

## Ancient Chinese Philosophy

### I. Confucius (551-479 B.C.)

Confucius was a great Chinese philosopher who urged people to follow traditional ways that worked well in the past to achieve social peace and harmony. To improve society and achieve good government, Confucius formulated a code of ethical conduct.

He taught that individuals should be guided by the following virtues: (1) careful observance of ancient traditions; (2) reverence for learning; (3) cherishing of honesty; (4) devotion to parents, family, and friends; and (5) obedience to authority and rule.



### II. Major Beliefs of Confucianism

#### 1. Natural Order

There is a natural order in the universe and in human relationships. Each person has a place in society which reflects his or her position in the universe. To ensure social order, the individual must find and accept his or her proper place in society.

#### 2. Role of Each Person

Each person has a role in society, as well as obligations. People and society will be in harmony if everyone fulfills these roles and obligations.

#### 3. Relationships

There is a superior and an inferior in each relationship. The superior must show love and responsibility, while the inferior must show loyalty and obedience.

#### 4. Mandate of Heaven

If the ruler benefits the people and provides them with food and protection, then the people will obey him and he will continue to hold the “Mandate of Heaven” (the right to rule).

#### 5. Education

Education is essential for government officials, so that they will govern for the benefit of the people. Confucius believed that education should be the road to advancement in society.

### III. Influence of Confucius on China

Confucianism became the official philosophy of China for thousands of years. Its emphasis on traditional values such as obedience and order helped preserve Chinese civilization. Confucianism also strengthened the importance of the family in Chinese life. It emphasized duties, doing good deeds, and following a civilized way of life.

## Questions to Answer

1. What virtues did Confucius teach?
2. Why is the “Mandate of Heaven” important?
3. Why is education essential for government officials?
4. How did Confucianism influence Chinese society?