

Confucianism

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson covers Confucianism and uses it to illustrate how shared values and beliefs can function to bind a society. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [The History of Confucianism](#)
2. [Philosophy of Humanism](#)
3. [The Five Relationships](#)

1. The History of Confucianism

Confucianism is a philosophical system of moral and ethical principles that is based on the thoughts and writings of a man who was eager to understand the workings of the human individual in all of his or her various relationships with the world. Confucius lived in the sixth and the fifth centuries before the common era during what is known as the Spring and Autumn period.

Confucianism has influenced many countries and many thinkers throughout history. The influence of Confucianism on China, its homeland, as well as many surrounding countries, is very broad and very long-lasting. Some of the primary Confucian texts are the *Book of Filial Piety*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Great Harmony*, or Mean.



DID YOU KNOW

Europeans in the 17th century came into contact with Confucianism and found it to be quite compatible with religious thought and certain religions themselves. Although it is non-theistic, many of its moral and ethical guidelines were found to be in sync with certain religious beliefs relating to duty and conduct in the world. In Korea, it lives alongside Buddhism and Christianity and plays a key role in nearly every individual's life. Less than 50% of the population claim affiliation with either Buddhism or Christianity, yet nearly everyone identifies with Confucianism.

2. Philosophy of Humanism

Like many religions, Confucianism has principles and guidelines that lead the individual and society toward transformation and purification in line with the faith and trust in a higher order upon which human order might then be modeled. Because of its emphasis on human relationships and the perfection of humans concerning society, it is often called the philosophy of **humanism**.

It's not considered a religion but rather a philosophical system of ordering principles that can be applied on an individual, societal, governmental, or even a global scale. Confucianism formed a strong foundation for society, functioning as a state ideology.

Despite the communist rise to power in the 20th century in China, many would argue that it still informs the Chinese mind in terms of moral codes, ethical principles, and most of all their relationships within society.



TERM TO KNOW

Humanism

The belief that human beings occupy a unique position in the world and/or universe and that consequently the study of humanity is central to all human inquiry.

3. The Five Relationships

There are many themes within Confucianism, but they all return—in one way or another—to the web of what is called the Five Relationships. Ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, and friend to friend. These are the five key relationships that everything else seems to revolve around in Confucianism.

An ideological system such as this was very appealing during the time of Confucius. The feudal system of the contemporary Zhou dynasty was dissolving, and there was growing economic and social destabilization. The philosophy of Confucianism was followed to help reorient society in a good humanist fashion, one individual at a time.

Confucianism is compatible with some other religions, such as certain forms of Christianity and Buddhism. There is one point of contention for the Catholic Church, and this is the Confucian ritual practice of ancestor worship. This ritual is an expression of filial piety, one of the central relationships in the Confucian system.

Venerating one's ancestors in this way was generally thought to be a form of paganism by the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore unjustified superstition. In countries such as Korea, where Confucianism still has great significance for people, this is still an issue of public debate.



SUMMARY

The History of Confucianism is rich, and has played an important role in shaping the modern world. Confucius lived during the sixth and the fifth centuries before the Common Era, during a time of political and economic instability. He used his philosophical system of ordering principles, moral and ethical guidelines, to help bring structure back to society. It is referred to as the **philosophy of humanism**. The

foundational element of his system was **the Five Relationships**. There is great compatibility between the Confucian philosophical system, which we identified as a humanistic system, and many of the religions of the world. This is because of its ethical and moral outlook. However, it can't be identified as a religion because it doesn't have a god that is followed and worshipped.

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