some of which with modern origin, are used in different situations to express different facets of Confucianism, including:
  - 儒家; Rújiā – "the ru school of thought";
  - 儒教; Rújiào – "ru religious doctrine";
  - 儒学; 儒學; Rúxué – "ru studies";
  - 孔教; Kǒngjiào – "Confucius's religious doctrine";
  - 孔家店; Kǒngjiādiàn – "Confucius's family's business", a pejorative phrase used during the New Culture Movement and the Cultural Revolution.

# Terminology



- Three of them use ru. These names do not use the name "Confucius" at all, but instead focus on the ideal of the Confucian man. The use of the term "Confucianism" has been avoided by some modern scholars, who favor "Ruism" and "Ruists" instead. Robert Eno argues that the term has been "burdened ... with the ambiguities and irrelevant traditional associations". Ruism, as he states, is more faithful to the original Chinese name for the school.
- The term "Traditionalist" has been suggested by David Schaberg to emphasize the connection to the past, its standards, and inherited forms, in which Confucius himself placed so much importance. This translation of the word ru is followed by e.g. Yuri Pines.
- According to Zhou Youguang, ru originally referred to shamanic methods of holding rites and existed before Confucius's times, but with Confucius it came to mean devotion to propagating such teachings to bring civilisation to the people.
- Confucianism was initiated by the disciples of Confucius, developed by Mencius (c. 372–289 BCE) and inherited by later generations, undergoing constant transformations and restructuring since its establishment, but preserving the principles of humaneness and righteousness at its core.
- In the Western world, the character for water is often used as a symbol for Confucianism, which is not the case in modern China. However, the five phases were used as important symbols representing leadership in Han dynasty thought, including Confucianist works.





# Five Classics

- Traditionally, Confucius was thought to be the author or editor of the Five Classics which were the basic texts of Confucianism, all edited into their received versions around 500 years later by Imperial Librarian Liu Xin.
- The scholar Yao Xinzong allows that there are good reasons to believe that Confucian classics took shape in the hands of Confucius, but that "nothing can be taken for granted in the matter of the early versions of the classics". Yao suggests that most modern scholars hold the "pragmatic" view that Confucius and his followers did not intend to create a system of classics, but nonetheless "contributed to their formation".

# Five Classics



- The scholar [Tu Weiming](#) explains these classics as embodying "five visions" which underlie the development of Confucianism:
- [I Ching](#) (*Classic of Change* or *Book of Changes*), generally held to be the earliest of the classics, shows a metaphysical vision which combines divinatory art with numerological technique and ethical insight; philosophy of change sees cosmos as interaction between the two energies yin and yang; universe always shows organismic unity and dynamism.
- [Classic of Poetry](#) or *Book of Songs* is the earliest anthology of [Chinese poems](#) and songs, with the earliest strata antedating the Zhou conquest. It shows the poetic vision in the belief that poetry and music convey common human feelings and mutual responsiveness.
- [Book of Documents](#) or *Book of History* is a compilation of speeches of major figures and records of events in ancient times, embodying the political vision and addressing the kingly way in terms of the ethical foundation for humane government. The documents show the sagacity, filial piety, and work ethic of mythical sage-emperors Yao, Shun, and Yu, who established a political culture which was based on responsibility and trust. Their virtue formed a covenant of social harmony which did not depend on punishment or coercion.
- [Book of Rites](#) describes the social forms, administration, and ceremonial rites of the Zhou Dynasty. This social vision defined society not as an adversarial system based on contractual relations but as a network of kinship groups bound by cultural identity and ritual practice, socially responsible for one another and the transmission of proper antique forms. The [four functional occupations](#) are cooperative (farmer, scholar, artisan, merchant).
- [Spring and Autumn Annals](#) chronicles the period to which it gives its name, [Spring and Autumn period](#) (771–481 BCE), from the perspective of Confucius's home state of [Lu](#). These events emphasise the significance of collective memory for communal self-identification, for reanimating the old is the best way to attain the new.

# Confucian Theology



- Confucianism revolves around the pursuit of the unity of the individual self and tian ("heaven"). Put it another way, it focuses on the relationship between humanity and heaven.
- The principle or way of Heaven (tian li or tian tao) is the order of the world and the source of divine authority.
- Tian li or tian tao is monistic, meaning that it singular and indivisible. Individuals may realise their humanity and become one with Heaven through the contemplation of such order.
- This transformation of the self may be extended to the family and society to create a harmonious community.
- Joël Thoraval studied Confucianism as a diffused civil religion in contemporary China, finding that it expresses itself in the widespread worship of five cosmological entities: Heaven and Earth (地; dì), the sovereign or the government (君; jūn), ancestors (親; qīn) and masters (師; shī).

# Confucian Theology



- According to the scholar Stephan Feuchtwang, in Chinese cosmology, which is not merely Confucian but shared by many Chinese religions, "the universe creates itself out of a primary chaos of material energy" (hundun and qi), organising through the polarity of yin and yang which characterises any thing and life.
- Creation is therefore a continuous ordering; it is not a creation ex nihilo. "Yin and yang are the invisible and visible, the receptive and the active, the unshaped and the shaped; they characterise the yearly cycle (winter and summer), the landscape (shady and bright), the sexes (female and male), and even sociopolitical history (disorder and order). Confucianism is concerned with finding "middle ways" between yin and yang at every new configuration of the world.

# Confucian Theology



- Confucianism conciliates both the inner and outer polarities of spiritual cultivation, that is to say self-cultivation and world redemption, synthesised in the ideal of "sageliness within and kingliness without".
- Ren, translated as "humaneness" or the essence proper of a human being, is the character of compassionate mind; it is the virtue endowed by Heaven and at the same time the means by which man may achieve oneness with Heaven comprehending his own origin in Heaven and therefore divine essence.
- In the Datong Shu [zh], it is defined as "to form one body with all things" and "when the self and others are not separated ... compassion is aroused".



# Confucian Theology

- Tian, a key concept in Chinese thought, refers to the God of Heaven, the northern culmen of the skies and its spinning stars, earthly nature and its laws which come from Heaven, to 'Heaven and Earth' (that is, "all things"), and to the awe-inspiring forces beyond human control.
- Confucius used the term in a mystical way. He wrote in the Analects (7.23) that tian gave him life, and that tian watched and judged (6.28; 9.12). In 9.5 Confucius says that a person may know the movements of tian, and this provides with the sense of having a special place in the universe. In 17.19 Confucius says that tian spoke to him, though not in words. The scholar Ronnie Littlejohn warns that tian was not to be interpreted as a personal God comparable to that of the Abrahamic faiths, in the sense of an otherworldly or transcendent creator.
- Rather it is similar to what Taoists meant by Dao: "the way things are" or "the regularities of the world", which Stephan Feuchtwang equates with the ancient Greek concept of physis, "nature" as the generation and regenerations of things and of the moral order.
- Tian may also be compared to the Brahman of Hindu and Vedic traditions.
- The scholar Promise Hsu, in the wake of Robert B. Louden, explained 17:19 ("What does Tian ever say? Yet there are four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does Tian say?") as implying that even though Tian is not a "speaking person", it constantly "does" through the rhythms of nature, and communicates "how human beings ought to live and act", at least to those who have learnt to carefully listen to it.



# Confucian Theology

- Duanmu Ci, a disciple of Confucius, said that Tian had set the master on the path to become a wise man (9.6). In 7.23 Confucius says that he has no doubt left that Tian gave him life, and from it he had developed right virtue (de). In 8.19, he says that the lives of the sages are interwoven with Tian.
- Regarding personal gods (shen, energies who emanate from and reproduce Tian) enlivening nature, in the Analects Confucius says that it is appropriate (yi) for people to worship (敬; jìng) them, although only through proper rites (li), implying respect of positions and discretion.
- Confucius himself was a ritual and sacrificial master



# Confucian Theology

- Answering to a disciple who asked whether it is better to sacrifice to the god of the stove or to the god of the family (a popular saying), in 3.13 Confucius says that in order to appropriately pray gods one should first know and respect Heaven.
- In 3.12, he explains that religious rituals produce meaningful experiences, and one has to offer sacrifices in person, acting in presence, otherwise "it is the same as not having sacrificed at all". Rites and sacrifices to the gods have an ethical importance: they generate good life, because taking part in them leads to the overcoming of the self.
- Analects 10.11 tells that Confucius always took a small part of his food and placed it on the sacrificial bowls as an offering to his ancestors





# Social Morality and Ethics

- As explained by Stephan Feuchtwang, the order coming from Heaven preserves the world, and has to be followed by humanity finding a "middle way" between yin and yang forces in each new configuration of reality. Social harmony or morality is identified as patriarchy, which is expressed in the worship of ancestors and deified progenitors in the male line, at ancestral shrines.
- Confucian ethical codes are described as humanistic. They may be practiced by all the members of a society. Confucian ethics is characterised by the promotion of virtues, encompassed by the Five Constants, elaborated by Confucian scholars out of the inherited tradition during the Han dynasty



# Five Constants

- Ren (benevolence, humaneness)
- Yi (righteousness, justice)
- Li (propriety, rites)
- Zhi (智; zhì: wisdom, knowledge)
- Xin (sincerity, faithfulness)



# Four Virtues

- The Five Constants are accompanied by the classical four virtues (四字; sìzì), one of which (Yi) is also included among the Five Constants:
- Yi (righteous justice)
- Loyalty (忠; zhōng)
- Filial piety (孝; xiào)
- Contenance (节; 節; jié)



# Other Confucian Values

- There are many other traditionally Confucian values, such as
- 'honesty' (诚; chéng),
- 'bravery' (勇; yǒng),
- 'incorruptibility' (廉; lián),
- 'kindness',
- 'forgiveness' (恕; shù),
- a 'sense of right and wrong' (耻; chǐ),
- 'gentleness' (温; wēn),
- 'kindheartenedness' (良; liáng),
- 'respect' (恭; gōng),
- 'frugality' (俭; jiǎn), and
- 让; ràng; 'modesty').

# Ren



- Ren is the Confucian virtue denoting the good feeling a virtuous human experiences when being altruistic. It is exemplified by a normal adult's protective feelings for children. It is considered the essence of the human being, endowed by Heaven, and at the same time the means by which someone may act according to the principle of Heaven and become one with it.
- Yan Hui, Confucius's most outstanding student, once asked his master to describe the rules of ren and Confucius replied, "one should see nothing improper, hear nothing improper, say nothing improper, do nothing improper." Confucius also defined ren in the following way: "wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others."
- Another meaning of ren is "not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself." Confucius also said, "ren is not far off; he who seeks it has already found it." Ren is close to man and never leaves him.



# Rite and Centering

- Li (礼; 禮) is a word which finds its most extensive use in Confucian and post-Confucian Chinese philosophy. Li is variously translated as 'rite' or 'reason', 'ratio' in the pure sense of Vedic ṛta ('right', 'order') when referring to the cosmic law, but when referring to its realisation in the context of human social behaviour it has also been translated as 'customs', 'measures' and 'rules', among other terms. Li also means religious rites which establish relations between humanity and the gods.
- According to Stephan Feuchtwang, rites are conceived as "what makes the invisible visible", making possible for humans to cultivate the underlying order of nature. Correctly performed rituals move society in alignment with earthly and heavenly (astral) forces, establishing the harmony of the three realms—Heaven, Earth and humanity. This practice is defined as "centering" (央; yāng or 中; zhōng). Among all things of creation, humans themselves are "central" because they have the ability to cultivate and centre natural forces.



# Rite and Centering

- Li embodies the entire web of interaction between humanity, human objects, and nature. Confucius includes in his discussions of li such diverse topics as learning, tea drinking, titles, mourning, and governance. Xunzi cites "songs and laughter, weeping and lamentation ... rice and millet, fish and meat ... the wearing of ceremonial caps, embroidered robes, and patterned silks, or of fasting clothes and mourning clothes ... spacious rooms and secluded halls, soft mats, couches and benches" as vital parts of the fabric of li.
- Confucius envisioned proper government being guided by the principles of li. Some Confucians proposed that all human beings may pursue perfection by learning and practising li. Overall, Confucians believe that governments should place more emphasis on li and rely much less on penal punishment when they govern.



# Loyalty

- Loyalty (忠; zhōng) is particularly relevant for the social class to which most of Confucius's students belonged, because the most important way for an ambitious young scholar to become a prominent official was to enter a ruler's civil service.
- Confucius himself did not propose that "might makes right", but rather that a superior should be obeyed because of his moral rectitude. In addition, loyalty does not mean subservience to authority. This is because reciprocity is demanded from the superior as well. As Confucius stated "a prince should employ his minister according to the rules of propriety; ministers should serve their prince with faithfulness (loyalty)."
- Similarly, Mencius also said that "when the prince regards his ministers as his hands and feet, his ministers regard their prince as their belly and heart; when he regards them as his dogs and horses, they regard him as another man; when he regards them as the ground or as grass, they regard him as a robber and an enemy." Moreover, Mencius indicated that if the ruler is incompetent, he should be replaced. If the ruler is evil, then the people have the right to overthrow him. A good Confucian is also expected to remonstrate with his superiors when necessary. At the same time, a proper Confucian ruler should also accept his ministers' advice, as this will help him govern the realm better.





# Loyalty

- In later ages, however, emphasis was often placed more on the obligations of the ruled to the ruler, and less on the ruler's obligations to the ruled. Like filial piety, loyalty was often subverted by the autocratic regimes in China. Nonetheless, throughout the ages, many Confucians continued to fight against unrighteous superiors and rulers.
- Many of these Confucians suffered and sometimes died because of their conviction and action. During the Ming-Qing era, prominent Confucians such as Wang Yangming promoted individuality and independent thinking as a counterweight to subservience to authority. The famous thinker Huang Zongxi also strongly criticised the autocratic nature of the imperial system and wanted to keep imperial power in check.
- Many Confucians also realised that loyalty and filial piety have the potential of coming into conflict with one another. This may be true especially in times of social chaos, such as during the period of the Ming-Qing transition.



# Filial Piety: Be Good to Your Parents

- In Confucian philosophy, "filial piety" (孝; xiào) is a virtue of respect for one's parents and ancestors, and of the hierarchies within society: father–son, elder–junior and male–female. The Confucian classic Xiaojing ("Book of Piety"), thought to be written during the Qin or Han dynasties, has historically been the authoritative source on the Confucian tenet of xiao. The book, a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Zeng Shen, is about how to set up a good society using the principle of xiao.
- In more general terms, filial piety means to be good to one's parents; to take care of one's parents; to engage in good conduct not just towards parents but also outside the home so as to bring a good name to one's parents and ancestors; to perform the duties of one's job well so as to obtain the material means to support parents as well as carry out sacrifices to the ancestors; not be rebellious; show love, respect and support; the wife in filial piety must obey her husband absolutely and take care of the whole family wholeheartedly. display courtesy; ensure male heirs, uphold fraternity among brothers; wisely advise one's parents, including dissuading them from moral unrighteousness, for blindly following the parents' wishes is not considered to be xiao; display sorrow for their sickness and death; and carry out sacrifices after their death.
- Filial piety is considered a key virtue in Chinese culture, and it is the main concern of a large number of stories. One of the most famous collections of such stories is "The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars". These stories depict how children exercised their filial piety in the past. While China has always had a diversity of religious beliefs, filial piety has been common to almost all of them; historian Hugh D.R. Baker calls respect for the family the only element common to almost all Chinese believers.



# Relationships

- Social harmony results in part from every individual knowing his or her place in the natural order, and playing his or her part well. Reciprocity or responsibility (renqing) extends beyond filial piety and involves the entire network of social relations, even the respect for rulers.
- This is shown in the story where Duke Jing of Qi asks Confucius about government, by which he meant proper administration so as to bring social harmony:
  - 齊景公問政於孔子。孔子對曰：君君，臣臣，父父，子子。
  - The duke Jing, of Qi, asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son."
- —Analects 12.11 (Legge translation).



# Relationships

- Particular duties arise from one's particular situation in relation to others. The individual stands simultaneously in several different relationships with different people: as a junior in relation to parents and elders, and as a senior in relation to younger siblings, students, and others. While juniors are considered in Confucianism to owe their seniors reverence, seniors also have duties of benevolence and concern toward juniors. The same is true with the husband and wife relationship where the husband needs to show benevolence towards his wife and the wife needs to respect the husband in return. This theme of mutuality still exists in East Asian cultures even to this day.
- The Five Bonds are: ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, friend to friend. Specific duties were prescribed to each of the participants in these sets of relationships. Such duties are also extended to the dead, where the living stand as sons to their deceased family. The only relationship where respect for elders is not stressed was the friend to friend relationship, where mutual equal respect is emphasised instead. All these duties take the practical form of prescribed rituals, for instance wedding and death rituals.



# Junzi

- The junzi ('lord's son') is a Chinese philosophical term often translated as "gentleman" or "superior person" and employed by Confucius in the Analects to describe the ideal man.
- In Confucianism, the sage or wise is the ideal personality; however, it is very hard to become one of them. Confucius created the model of junzi, gentleman, which may be achieved by any individual. Later, Zhu Xi defined junzi as second only to the sage. There are many characteristics of the junzi: he may live in poverty, he does more and speaks less, he is loyal, obedient and knowledgeable. The junzi disciplines himself. Ren is fundamental to become a junzi.
- As the potential leader of a nation, a son of the ruler is raised to have a superior ethical and moral position while gaining inner peace through his virtue. To Confucius, the junzi sustained the functions of government and social stratification through his ethical values. Despite its literal meaning, any righteous man willing to improve himself may become a junzi.



# Junzi

- In contrast to the junzi, the xiaoren (小人; xiǎorén, "small or petty person") does not grasp the value of virtues and seeks only immediate gains. The petty person is egotistic and does not consider the consequences of his action in the overall scheme of things. Should the ruler be surrounded by xiaoren as opposed to junzi, his governance and his people will suffer due to their small-mindedness. Examples of such xiaoren individuals may range from those who continually indulge in sensual and emotional pleasures all day to the politician who is interested merely in power and fame; neither sincerely aims for the long-term benefit of others.
- The junzi enforces his rule over his subjects by acting virtuously himself. It is thought that his pure virtue would lead others to follow his example. The ultimate goal is that the government behaves much like a family, the junzi being a beacon of filial piety.



# Rectification of Names

- Confucius believed that social disorder often stemmed from failure to perceive, understand, and deal with reality. Fundamentally, then, social disorder may stem from the failure to call things by their proper names, and his solution to this was the "rectification of names" (正名; zhèngmíng). He gave an explanation of this concept to one of his disciples:
- Zi-lu said, "The vassal of Wei has been waiting for you, in order with you to administer the government. What will you consider the first thing to be done?"
- The Master replied, "What is necessary to rectify names."
- "So! indeed!" said Zi-lu. "You are wide off the mark! Why must there be such rectification?"
- The Master said, "How uncultivated you are, Yu! The superior man [Junzi] cannot care about the everything, just as he cannot go to check all himself!"



# Rectification of Names

- If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things.
- If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success.
- When affairs cannot be carried on to success, proprieties and music do not flourish.
- When proprieties and music do not flourish, punishments will not be properly awarded.
- When punishments are not properly awarded, the people do not know how to move hand or foot.
- Therefore a superior man considers it necessary that the names he uses may be spoken appropriately, and also that what he speaks may be carried out appropriately. What the superior man requires is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect."
- (Analects XIII, 3, tr. Legge)
- Xunzi chapter (22) "On the Rectification of Names" claims the ancient sage-kings chose names (名; míng) that directly corresponded with actualities (實; shí), but later generations confused terminology, coined new nomenclature, and thus could no longer distinguish right from wrong. Since social harmony is of utmost importance, without the proper rectification of names, society would essentially crumble and "undertakings [would] not [be] completed.





# Metaphysical Antecedents

- According to He Guanghu, Confucianism may be identified as a continuation of the Shang-Zhou (c. 1600–256 BCE) official religion, or the Chinese aboriginal religion which has lasted uninterrupted for three thousand years.
- Both the dynasties worshipped a supreme "godhead", called Shangdi ('Highest Deity') or Di by the Shang and Tian ('Heaven') by the Zhou. Shangdi was conceived as the first ancestor of the Shang royal house, an alternate name for him being the "Supreme Progenitor" (上甲; Shàngjiǎ).
- Shang theology viewed the multiplicity of gods of nature and ancestors as parts of Di. Di manifests as the Wufang Shangdi with the winds (風; fēng) as its cosmic will.
- With the Zhou dynasty, which overthrew the Shang, the name for the supreme godhead became tian. While the Shang identified Shangdi as their ancestor-god to assert their claim to power by divine right, the Zhou transformed this claim into a legitimacy based on moral power, the Mandate of Heaven. In Zhou theology, Tian had no singular earthly progeny, but bestowed divine favour on virtuous rulers. Zhou kings declared that their victory over the Shang was because they were virtuous and loved their people, while the Shang were tyrants and thus were deprived of power by Tian



# Meritocracy

- Although Confucius claimed that he never invented anything but was only transmitting ancient knowledge (Analects 7.1), he did produce a number of new ideas. Many European and American admirers such as Voltaire and Herrlee G. Creel point to the revolutionary idea of replacing nobility of blood with nobility of virtue. Junzi ('lord's son'), which originally signified the younger, non-inheriting, offspring of a noble, became, in Confucius's work, an epithet having much the same meaning and evolution as the English "gentleman".
- A virtuous commoner who cultivates his qualities may be a "gentleman", while a shameless son of the king is only a "petty person". That Confucius admitted students of different classes as disciples is a clear demonstration that he fought against the feudal structures that defined pre-imperial Chinese society.
- Another new idea, that of meritocracy, led to the introduction of the imperial examination system in China. This system allowed anyone who passed an examination to become a government officer, a position which would bring wealth and honour to the whole family. The Chinese imperial examination system started in the Sui dynasty. Over the following centuries the system grew until finally almost anyone who wished to become an official had to prove his worth by passing a set of written government examinations.
- Confucian political meritocracy is not merely a historical phenomenon. The practice of meritocracy still exists across China and East Asia today, and a wide range of contemporary intellectuals—from Daniel Bell to Tongdong Bai, Joseph Chan, and Jiang Qing—defend political meritocracy as a viable alternative to liberal democracy.



# Confucianism Today in China

- Since the 2000s, there has been a growing identification of the Chinese intellectual class with Confucianism. In 2003, the Confucian intellectual Kang Xiaoguang published a manifesto in which he made four suggestions: Confucian education should enter official education at any level, from elementary to high school; the state should establish Confucianism as the state religion by law; Confucian religion should enter the daily life of ordinary people through standardisation and development of doctrines, rituals, organisations, churches and activity sites; the Confucian religion should be spread through non-governmental organisations. Another modern proponent of the institutionalisation of Confucianism in a state church is Jiang Qing.
- In 2005, the Center for the Study of Confucian Religion was established, and guoxue started to be implemented in public schools on all levels. Being well received by the population, even Confucian preachers have appeared on television since 2006. The most enthusiastic New Confucians proclaim the uniqueness and superiority of Confucian Chinese culture, and have generated some popular sentiment against Western cultural influences in China.
- The idea of a "Confucian church" as the state religion of China has roots in the thought of Kang Youwei, an exponent of the early New Confucian search for a regeneration of the social relevance of Confucianism, at a time when it was de-institutionalised with the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the Chinese empire. Kang modeled his ideal "Confucian Church" after European national Christian churches, as a hierarchic and centralised institution, closely bound to the state, with local church branches, devoted to the worship and the spread of the teachings of Confucius.