

History 101



Confucius

Confucius (literally Master Kong; September 28, 551 – 479 BC) was a Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history.

The philosophy of Confucius emphasized personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice and sincerity. His followers competed successfully with many other schools during the Hundred Schools of Thought era only to be suppressed in favor of the Legalists during the Qin Dynasty. Following the victory of Han over Chu after the collapse of Qin, Confucius's thoughts received official sanction and were further developed into a system known as Confucianism.

Confucius is traditionally credited with having authored or edited many of the Chinese classic texts including all of the *Five Classics*, but modern scholars are cautious of attributing specific assertions to Confucius himself. Aphorisms concerning his teachings were compiled in the *Analects*, but only many years after his death. Confucius's principles had a basis in common Chinese tradition and belief. He championed strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respect of elders by their children and of husbands by their wives. He also recommended family as a basis for ideal government. He espoused the well-known principle "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself", the Golden Rule.

Confucius was born into the class of shi, between the aristocracy and the common people. He is said to have worked in various government jobs during his early 20s, and also worked as a bookkeeper and a caretaker of sheep and horses, which he used the proceeds from to give his mother a proper burial.

When his mother died, Confucius (aged 23) is said to have mourned for three years as was the tradition.

Over his career, Confucius had built up a considerable reputation through his teachings, but he also had a number of government positions, including: in 501 BC being appointed to the minor position of governor of a town, and eventually to the position of Minister of Crime.

Confucius returned home to his native Lu when he was 68, after he was invited to do so by Ji Kangzi, the chief minister. During his return, Confucius sometimes acted as an advisor to several government officials in Lu on matters including governance and crime. The *Analects* depict him spending his last years teaching 72 or 77 disciples and transmitting the old wisdom via a set of texts called the *Five Classics*.

Although Confucianism is often followed in a religious manner by the Chinese, many argue that its values are secular and therefore it isn't a religion, but more akin to a secular morality. Proponents argue that despite the secular nature of Confucianism's teachings, it is based on a worldview that is religious. Confucianism discusses elements of the afterlife and views concerning Heaven, but it is relatively unconcerned with some spiritual matters often considered essential to religious thought, such as the nature of souls. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius>]

