

Confucius and the Social Order

(from your textbook, pages 104-5 [adapted])

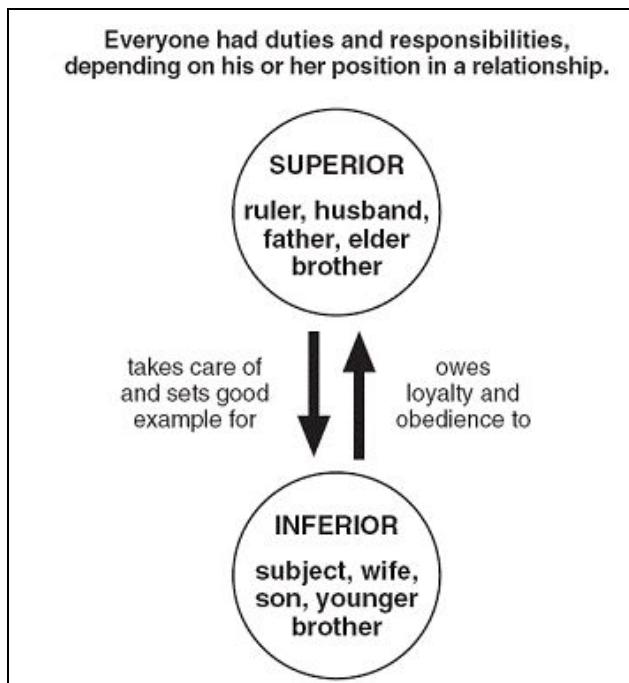
Toward the end of the Zhou (“Joe”) Dynasty (1027 - 256 BCE), China moved away from its ancient values of **social order**, **harmony**, and respect for authority. Chinese scholars and philosophers developed different solutions to restore those values.

Confucius Urges Harmony

China’s most influential scholar was **Confucius** (kuhn•FYOO•shuhs). Born in 551 BCE, Confucius lived in a time when the Zhou Dynasty was in decline. He led a scholarly life, studying and teaching history, music, and moral character.



Confucius was born at a time of crisis and violence in China. He had a deep



desire to restore the order and moral living of earlier times to his society.

Confucius believed that social order, harmony, and good government could be restored in China if society were organized around five basic relationships known as **The Five Bonds**. The Five Bonds were the relationships between: 1) ruler and subject, 2) father and son, 3) husband and wife, 4) older brother and younger brother, and 5) friend and friend. A code of proper conduct regulated each of these relationships. For example, rulers should practice kindness and virtuous living. In return, subjects should be loyal and law-abiding.

Three of Confucius’s Five Bonds were based upon the family. Confucius stressed that children should practice **filial piety**, or respect for their parents and ancestors. Filial piety, according to Confucius, meant devoting oneself to one’s parents during their lifetime. It also required honoring their memory after death through the performance of certain rituals.



In the following passage, Confucius—the “Master”—expresses his thoughts on the concept:

“Ziyou [a disciple of Confucius] asked about filial piety. The Master said: ‘Nowadays people think they are dutiful sons when they feed their parents. Yet they also feed their dogs and horses. Unless there is respect, where is the difference?’” (CONFUCIUS, from *The Analects* 2.7)

Confucius wanted to reform Chinese society by showing rulers how to govern wisely. Impressed by Confucius's wisdom, the duke of Lu appointed him minister of justice. According to legend, Confucius so overwhelmed people by his kindness and courtesy that almost overnight, crime vanished from Lu. When the duke's ways changed, however, Confucius became disillusioned and resigned.

Confucius spent the remainder of his life teaching. His students later collected his words in a book called ***The Analects***. A disciple named Mencius (MEHN•shee•uhs) also spread Confucius's ideas.

Confucian Ideas About Government

Confucius said that education could transform a humbly born person into a gentleman. In saying this, he laid the groundwork for the creation of a **bureaucracy**, a trained civil service - in other words, the people who run the government's day-to-day operations. According to Confucius, a gentleman had four virtues: "In his private conduct he was courteous; in serving his master he was precise; in providing for the needs of the people he gave them even more than their due; in exacting service from the people, he was just." Education became critically important to career advancement in the bureaucracy.



The collected ideas of Confucius are now known as **Confucianism**. Confucianism was never a religion, but it was an ethical system, a system based on accepted principles of right and wrong. Confucianism emphasized the idea that people could become good if they followed moral instruction and performed rituals that honored the gods and elder family members. In a time of social problems and war, Confucius taught that only careful maintenance of the old traditions could create harmony. Confucianism became the foundation for Chinese government and did increase social order. Soon, the ideas of Confucius spread beyond China and influenced civilizations throughout East Asia.

*To study and not think is a waste.
To think and not study is dangerous.*

-Confucius (The Analects, Ch. II)

