Confucianism

Confucianism, the way of life propagated by Confucius in the 6th–5th century bce and followed by the Chinese people for more than two millennia. Although transformed over time, it is still the substance of learning, the source of values, and the social code of the Chinese. Its influence has also extended to other countries, particularly Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

Confucianism, a Western term that has no counterpart in Chinese, is a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life. Sometimes viewed as a philosophy and sometimes as a religion, Confucianism may be understood as an all-encompassing way of thinking and living that entails ancestor reverence and a profound human-centred religiousness. East Asians may profess themselves to be Shintōists, Daoists, Buddhists, Muslims, or Christians, but, by announcing their religious affiliations, seldom do they cease to be Confucians.

Although often grouped with the major historical religions, Confucianism differs from them by not being an organized religion. Nonetheless, it spread to other East Asian countries under the influence of Chinese literature culture and has exerted a profound influence on spiritual and political life. Both the theory and practice of Confucianism have indelibly marked the patterns of government, society, education, and family of East Asia. Although it is an exaggeration to characterize traditional Chinese life and culture as Confucian, Confucian ethical values have for well over 2,000 years served as the source of inspiration as well as the court of appeal for human interaction between individuals, communities, and nations in the Sinitic world.

THE THOUGHT OF CONFUCIUS

The story of Confucianism does not begin with Confucius. Nor was Confucius the founder of Confucianism in the sense that the Buddha was the founder of Buddhism and Jesus Christ the founder of Christianity. Rather, Confucius considered himself a transmitter who consciously tried to reanimate the old in order to attain the new. He proposed revitalizing the meaning of the past by advocating a ritualized life. Confucius's love of antiquity was motivated by his strong desire to understand why certain life forms and institutions, such as reverence for ancestors, human-centred religious practices, and mourning ceremonies, had survived for centuries. His journey into the past was a search for roots, which he perceived as grounded in humanity's deepest needs for belonging and communicating. He had faith in the cumulative power of culture. The fact that traditional ways had lost vitality did not, for him, diminish their potential for regeneration in the future. In fact, Confucius's sense of history was so strong that he saw himself as a conservationist responsible for the continuity of the cultural values and the social norms that had worked so well for the idealized civilization of the Western Zhou dynasty.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The scholarly tradition envisioned by Confucius can be traced to the sage-kings of antiquity. Although the earliest dynasty confirmed by archaeology is the Shang dynasty (18th–12th century bce), the historical period that Confucius claimed as relevant was much earlier. Confucius may have initiated a cultural process known in the West as Confucianism, but he and those who followed him considered themselves part of a tradition, later identified by Chinese historians as the *rujia*, "scholarly tradition," that had its origins two millennia previously, when the legendary sages Yao and Shun created a civilized world through moral persuasion.

Confucius's hero was Zhougong, or the duke of Zhou (fl. 11th century bce), who was said to have helped consolidate, expand, and refine the "feudal" ritual system. This elaborate system of mutual dependence was based on blood ties, marriage alliances, and old covenants as well as on newly negotiated contracts. The appeal to cultural values and social norms for the maintenance of interstate as well as domestic order was predicated on a shared political vision, namely, that authority lies in universal kingship, heavily invested with ethical and religious power by the "mandate of heaven" (*tianming*), and that social solidarity is achieved not by legal constraint but by ritual observance. Its implementation enabled the Western Zhou dynasty to survive in relative peace and prosperity for more than five centuries.

Inspired by the statesmanship of Zhougong, Confucius harboured a lifelong dream to be in a position to emulate the duke by putting into practice the political ideas that he had learned from the ancient sages and worthies. Although Confucius never realized his political dream, his conception of politics as moral persuasion became more and more influential.

The concept of "heaven" (*tian*), unique in Zhou cosmology, was compatible with that of the Lord on High (Shangdi) in the Shang dynasty. Lord on High may have referred to the ancestral progenitor of the Shang royal lineage, but heaven to the Zhou kings, although also ancestral, was a more-generalized anthropomorphic god. The Zhou belief in the mandate of heaven (the functional equivalent of the will of the Lord on High) differed from the divine right of kings in that there was no guarantee that the descendants of the Zhou royal house would be entrusted with kingship, for, as written in the *Shujing* ("Classic of History"), "heaven sees as the people see [and] hears as the people hear"; thus, the virtues of the kings were essential for the maintenance of their power and authority. This emphasis on benevolent rulership, expressed in numerous bronze inscriptions, was both a reaction to the collapse of the Shang dynasty and an affirmation of a deep-rooted worldview.

Partly because of the vitality of the feudal ritual system and partly because of the strength of the royal household itself, the Zhou kings were able to control their kingdom for several centuries. In 771 bce, however, they were forced to move their capital eastward to present-day Luoyang to avoid barbarian attacks from Central Asia. Real power thereafter passed into the hands of feudal lords. Since the surviving line of the Zhou kings continued to be recognized in name, they still managed to exercise some measure of symbolic control. By Confucius's time, however, the feudal ritual system had been so fundamentally undermined that the political crises also precipitated a profound sense of moral decline: the centre of symbolic control could no longer hold the kingdom, which had devolved from centuries of civil war into 14 feudal states.

Confucius's response was to address himself to the issue of learning to be human. In so doing he attempted to redefine and revitalize the institutions that for centuries had been vital to political stability and social order: the family, the school, the local community, the state, and the kingdom. Confucius did not accept the status quo, which held that wealth and power spoke the loudest. He felt that virtue (*de*), both as a personal quality and as a requirement for leadership, was essential for individual dignity, communal solidarity, and political order.

THE ANALECTS AS THE EMBODIMENT OF CONFUCIAN IDEAS

The *Lunyu* (*Analects*), the most-revered sacred scripture in the Confucian tradition, was probably compiled by the succeeding generations of Confucius's disciples. Based primarily on the Master's sayings, preserved in both oral and written transmissions, it captures the Confucian spirit in form and content in the same way that the Platonic dialogues embody Socratic pedagogy.

The *Analects* has often been viewed by the critical modern reader as a collection of unrelated reflections randomly put together. That impression may have resulted from the unfortunate perception of Confucius as a mere commonsense moralizer who gave practical advice to students in everyday situations. If readers approach the *Analects* as a communal memory, a literary device on the part of those who considered themselves beneficiaries of the Confucian Way to continue the Master's memory and to transmit his form of life as a living tradition, they come close to why it has been so revered in China for centuries. Interchanges with various historical figures and his disciples are used to show Confucius in thought and action, not as an isolated individual but as the centre of relationships. Actually the sayings of the *Analects* reveal Confucius's personality—his ambitions, his fears, his joys, his commitments, and above all his self-knowledge.

The purpose, then, in compiling the distilled statements centring on Confucius seems not to have been to present an argument or to record an event but to offer an invitation to readers to take part in an ongoing conversation. Through the *Analects* Confucians for centuries learned to reenact the awe-inspiring ritual of participating in a conversation with Confucius.

One of Confucius's most-significant personal descriptions is the short autobiographical account of his spiritual development found in the *Analects*:

At 15 I set my heart on learning; at 30 I firmly took my stand; at 40 I had no delusions; at 50 I knew the mandate of heaven; at 60 my ear was attuned; at 70 I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the boundaries. (2:4)

Confucius's life as a student and teacher exemplified his idea that education was a ceaseless process of self-realization. When one of his students reportedly had difficulty describing him, Confucius came to his aid:

Why did you not simply say something to this effect: he is the sort of man who forgets to eat when he engages himself in vigorous pursuit of learning, who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries, and who does not notice that old age is coming on? (7:18)

Confucius was deeply concerned that the culture (*wen*) he cherished was not being transmitted and that the learning (*xue*) he propounded was not being taught. His strong sense of mission, however, never interfered with his ability to remember what had been imparted to him, to learn without flagging, and to teach without growing weary. What he demanded of himself was strenuous:

It is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go deeply into what I have learned, inability to move up to what I have heard to be right, and inability to reform myself when I have defects. (7:3)

What he demanded of his students was the willingness to learn: "I do not enlighten anyone who is not eager to learn, nor encourage anyone who is not anxious to put his ideas into words" (7:8).

The community that Confucius created was a scholarly fellowship of like-minded men of different ages and different backgrounds from different states. They were attracted to Confucius because they shared his vision and to varying degrees took part in his mission to bring moral order to an increasingly fragmented world. That mission was difficult and even dangerous. Confucius himself suffered from joblessness, homelessness, starvation, and occasionally life-threatening violence. Yet his faith in the survivability of the culture that he cherished and the workability of the approach to teaching that he propounded was so steadfast that he convinced his followers as well as himself that heaven was on their side. When Confucius's life was threatened in Kuang, he said:

Since the death of King Wen [founder of the Zhou dynasty] does not the mission of culture (wen) rest here in me? If heaven intends this culture to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me? (9:5)

That expression of self-confidence informed by a powerful sense of mission may give the impression that there was presumptuousness in Confucius's self-image. Confucius, however, made it explicit that he was far from attaining sagehood and that all he really excelled in was "love of learning" (5:27). To him, learning not only broadened his knowledge and deepened his self-awareness but also defined who he was. He frankly admitted that he was not born endowed with knowledge, nor did he belong to the class of men who could transform society without knowledge. Rather, he reported that he used his ears widely and followed what was good in what he had heard and used his eyes widely and retained in his mind what he had seen. His learning constituted "a lower level of knowledge" (7:27), a practical level that was presumably accessible to the majority of human beings. In that sense Confucius was neither a prophet with privileged access to the divine nor a philosopher who had already seen the truth but a teacher of humanity who was also an advanced fellow traveler on the way to self-realization.

As a teacher of humanity, Confucius stated his ambition in terms of concern for human beings: "To bring comfort to the old, to have trust in friends, and to cherish the young" (5:25). Confucius's vision of the way to develop a moral community began with a holistic reflection on the human condition. Instead of dwelling on abstract speculations such as humanity's condition in the state of nature, Confucius sought to understand the actual situation of a given time and to use that as his point of departure. His aim was to restore trust in government and to transform society into a flourishing moral community by cultivating a

sense of humanity in politics and society. To achieve that aim, the creation of a scholarly community, the fellowship of *junzi* (exemplary persons), was essential. In the words of Confucius's disciple Zengzi, exemplary persons

must be broad-minded and resolute, for their burden is heavy and their road is long. They take humanity as their burden. Is that not heavy? Only with death does their road come to an end. Is that not long? (8:7)

The fellowship of *junzi* as moral vanguards of society, however, did not seek to establish a radically different order. Its mission was to redefine and revitalize those institutions that for centuries were believed to have maintained social solidarity and enabled people to live in harmony and prosperity. An obvious example of such an institution was the family.

It is related in the *Analects* that Confucius, when asked why he did not take part in government, responded by citing a passage from the ancient *Shujing* ("Classic of History"), "Simply by being a good son and friendly to his brothers a man can exert an influence upon government!" to show that what a person does in the confines of his home is politically significant (2:21). That maxim is based on the Confucian conviction that cultivation of the self is the root of social order and that social order is the basis for political stability and enduring peace.

The assertion that family ethics is politically efficacious must be seen in the context of the Confucian conception of politics as "rectification" (*zheng*). Rulers should begin by rectifying their own conduct; that is, they are to be examples who govern by moral leadership and exemplary teaching rather than by force. Government's responsibility is not only to provide food and security but also to educate the people. Law and punishment are the minimum requirements for order; the higher goal of social harmony, however, can be attained only by virtue expressed through ritual performance. To perform rituals, then, is to take part in a communal act to promote mutual understanding.

One of the fundamental Confucian values that ensures the integrity of ritual performance is *xiao* (filial piety). Indeed, Confucius saw filial piety as the first step toward moral excellence, which he believed lay in the attainment of the cardinal virtue, *ren* (humanity). To learn to embody the family in the mind and the heart is to become able to move beyond self-centredness or, to borrow from modern psychology, to transform the enclosed private ego into an open self. Filial piety, however, does not demand unconditional submissiveness to parental authority but recognition of and reverence for the source of life. The purpose of filial piety, as the ancient Greeks expressed it, is to enable both parent and child to flourish. Confucians see it as an essential way of learning to be human.

Confucians, moreover, are fond of applying the family metaphor to the community, the country, and the cosmos. They prefer to address the emperor as the son of heaven (*tianzi*), the king as ruler-father, and the magistrate as the "father-mother official," because to them the family-centred nomenclature implies a political vision. When Confucius said that taking care of family affairs is itself active participation in politics, he had already made it clear that family ethics is not merely a private concern; the public good is realized by and through it.

Confucius defined the process of becoming human as being able to "discipline yourself and return to ritual" (12:1). The dual focus on the transformation of the self (Confucius is said to have freed himself from four things: "opinionatedness, dogmatism, obstinacy, and egoism" [9:4]) and on social participation enabled Confucius to be loyal (*zhong*) to himself and considerate (*shu*) of others (4:15). It is easy to understand why the Confucian "golden rule" is "Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you!" (15:23). Confucius's legacy, laden with profound ethical implications, is captured by his "plain and real" appreciation that learning to be human is a communal enterprise:

Persons of humanity, in wishing to establish themselves, also establish others, and in wishing to enlarge themselves, also enlarge others. The ability to take as analogy what is near at hand can be called the method of humanity. (6:30)

FORMATION OF THE CLASSICAL CONFUCIAN TRADITION

According to Han Feizi (died 233 bce), shortly after Confucius's death his followers split into eight distinct schools, all claiming to be the legitimate heir to the Confucian legacy. Presumably each school was associated with or inspired by one or more of Confucius's disciples. Yet the Confucians did not exert much influence in the 5th century bce. Although the reverent Yan Yuan (or Yan Hui), the faithful Zengzi, the talented Zigong, the erudite Zixia, and others may have generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the

second generation of Confucius's students, it was not at all clear at the time that the Confucian tradition was to emerge as the most-powerful one in Chinese history.

Mencius (*c.* 371–*c.* 289 bce) complained that the world of thought in the early Warring States period (475–221 bce) was dominated by the collectivism of Mozi and the individualism of Yang Zhu (440–*c.*360 bce). The historical situation a century after Confucius's death clearly shows that the Confucian attempt to moralize politics was not working; the disintegration of the Zhou feudal ritual system and the rise of powerful hegemonic states reveal that wealth and power spoke the loudest. The hermits (the early Daoists), who left the world to create a sanctuary in nature in order to lead a contemplative life, and the realists (proto-Legalists), who played the dangerous game of assisting ambitious kings to gain wealth and power so that they could influence the political process, were actually determining the intellectual agenda. The Confucians refused to be identified with the interests of the ruling minority, because their social consciousness impelled them to serve as the conscience of the people. They were in a dilemma. Although they wanted to be actively involved in politics, they could not accept the status quo as the legitimate arena in which to exercise authority and power. In short, they were in the world but not of it; they could not leave the world, nor could they effectively change it.

MENCIUS: THE PARADIGMATIC CONFUCIAN INTELLECTUAL

Mencius is known as the self-styled transmitter of the Confucian Way. Educated first by his mother and then allegedly by a student of Confucius's grandson, Mencius brilliantly performed his role as a social critic, a moral philosopher, and a political activist. He argued that cultivating a class of scholar-officials who would not be directly involved in agriculture, industry, and commerce was vital to the well-being of the state. In his sophisticated argument against the physiocrats (those who advocated the supremacy of agriculture), he intelligently employed the idea of the division of labour to defend those who labour with their minds, observing that service is as important as productivity. To him Confucians served the vital interests of the state as scholars not by becoming bureaucratic functionaries but by assuming the responsibility of teaching the ruling minority humane government (*renzheng*) and the kingly way (*wangdao*). In dealing with feudal lords, Mencius conducted himself not merely as a political adviser but also as a teacher of kings. Mencius made it explicit that a true person cannot be corrupted by wealth, subdued by power, or affected by poverty.

To articulate the relationship between Confucian moral idealism and the concrete social and political realities of his time, Mencius began by exposing as impractical the prevailing ideologies of Mozi's collectivism and Yang Zhu's individualism. Mozi, a former Confucian who had become disaffected with rituals that he viewed as too time-consuming to be practical, promoted a mode of collectivism that rested on the principle of loving everyone (*jianai*) without respect to social status or personal relationship. Mencius contended, however, that the result of the Mohist admonition to treat a stranger as intimately as one's own father would be to treat one's own father as indifferently as one would treat a stranger. Yang Zhu, on the other hand, advocated the primacy of the self and the nourishment (*yang*) of one's nature (*xing*) rather than investing one's time and energy in social concerns and institutions that (Yang suggested) violated that nature. Yang Zhu gained infamy among Confucians for declaring that he would not sacrifice one eyelash to save the world. His point was arguably that people all too often waste their own lives in the service of social arrangements that actually undermine their best interests. Mencius, however, who as a good Confucian viewed the family as the natural paradigm of social organization, contended that excessive attention to self-interest would lead to political disorder. Indeed, Mencius argued, in Mohist collectivism fatherhood becomes a meaningless concept, and so does kingship in Yang Zhu's individualism.

Mencius's strategy for social reform was to change the language of profit, self-interest, wealth, and power by making it part of a moral discourse, with emphasis on rightness, public-spiritedness, welfare, and influence. Mencius, however, was not arguing against profit. Rather, he instructed the feudal lords to look beyond the narrow horizon of their palaces and to cultivate a common bond with their ministers, officers, clerks, and the seemingly undifferentiated masses. Only then, Mencius contended, would they be able to

preserve their profit, self-interest, wealth, and power. He encouraged them to extend their benevolence (his interpretation of *ren*) and warned them that this was crucial for the protection of their families.

Mencius's appeal to the common bond among all people as a mechanism of government was predicated on his strong populist sense that the people are more important than the state and the state is more important than the king and that the ruler who does not act in accordance with the kingly way is unfit to rule. Mencius insisted that an unfit ruler should be criticized, rehabilitated, or, as the last resort, deposed. Since "heaven sees as the people see; heaven hears as the people hear," revolution, or literally the change of the mandate (*geming*), in severe cases is not only justifiable but is a moral imperative.

Mencius's populist conception of politics was predicated on his philosophical vision that human beings can perfect themselves through effort and that human nature (*xing*) is good. While he acknowledged the role of biological and environmental factors in shaping the human condition, he insisted that human beings become moral by willing to be so. According to Mencius, willing entails the transformative moral act insofar as the propensity of humans to be good is activated whenever they decide to bring it to their conscious attention.

Mencius taught that all people have the spiritual resources to deepen their self-awareness and strengthen their bonds with others. Biologic and environmental constraints notwithstanding, people always have the freedom and the ability to refine and enlarge their heaven-endowed nobility (their "great body"). The possibility of continuously refining and enlarging the self is vividly illustrated in Mencius's description of degrees of excellence:

Those who are admirable are called good (shan). Those who are sincere are called true (xin). Those who are totally genuine are called beautiful (mei). Those who radiate this genuineness are called great (da). Those whose greatness transforms are called sagely (sheng). Those whose sageliness is unfathomable are called spiritual (shen). (VIIB:25)

Furthermore, Mencius asserted that if people fully realize the potential of their hearts, they will understand their nature; by understanding their nature, they will know heaven. Learning to be fully human, in this Mencian perspective, entails the cultivation of human sensitivity to embody the whole cosmos as one's lived experience:

All myriad things are here in me. There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself. Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to humanity. (VIIA:4)

XUNZI: THE TRANSMITTER OF CONFUCIAN SCHOLARSHIP

If Mencius brought Confucian moral idealism to fruition, Xunzi (*c.* 300–*c.* 230 bce) conscientiously transformed Confucianism into a realistic and systematic inquiry on the human condition, with special reference to ritual (*li*) and authority. Widely acknowledged as the most eminent of the notable scholars who congregated in Jixia, the capital of the wealthy and powerful Qi state in the mid-3rd century bce, Xunzi distinguished himself in erudition and by the quality of his argumentation. His critique of the so-called 12 philosophers gave an overview of the intellectual life of his time. His penetrating insight into the limitations of virtually all the major currents of thought propounded by his fellow thinkers helped to establish the Confucian school as a dominant political and social force. His principal adversary, however, was Mencius, and he vigorously attacked Mencius's view that human nature is good as naive moral optimism.

True to the Confucian and, for that matter, Mencian spirit, Xunzi underscored the centrality of self-cultivation. He defined the process of Confucian education, from exemplary person (*junzi*) to sage, as a ceaseless endeavour to accumulate knowledge, skills, insight, and wisdom. In contrast to Mencius, Xunzi stressed that human nature is evil. Because he saw human beings as prone by nature to pursue the gratification of their passions, he firmly believed in the need for clearly articulated social constraints. Without constraints, social solidarity—the precondition for human well-being—would be undermined. The most-serious flaw he perceived in the Mencian commitment to the goodness of human nature was the practical consequence of neglecting the necessity of ritual and authority for the well-being of society. For Xunzi, as for Confucius before him, becoming moral is hard work.

Xunzi singled out the cognitive function of the heart-and-mind (*xin*), or human rationality, as the basis for morality. People become moral by voluntarily harnessing their desires and passions to act in accordance with society's norms. Although that is alien to human nature, it is perceived by the heart-and-mind as necessary for both survival and well-being. It is the construction of the moral mind as a human artifact, as a

“second nature.” Like Mencius, Xunzi believed in the perfectibility of all human beings through self-cultivation, in humanity and rightness as cardinal virtues, in humane government as the kingly way, in social harmony, and in education. But his view of how those could actually be achieved was diametrically opposed to that of Mencius. The Confucian project, as shaped by Xunzi, defines learning as socialization. The authority of ancient sages and worthies, the classical tradition, conventional norms, teachers, governmental rules and regulations, and political officers are all important for that process. A cultured person is by definition a fully socialized member of the human community who has successfully sublimated his instinctual demands for the public good.

Xunzi’s tough-minded stance on law, order, authority, and ritual seems precariously close to that of the Legalists, whose policy of social conformism was designed exclusively for the benefit of the ruler. His insistence on objective standards of behaviour may have ideologically contributed to the rise of authoritarianism, which resulted in the dictatorship of the Qin (221–207 bce). As a matter of fact, two of the most-influential Legalists, the theoretician Hanfeizi from the state of Han and the Qin minister Li Si (*c.* 280–208 bce), were his pupils. Yet Xunzi was instrumental in the continuation of Confucianism as a scholarly enterprise. His naturalistic interpretation of *tian*, his sophisticated understanding of culture, his insightful observations on the epistemological aspect of the mind and social function of language, his emphasis on moral reasoning and the art of argumentation, his belief in progress, and his interest in political institutions so significantly enriched the Confucian heritage that he was revered by the Confucians as the paradigmatic scholar for more than three centuries.

THE CONFUCIANIZATION OF POLITICS

The short-lived dictatorship of the Qin marked a brief triumph of Legalism. In the early years of the Western Han (206 bce–25 ce), however, the Legalist practice of absolute power of the emperor, complete subjugation of the peripheral states to the central government, total uniformity of thought, and ruthless enforcement of law were replaced by the Daoist practice of reconciliation and noninterference. That practice is commonly known in history as the Huang-Lao method, referring to the art of rulership attributed to the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) and the mysterious founder of Daoism, Laozi. Although a few Confucian thinkers, such as Lu Jia and Jia Yi, made important policy recommendations, Confucianism before the emergence of Dong Zhongshu (*c.* 179–*c.* 104 bce) was not particularly influential. Nonetheless, the gradual Confucianization of Han politics began soon after the founding of the dynasty.

By the reign of Wudi (the “Martial Emperor”; 141–87 bce), who inherited the task of consolidating power in the central Han court, Confucianism was deeply entrenched in the central bureaucracy. It was manifest in such practices as the clear separation of the court and the government, often under the leadership of a scholarly prime minister, the process of recruiting officials through the dual mechanism of recommendation and selection, the family-centred social structure, the agriculture-based economy, and the educational network. Confucian ideas were also firmly established in the legal system as ritual became increasingly important in governing behaviour, defining social relationships, and adjudicating civil disputes. Yet it was not until the prime minister Gongsun Hong (died 121 bce) had persuaded Wudi to announce formally that the *ru* school alone would receive state sponsorship that Confucianism became an officially recognized imperial ideology and state cult.

As a result, Confucian Classics became the core curriculum for all levels of education. In 136 bce Wudi set up at court five Erudites of the Five Classics and in 124 bce assigned 50 official students to study with them, thus creating a de facto imperial university. By 50 bceenrollment at the university had grown to an impressive 3,000, and by 1 ce a hundred students a year were entering government service through the examinations administered by the state. In short, those with a Confucian education began to staff the bureaucracy. In the year 58 all government schools were required to make sacrifices to Confucius, and in 175 the court had the approved version of the Classics, which had been determined by scholarly conferences and research groups under imperial auspices for several decades, carved on large stone tablets. (Those stelae, which were erected at the capital, are today well preserved in the museum of Xi’an.) That act of committing to permanence and to public display the content of the sacred scriptures symbolized the completion of the formation of the classical Confucian tradition.

THE FIVE CLASSICS

The compilation of the *Wujing* (Five Classics) was a concrete manifestation of the coming of age of the Confucian tradition. The inclusion of both pre-Confucian texts, the *Shujing* ("Classic of History") and the *Shijing* ("Classic of Poetry"), and contemporary Qin-Han material, such as certain portions of the *Liji* ("Record of Rites"), suggests that the spirit behind the establishment of the core curriculum for Confucian education was ecumenical. The Five Classics can be described in terms of five visions: metaphysical, political, poetic, social, and historical.

The metaphysical vision, expressed in the *Yijing* ("Classic of Changes"), combines divinatory art with numerological technique and ethical insight. According to the philosophy of change, the cosmos is a great transformation occasioned by the constant interaction of yin and yang, the two complementary as well as conflicting life forces (qi). The world, which emerges out of that ongoing transformation, exhibits both organismic unity and dynamism. The exemplary person, inspired by the harmony and creativity of the cosmos, must emulate that pattern by aiming to realize the highest ideal of "unity of man and heaven" (*tianrenheyi*) through ceaseless self-exertion.

The political vision, contained in the *Shujing*, presents kingship in terms of the ethical foundation for a humane government. The legendary Three Emperors (Yao, Shun, and Yu) all ruled by virtue. Their sagacity, *xiao* (filial piety), and dedication to work enabled them to create a political culture based on responsibility and trust. Their exemplary lives taught and encouraged the people to enter into a covenant with them so that social harmony could be achieved without punishment or coercion. Even in the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) moral authority, as expressed through ritual, was sufficient to maintain political order. The human continuum, from the undifferentiated masses to the enlightened people, the nobility, and the sage-king, formed an organic unity as an integral part of the great cosmic transformation. Politics means moral persuasion, and the purpose of the government is not only to provide food and maintain order but also to educate.

The poetic vision, contained in the *Shijing*, underscores the Confucian valuation of common human feelings. The majority of verses give voice to emotions and sentiments of communities and persons from all levels of society expressed on a variety of occasions. The basic theme of that poetic world is mutual responsiveness. The tone as a whole is honest rather than earnest and evocative rather than expressive.

The social vision, contained in the *Liji*, shows society not as an adversarial system based on contractual relationships but as a community of trust with emphasis on communication. Society organized by the four functional occupations—the scholar, the farmer, the artisan, and the merchant—is, in the true sense of the word, a cooperation. As a contributing member of the cooperation, each person is obligated to recognize the existence of others and to serve the public good. It is the king's duty to act kingly and the father's duty to act fatherly. If kings or fathers fail to behave properly, they cannot expect their ministers or children to act in accordance with ritual. It is in that sense that a chapter in the *Liji* entitled the "Great Learning" (*Daxue*) specifies, "From the son of heaven to the commoner, all must regard self-cultivation as the root." That pervasive consciousness of duty features prominently in all Confucian literature on ritual.

The historical vision, presented in the *Chunqiu* ("Spring and Autumn [Annals]"), emphasizes the significance of collective memory for communal self-identification. Historical consciousness is a defining characteristic of Confucian thought. By defining himself as a lover of antiquity and a transmitter of its values, Confucius made it explicit that a sense of history is not only desirable but necessary for self-knowledge. Confucius's emphasis on the importance of history was in a way his reappropriation of the ancient Sinitic wisdom that reanimating the old is the best way to attain the new. Confucius may not have been the author of the *Chunqiu*, but it seems likely that he applied moral judgment to political events in China proper from the 8th to the 5th century bce. In that unprecedented procedure he assumed a godlike role in evaluating politics by assigning ultimate historical praise and blame to the most powerful and influential political actors of the period. Not only did that practice inspire the innovative style of the grand historian Sima Qian (*c.* 145–*c.* 87 bce), but it was also widely employed by others writing dynastic histories in imperial China.

DONG ZHONGSHU: THE CONFUCIAN VISIONARY

Like Sima Qian, Dong Zhongshu (*c.* 179–*c.* 104 bce) took the *Chunqiu* absolutely seriously. His own work, *Chunqiu fanlu* ("Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals"), however, is far from being a book of historical judgment. It is a metaphysical treatise in the spirit of the *Yijing*. A man extraordinarily dedicated to learning (he is said to have been so absorbed in his studies that for three years he did not even glance at the garden in front of him) and strongly committed to moral idealism (one of his often-quoted dicta is

“rectifying rightness without scheming for profit; enlightening his Way without calculating efficaciousness”), Dong was instrumental in developing a characteristically Han interpretation of Confucianism.

Despite Wudi’s pronouncement that Confucianism alone would receive imperial sponsorship, Daoists, yinyang cosmologists, Legalists, shamanists, practitioners of seances, healers, magicians, geomancers, and others all contributed to the cosmological thinking of the Han cultural elite. Indeed, Dong himself was a beneficiary of that intellectual syncretism, for he freely tapped the spiritual resources of his time in formulating his own worldview: that human actions have cosmic consequences.

Dong’s inquiries on the meaning of the *wuxing*, or five phases (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), the correspondence of human beings and the numerical categories of heaven, and the sympathetic activation of things of the same kind, as well as his studies of cardinal Confucian values such as humanity, rightness, ritual, wisdom, and trustworthiness, enabled him to develop an elaborate worldview integrating Confucian ethics with naturalistic cosmology. What Dong accomplished was not merely a theological justification for the emperor as the “son of heaven” (*tianzi*); rather, his theory of mutual responsiveness between heaven and humanity provided the Confucian scholars with a higher law by which to judge the conduct of the ruler.

Despite Dong’s immense popularity, his worldview was not universally accepted by Han Confucian scholars. A reaction in favour of a more rational and moralistic approach to the Confucian Classics, known as the Old Text school, had already set in before the fall of the Western Han. Yang Xiong (*c.* 53 bce–18 ce) in the *Fayan* (“Model Sayings”), a collection of moralistic aphorisms in the style of the *Analects*, and the *Taixuan jing* (“Classic of the Supremely Profound Principle”), a cosmological speculation in the style of the *Yijing*, presented an alternative worldview. That school, claiming its own recensions of authentic classical texts allegedly rediscovered during the Han period and written in an “old” script before the Qin unification, was widely accepted in the Eastern Han (25–220 ce). As the institutions of the Erudites and the Imperial University expanded in the Eastern Han, the study of the Classics became more refined and elaborate. Confucian scholasticism, however, like its counterparts in Talmudic and biblical studies, became too professionalized to remain a vital intellectual force.

Yet Confucian ethics exerted great influence on government, schools, and society at large. Toward the end of the Han as many as 30,000 students attended the Imperial University. All public schools throughout the land offered regular sacrifices to Confucius, and he virtually became the patron saint of education. Many Confucian temples were also built. The imperial courts continued to honour Confucius from age to age; a Confucian temple eventually stood in every one of the 2,000 counties. As a result, the teacher—together with heaven, earth, the emperor, and parents—became one of the most-respected authorities in traditional China.

CONFUCIAN ETHICS IN THE DAOIST AND BUDDHIST CONTEXT

Incompetent rulership, faction-ridden bureaucracy, a mismanaged tax structure, and domination by eunuchs toward the end of the Eastern Han first prompted widespread protests by the Imperial University students. The high-handed policy of the court to imprison and kill thousands of them and their official sympathizers in 169 ce may have put a temporary stop to the intellectual revolt, but the downward economic spiral made the life of the peasantry unbearable. The peasant rebellion led by Confucian scholars as well as Daoist religious leaders of faith-healing groups, combined with open insurrections of the military, brought down the Han dynasty and thus put an end to the first Chinese empire. As the imperial Han system disintegrated, barbarians invaded from the north. The plains of northern China were fought over, despoiled, and controlled by rival groups, and a succession of states were established in the south. That period of disunity, from the early 3rd to the late 6th century, marked the decline of Confucianism, the upsurge of *xuanxue* (“Obscure Learning”; sometimes called neo-Daoism), and the spread of Buddhism.

The prominence of Daoism and Buddhism among the cultural elite and the populace in general, however, did not mean that the Confucian tradition had disappeared. In fact, Confucian ethics was by then virtually inseparable from the moral fabric of Chinese society. Confucius continued to be universally honoured as the paradigmatic sage. The outstanding Daoist thinker Wang Bi (226–249) argued that Confucius, by not speculating on the nature of the *dao*, had an experiential understanding of it superior to Laozi’s. The Confucian Classics remained the foundation of all literate culture, and sophisticated commentaries were produced throughout the age. Confucian values continued to dominate in such political institutions as the central bureaucracy, the recruitment of officials, and local governance. The political forms

of life also were distinctively Confucian. When a barbarian state adopted a sinicization policy, notably the case of the Northern Wei (386–534/535), it was by and large Confucian in character. In the south systematic attempts were made to strengthen family ties by establishing clan rules, genealogical trees, and ancestral rituals based on Confucian ethics.

The reunification of China by the Sui (581–618) and the restoration of lasting peace and prosperity by the Tang (618–907) gave a powerful stimulus to the revival of Confucian learning. The publication of a definitive official edition of the *Wujing* with elaborate commentaries and subcommentaries and the implementation of Confucian rituals at all levels of governmental practice, including the compilation of the famous Tang legal code, were two outstanding examples of Confucianism in practice. An examination system based on literary competence was established. That system made the mastery of Confucian Classics a prerequisite for political success and was therefore perhaps the single-most-important institutional innovation in defining elite culture in Confucian terms.

The Tang dynasty, nevertheless, was dominated by Buddhism and, to a lesser degree, by Daoism. The philosophical originality of the dynasty was mainly represented by monk-scholars such as Jizang (549–623), Xuanzang (602–664), and Zhiyi (538–597). An unintended consequence in the development of Confucian thought in that context was the prominent rise of the metaphysically significant Confucian texts, notably *Zhongyong* (“Doctrine of the Mean”) and *Yizhuan* (“The Great Commentary of the Classic of Changes”), which appealed to some Buddhist and Daoist thinkers. A sign of a possible Confucian turn in the Tang was Li Ao’s (died *c.* 844) essay “Returning to Nature” that foreshadowed features of Song (960–1279) Confucian thought. The most-influential precursor of a Confucian revival, however, was Han Yu (768–824). He attacked Buddhism from the perspectives of social ethics and cultural identity and provoked interest in the question of what actually constitutes the Confucian Way. The issue of *Daotong*, the transmission of the Way or the authentic method to repossess the Way, has stimulated much discussion in the Confucian tradition since the 11th century.

THE CONFUCIAN REVIVAL

The Buddhist conquest of China and the Chinese transformation of Buddhism—a process entailing the introduction, domestication, growth, and appropriation of a distinctly Indian form of spirituality—lasted for at least six centuries. Since Buddhist ideas were introduced to China via Daoist categories and since the development of the Daoist religion benefited from having Buddhist institutions and practices as models, the spiritual dynamics in medieval China were characterized by Buddhist and Daoist values. The reemergence of Confucianism as the leading intellectual force thus involved both a creative response to the Buddhist and Daoist challenge and an imaginative reappropriation of classical Confucian insights. Furthermore, after the collapse of the Tang dynasty, the grave threats to the survival of Chinese culture from the Khitan, the Jurchen (Jin), and later the Mongols prompted the literati to protect their common heritage by deepening their communal critical self-awareness. To enrich their personal knowledge as well as to preserve China as a civilization-state, they explored the symbolic and spiritual resources that made Confucianism a living tradition.

THE SONG MASTERS

The Song dynasty (960–1279) was militarily weak and much smaller than the Tang, but its cultural splendour and economic prosperity were unprecedented in Chinese, if not human, history. The Song’s commercial revolution produced flourishing markets, densely populated urban centres, elaborate communication networks, theatrical performances, literary groups, and popular religions—developments that tended to remain unchanged into the 19th century. Technological advances in agriculture, textiles, lacquer, porcelain, printing, maritime trade, and weaponry demonstrated that China excelled in the fine arts as well as in the sciences. The decline of the aristocracy, the widespread availability of printed books, the democratization of education, and the full implementation of the examination system produced a new social class, the gentry, noted for its literary proficiency, social consciousness, and political participation. The outstanding members of that class—such as the classicists Hu Yuan (993–1059) and Sun Fu (992–1057), the reformers Fan Zhongyan (989–1052) and Wang Anshi (1021–86), the writer-officials Ouyang Xiu (1007–72) and Su Shi (pen name of Su Dongpo; 1037–1101), and the statesman-historian Sima Guang (1019–86)—contributed to the revival of Confucianism in education, politics, literature, and history and collectively to the development of a scholarly official style, a way of life informed by Confucian ethics.

The Confucian revival, understood in traditional historiography as the establishment of the lineage of Daoxue (“Learning of the Way”), nevertheless can be traced through a line of neo-Confucian thinkers from Zhou Dunyi (1017–73) by way of Shao Yong (1011–77), Zhang Zai (1020–77), the brothers Cheng Hao (1032–85) and Cheng Yi (1033–1107), and the great synthesizer Zhu Xi (1130–1200). These men developed a comprehensive humanist vision in which cultivation of the self was integrated with social ethics and moral metaphysics. In the eyes of the Song literati, this new philosophy faithfully restored the classical Confucian insights and successfully applied them to the concerns of their own age.

Zhou Dunyi ingeniously articulated the relationship between the “great transformation” of the cosmos and the moral development of human beings. In his metaphysics, humanity, as the recipient of the highest excellence from heaven, is itself a centre of cosmic creativity. He developed this all-embracing humanism by a thought-provoking interpretation of the Daoist diagram of *taiji* (“Great Ultimate”). Shao Yong elaborated on the metaphysical basis of human affairs, insisting that a disinterested numerological mode of analysis is most appropriate for understanding the “supreme principles governing the world.” Zhang Zai, on the other hand, focused on the omnipresence of qi, which is often taken to be the fundamental enlivening force of the universe but to Zhang was also the constituent material force of everything in the universe. Zhang also advocated the oneness of *li* (“principle”; comparable to the idea of natural law) and the multiplicity of its manifestations, which is created as the principle expresses itself through qi. As an article of faith he pronounced in the “Western Inscription”:

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small being as I finds a central abode in their midst. Therefore that which fills the cosmos I regard as my body and that which directs the cosmos I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.

This theme of mutuality between heaven and human beings, consanguinity between one human being and another, and harmony between humanity and nature was brought to fruition in Cheng Hao’s definition of humanity as “forming one body with all things.” To him the presence of *tianli* (“heavenly principle”) in all things as well as in human nature enables the human mind to purify itself in a spirit of reverence. Cheng Yi, following his brother’s lead, formulated the famous dictum, “Self-cultivation requires reverence; the extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things.” By making special reference to *gewu* (“investigation of things”), he raised doubts about the appropriateness of focusing exclusively on the illumination of the mind in self-cultivation, as his brother seems to have done. The learning of the mind as advocated by Cheng Hao and the learning of the principle as advocated by Cheng Yi became two distinct modes of thought in Song Confucianism.

Zhu Xi, clearly following Cheng Yi’s School of Principle and implicitly rejecting Cheng Hao’s School of Mind, developed a method of interpreting and transmitting the Confucian Way that for centuries defined Confucianism not only for the Chinese but for the Koreans and Japanese as well. If, as quite a few scholars have advocated, Confucianism represents a distinct form of East Asian spirituality, it is the Confucianism shaped by Zhu Xi. Zhu Xi virtually reconstituted the Confucian tradition, giving it new structure, new texture, and new meaning. He was more than a synthesizer; through conscientious appropriation and systematic interpretation, he gave rise to a new Confucianism, known as neo-Confucianism in the West but often referred to as *lixue* (“Learning of the Principle”) in modern China.

The *Zhongyong* and the *Daxue*, two chapters in the *Liji*, had become independent treatises and, together with the *Analects* and *Mencius*, had been included in the core curriculum of Confucian education for centuries before Zhu Xi’s birth. But by putting them into a particular sequence—the *Daxue*, the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and the *Zhongyong*—synthesizing their commentaries, interpreting them as a coherent humanistic vision, and calling them the Four Books (*Sishu*), Zhu Xi fundamentally restructured the Confucian scriptural tradition. The Four Books, placed above the Five Classics, became the central texts for both primary education and civil service examinations in traditional China from the 14th century. Thus, they have exerted far greater influence on Chinese life and thought in the past 600 years than any other work.

As an interpreter and transmitter of the Confucian Way, Zhu Xi identified which early Song masters belonged to the lineage of Confucius and Mencius. His judgment, later widely accepted by governments in East Asia, was based principally on philosophical insight. Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and the Cheng brothers, the select four, were Zhu Xi's cultural heroes. Shao Yong and Sima Guang were originally on his list, but Zhu Xi apparently changed his mind, perhaps because of Shao's excessive metaphysical speculation and Sima's obsession with historical facts.

Up until Zhu Xi's time the Confucian thinking of the Song masters was characterized by a few fruitfully ambiguous concepts, notably the Great Ultimate (*taiji*), principle, vital energy, nature, mind, and humanity. Zhu Xi defined the process of the investigation of things as a rigorous discipline of the mind to probe the principle in things. He recommended a twofold method of study: to cultivate a sense of reverence and to pursue knowledge. This combination of morality and wisdom made his pedagogy an inclusive approach to humanist education. Reading, sitting quietly, ritual practice, physical exercise, calligraphy, arithmetic, and empirical observation all had a place in his pedagogical program. Zhu Xi reestablished the White Deer Grotto in present Jiangxi province as an academy. It became the intellectual centre of his age and provided an instructional model for all schools in East Asia for generations to come.

Zhu Xi was considered the preeminent Confucian scholar in Song China, but his interpretation of the Confucian Way was seriously challenged by his contemporary Lu Jiuyuan (Lu Xiangshan, 1139–93). Claiming that he appropriated the true wisdom of Confucian teaching by reading Mencius, Lu criticized Zhu Xi's theory of the investigation of things as fragmented and ineffective empiricism. Instead, he advocated a return to Mencian moral idealism by insisting that establishing the "great body" (i.e., heaven-endowed nobility) is the primary precondition for self-realization. To him the learning of the mind as a quest for self-knowledge provided the basis upon which the investigation of things assumed its proper significance. Lu's confrontation with Zhu Xi in the famous meeting at the Goose Lake Temple in 1175 further convinced him that Confucianism as Zhu Xi had shaped it was not Mencian. Although Lu's challenge remained a minority position for some time, his learning of the mind later became a major intellectual force in Ming China (1368–1644) and Tokugawa Japan (1603–1867).

CONFUCIAN LEARNING IN JIN, YUAN, AND MING

For about 150 years, from the time the Song court moved its capital to the South and reestablished itself there in 1127, North China was ruled by three conquest dynasties—the Liao (907–1125), Xi Xia (1038–1227), and Jin (1115–1234). Although the bureaucracies and political cultures of both Liao and Xi Xia were under Confucian influence, no discernible intellectual developments helped to further the Confucian tradition there. In the Jurchen Jin dynasty, however, despite the paucity of information about the Confucian renaissance in the Southern Song, the Jin scholar-officials continued the classical, artistic, literary, and historiographic traditions of the North and developed a richly textured cultural form of their own. Zhao Bingwen's (1159–1232) combination of literary talent and moral concerns and Wang Roxu's (1174–1243) scholarship in Classics and history, as depicted in Yuan Haowen's (1190–1257) biographical sketches and preserved in their collected works, compared well with the high standards set by their counterparts in the South.

When the Mongols reunited China in 1279, the intellectual dynamism of the South profoundly affected the Northern style of scholarship. Although the harsh treatment of scholars by the conquest Yuan (Mongol) dynasty (1206–1368) seriously damaged the well-being of the scholarly community, outstanding Confucian thinkers nevertheless emerged throughout the period. Some opted to purify themselves so that they could repossess the Way for the future; some decided to become engaged in politics to put their teaching into practice.

Xu Heng (1209–81) took a practical approach. Appointed by Kublai, the Great Khan in Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, as the president of the Imperial Academy and respected as the leading scholar in the court, Xu conscientiously introduced Zhu Xi's teaching to the Mongols. He assumed personal responsibility for educating the sons of the Mongol nobility to become qualified teachers of Confucian Classics. His erudition and skills in medicine, legal affairs, irrigation, military science, arithmetic, and astronomy enabled him to be an informed adviser to the conquest dynasty. He set the tone for the eventual success of the Confucianization of Yuan bureaucracy. In fact, it was the Yuan court that first officially adopted the Four Books as the basis of the civil service examination, a practice that was to be observed

until 1905. Thanks to Xu Heng, Zhu Xi's teaching prevailed in the Mongol period, but it was significantly simplified.

The hermit-scholar Liu Yin (1249–93), on the other hand, allegedly refused Kublai Khan's summons in order to maintain the dignity of the Confucian Way. To him education was for self-realization. Loyal to the Jin culture in which he was reared and faithful to the Confucian Way that he had learned from the Song masters, Liu Yin rigorously applied philological methods to classical studies and strongly advocated the importance of history. Although true to Zhu Xi's spirit, by taking seriously the idea of the investigation of things, he put a great deal of emphasis on the learning of the mind. Liu Yin's contemporary Wu Zheng (1249–1333) further developed the learning of the mind. He fully acknowledged the contribution of Lu Jiuyuan to the Confucian tradition, even though as an admirer of Xu Heng he considered himself a follower of Zhu Xi. Wu assigned himself the challenging task of harmonizing the difference between Zhu and Lu. As a result, he reoriented Zhu's balanced approach to morality and wisdom to accommodate Lu's existential concern for self-knowledge. That prepared the way for the revival of Lu's learning of the mind in the Ming (1368–1644).

The thought of the first outstanding Ming Confucian scholar, Xue Xuan (1389–1464), already revealed the turn toward moral subjectivity. Although Xue was a devoted follower of Zhu Xi, Xue's *Records of Reading* clearly shows that he considered the cultivation of "mind and nature" to be particularly important. Two other early Ming scholars, Wu Yubi (1391–1469) and Chen Xianzhang (1428–1500), helped to define Confucian education for those who studied the Classics not simply in preparation for examinations but as learning of the "body and mind." They cleared the way for Wang Yangming (1472–1529), the most-influential Confucian thinker after Zhu Xi.

As a critique of excessive attention to philological details characteristic of Zhu Xi's followers, Wang Yangming allied himself with Lu Jiuyuan's learning of the mind. He advocated the precept of uniting thought and action. By focusing on the transformative power of the will, he inspired a generation of Confucian students to return to the moral idealism of Mencius. His own personal example of combining teaching with bureaucratic routine, administrative responsibility, and leadership in military campaigns demonstrated that he was a man of deeds.

Despite his competence in practical affairs, Wang's primary concern was moral education, which he felt had to be grounded in the "original substance" of the mind. This he later identified as *liangzhi* ("good conscience"), by which he meant innate knowledge or a primordial existential awareness possessed by every human being. He further suggested that good conscience as the heavenly principle is inherent in all beings from the highest spiritual forms to grass, wood, bricks, and stone. Because the universe consists of vital energy informed by good conscience, it is a dynamic process rather than a static structure. Human beings can learn to regard heaven and earth and the myriad things as one body by extending their good conscience to embrace an ever-expanding network of relationships.

Wang Yangming's dynamic idealism, as Wing-tsit Chan, the late dean of Chinese philosophy in North America, characterized it, set the Confucian agenda for several generations in China. His followers, such as the communitarian Wang Ji (1498–1583), who devoted his long life to building a community of the like-minded, and the radical individualist Li Zhi (1527–1602), who proposed to reduce all human relationships to friendship, broadened Confucianism to accommodate a variety of lifestyles.

Among Wang's critics, Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645) was perhaps the most brilliant. His *Human Schemata* (*Renpu*) offered a rigorous phenomenological description of human mistakes as a corrective to Wang Yangming's moral optimism. Liu's student Huang Zongxi (1610–95) compiled a comprehensive biographical history of Ming Confucians based on Liu's writings. One of Huang's contemporaries, Gu Yanwu (1613–82), was also a critic of Wang Yangming. He excelled in his studies of political institutions, ancient phonology, and classical philology. While Gu was well known in his own time and was honoured as the patron saint of "evidential learning" in the 18th century, his contemporary Wang Fuzhi (1619–92) was discovered 200 years later as one of the most-sophisticated original minds in the history of Confucian thought. His extensive writings on metaphysics, history, and the Classics made him a thorough critic of Wang Yangming and his followers.

THE AGE OF CONFUCIANISM: CHOSŎN KOREA, TOKUGAWA JAPAN, & QING CHINA

Among all the dynasties, Chinese and foreign, the long-lived Chosŏn (Joseon; also called Yi) in Korea (1392–1910) was undoubtedly the most thoroughly Confucianized. Since the 15th century, when the

aristocracy (*yangban*) defined itself as the carrier of Confucian values, the penetration of court politics and elite culture by Confucianism was unprecedented. Even today—as manifested in political behaviour, legal practice, ancestral veneration, genealogy, village schools, and student activism—the vitality of the Confucian tradition is widely felt in South Korea.

Yi T'oegye (1501–70), the single most-important Korean Confucian, helped shape the character of Chosŏn Confucianism through his creative interpretation of Zhu Xi's teaching. Critically aware of the philosophical turn engineered by Wang Yangming, T'oegye transmitted the Zhu Xi legacy as a response to the advocates of the learning of the mind. As a result, he made Chosŏn Confucianism at least as much a true heir to Song learning as Ming Confucianism was. Indeed, his *Discourse on the Ten Sagely Diagrams*, an aid for educating the king, offered a depiction of all the major concepts in Song learning. His exchange of letters with Ki Taesŭng (1527–72) in the famous Four-Seven debate, which discussed the relationship between Mencius's four basic human feelings—commiseration, shame, modesty, and right and wrong—and seven emotions, such as anger and joy, raised the level of Confucian dialogue to a new height of intellectual sophistication.

In addition, Yi Yulgok's (1536–84) challenge to T'oegye's re-presentation of Zhu Xi's Confucianism, from the perspective of Zhu's thought itself, significantly enriched the repertoire of the learning of the principle. The leadership of the central government, supported by the numerous academies set up by aristocratic families and by institutions such as the community compact system and the village schools, made the learning of the principle not only a political ideology but also a common creed in Korea.

In Japan, Zhu Xi's teaching, as interpreted by T'oegye, was introduced to Yamazaki Ansai (1618–82). A distinctive feature of Yamazaki's thought was his recasting of native Shintōism in Confucian terminology. The diversity and vitality of Japanese Confucianism was further evident in the appropriation of Wang Yangming's dynamic idealism by the samurai-scholars, notably Kumazawa Banzan (1619–91). It is, however, in Ogyū Sorai's (1666–1728) determination to rediscover the original basis of Confucian teaching by returning to its pre-Confucian sources that a true exemplification of the independent-mindedness of Japanese Confucians is found. Indeed, Sorai's brand of ancient learning with its particular emphasis on philological exactitude foreshadowed a similar scholarly movement in China by at least a generation. Although Tokugawa Japan was never as Confucianized as Chosŏn Korea, virtually every educated person in Japanese society was exposed to the Four Books by the end of the 17th century.

The Confucianization of Chinese society reached its apex during the Qing (1644–1911/12), when China was again ruled by a conquest dynasty, in this case Manchu. The Qing emperors outshone their counterparts in the Ming in presenting themselves as exemplars of Confucian kingship. They transformed Confucian teaching into a political ideology, indeed a mechanism of control. Jealously guarding their imperial prerogatives as the ultimate interpreters of Confucian truth, they undermined the freedom of scholars to transmit the Confucian Way by imposing harsh measures, such as literary inquisition. It was Gu Yanwu's classical scholarship rather than his insights on political reform that inspired the 18th-century evidential scholars. Dai Zhen, the most philosophically minded philologist among them, couched his brilliant critique of Song learning in his commentary "The Meanings of Terms in the *Book of Mencius*." Dai Zhen was one of the scholars appointed by the Qianlong emperor in 1773 to compile an imperial manuscript library. That massive scholarly attempt, *The Complete Library of the Four Treasures*, is symbolic of the grandiose intent of the Manchu court to give an account of all the important works of the four branches of learning—the Classics, history, philosophy, and literature—in Confucian culture. The project comprised more than 36,000 volumes with comments on about 10,230 titles, employed as many as 15,000 copyists, and took 20 years to complete. The Qianlong emperor and the scholars around him may have expressed their cultural heritage in a definitive form, but the Confucian tradition was yet to encounter its most-serious threat.

TRANSFORMATION SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY

At the time of the first Opium War (1839–42), East Asian societies had been Confucianized for centuries. The continuous growth of Mahayana Buddhism throughout Asia and the presence of Daoism in China, shamanism in Korea, and Shintōism in Japan did not undermine the power of Confucianism in government, education, family rituals, and social ethics. In fact, Buddhist monks were often messengers of Confucian values, and the coexistence of Confucianism with Daoism, shamanism, and Shintōism actually characterized the syncretic East Asian religious life. The impact of the West, however, so fundamentally

challenged the Confucian roots in East Asia that for some time it was widely debated whether Confucianism could remain a viable tradition in modern times.

Beginning in the 19th century, Chinese intellectuals' faith in the ability of Confucian culture to withstand the impact of the West became gradually eroded. That loss of faith may be perceived in Lin Zexu's (1785–1850) moral indignation against the British, followed by Zeng Guofan's (1811–72) pragmatic acceptance of the superiority of Western technology, Kang Youwei's (1858–1927) sweeping recommendation for political reform, and Zhang Zhidong's (1837–1909) desperate eclectic attempt to save the essence of Confucian learning, which, however, eventually led to the anti-Confucian iconoclasm of the so-called May Fourth Movement in 1919. The triumph of Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of the People's Republic of China in 1949 relegated Confucian rhetoric to the background. The modern Chinese intelligentsia, however, maintained unacknowledged, sometimes unconscious, continuities with the Confucian tradition at every level of life—behaviour, attitude, belief, and commitment. Indeed, Confucianism remains an integral part of the psychocultural construct of the contemporary Chinese intellectual as well as of the Chinese farmer.

The emergence of Japan and other newly industrialized Asian countries (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore) as the most-dynamic region of economic development since World War II has generated much scholarly interest. Labeled the "Sinitic World in Perspective," "The Second Case of Industrial Capitalism," the "Eastasia Edge," or "the Challenge of the Post-Confucian States," that phenomenon has raised questions about how the typical East Asian institutions, still suffused with Confucian values—such as a paternalistic government, an educational system based on competitive examinations, the family with emphasis on loyalty and cooperation, and local organizations informed by consensus—have adapted themselves to the imperatives of modernization.

Some of the most creative and influential intellectuals in contemporary China have continued to think from Confucian roots. Xiong Shili's ontological reflection, Liang Shuming's cultural analysis, Feng Youlan's reconstruction of the learning of the principle, He Lin's new interpretation of the learning of the mind, Tang Junyi's philosophy of culture, Xu Fuguan's social criticism, and Mou Zongsan's moral metaphysics are noteworthy examples. Although some of the most-articulate intellectuals in the People's Republic of China criticize their Confucian heritage as the embodiment of authoritarianism, bureaucratism, nepotism, conservatism, and male chauvinism, others in China, Taiwan, Singapore, and North America have imaginatively established the relevance of Confucian humanism to China's modernization. The revival of Confucian studies in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore has been under way for more than a generation, though Confucian scholarship in Japan remains unrivaled. Confucian thinkers in the West, inspired by religious pluralism and liberal democratic ideas, have explored the possibility of a third epoch of Confucian humanism. They uphold that its modern transformation, as a creative response to the challenge of the West, is a continuation of its classical formulation and its medieval elaboration. Scholars in mainland China have also explored the possibility of a fruitful interaction between Confucian humanism and democratic liberalism in a socialist context.

Tu Weiming - Scholars on both sides of the Pacific have explored with greater frequency since the late 20th century the possible contributions that Confucianism may make to increasingly specialized subfields of philosophy, particularly ethics. The cardinal virtue of humaneness, when conceived as a sentiment of benevolence or as a conscientious concern, has played a key role in scholarly discussions within environmental philosophy, bioethics, and the ethics of care (particularly in medical ethics). Also, Confucianism's stress upon the cultivation of humane characteristics and the development of virtuous dispositions has inspired some scholars to interpret the Confucian Way as a sophisticated mode of virtue ethics that developed independently of the Western tradition. Confucianism's emphases on human nature and on the primacy of interpersonal relationships in human life arguably make it amenable to feminism, according to some scholars. The strength exhibited by economic markets not only in mainland China but in East Asia more broadly has promoted scholarship on how Confucian values may inform business ethics. Finally, the Confucian tradition's emphasis upon the heart-and-mind (considered to be one organ in the classical Chinese worldview) and upon the emotional basis of human cognition and action have influenced Western scholars in cognitive science, neuropsychology, and evolutionary and developmental psychology.

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica "Confucianism". *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2017. Web. 17 Aug. 2017 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Confucianism>.