If YOU were there...

You are a student of the famous teacher Confucius. Like many older Chinese, he thinks that society has changed—and not for the better. He believes in old values and a strict social order. He is trying to teach you and your fellow students how to behave properly. You must respect those who are your superiors in society. You must set a good example for others.

How will these teachings affect your life?

BUILDING BACKGROUND The people of the Shang dynasty made many advances, including beautiful metalwork, a writing system, and a calendar. The next dynasty, the Zhou, established other Chinese traditions. Some of these traditions included the importance of family and social order. Later thinkers looked back with admiration to the values of the Zhou period.

The Zhou Dynasty

In the 1100s BC the leaders of a people who came to be known as the Zhou (JÔH) ruled over a kingdom in China. They joined with other nearby tribes and attacked and overthrew the Shang dynasty. The Zhou dynasty lasted longer than any other dynasty in Chinese history.
The Zhou Political System

The Zhou kings claimed to possess the mandate of heaven. According to this idea, heaven gave power to the king or leader, and no one ruled without heaven’s permission. If a king was found to be bad, heaven would support another leader.

The Zhou came from an area to the west of the Shang kingdom. Early Zhou rulers used the mandate of heaven to justify their rebellion against the Shang. Later Zhou rulers expanded their territory to the northwest and the east. Zhou soldiers then moved south, eventually expanding their rule to the Chang Jiang.

The Zhou established a new political order. They granted land to others in return for loyalty, military support, and other services. The Zhou king was at the highest level. He granted plots of land to lords, or people of high rank. Lords paid taxes and provided soldiers to the king as needed. Peasants, or farmers with small farms, were at the bottom of the order. Each peasant family received a small plot of land and had to farm additional land for the noble. The system was described in the Book of Songs:

“Everywhere under vast Heaven
There is no land that is not the king’s
Within the borders of those lands
There are none who are not the king’s servants.”

–from the Zhou Book of Songs

The Zhou system brought order to China. Ruling through lords helped the Zhou control distant areas and helped ensure loyalty to the king. Over time, however, the political order broke down. Lords passed their power to their sons, who were less loyal to the king. Local rulers gained power. They began to reject the authority of the Zhou kings.
The Decline of Zhou Power

As the lords' loyalty to the Zhou king lessened, many refused to fight against invasions. In 771 BC invaders reached the capital. According to legend, the king had been lighting warning fires to entertain a friend. Each time the fires were lit, the king's armies would rush to the capital gates to protect him. When the real attack came, the men thought the fires were just another joke, and no one came. The Zhou lost the battle, but the dynasty survived.

After this defeat the lords began to fight each other. By 481 BC, China had entered an era called the Warring States period, a time of many civil wars. Armies grew. Fighting became brutal and cruel as soldiers fought for territory, not honor.

Internal Problems

The decline of the Zhou took place along with important changes in the Chinese family structure. For many centuries the family had been the foundation of life in China. Large families of several generations formed powerful groups. When these families broke apart, they lost their power. Close relatives became rivals.

Bonds of loyalty even weakened within small families, especially among the upper classes. Sons plotted against each other over inheritances. A wealthy father sometimes tried to maintain peace by dividing his land among his sons. But this created new problems. Each son could build up his wealth and then challenge his brothers. Some sons even killed their own fathers. During the Warring States period, China lacked a strong government to stop the power struggles within the ruling-class families. Chinese society fell into a period of disorder.

Reading Check

Identifying Cause and Effect

How did the Zhou's decline affect Chinese society?
Confucius and Society

During the late Zhou period, thinkers came up with ideas about how to restore order to China. One such person, Confucius, became the most influential teacher in Chinese history. Confucius is a Western form of the Chinese title of “Master Kong” or “Kongfuzi.”

Confucius felt that China was overrun with rude and dishonest people. Upset by the disorder and people's lack of decency, Confucius said that the Chinese needed to return to ethics, or moral values. The ideas of Confucius are known as Confucianism.

Confucius wanted China to return to ideas and practices from a time when people knew their proper roles in society. These are basic guidelines that Confucius thought would restore family order and social harmony:

- Fathers should display high moral values to inspire their families.
- Children should respect and obey their parents.
- All family members should be loyal to each other.

Confucius’s ideas about government were similar to his ideas about family:

- Moral leadership, not laws, brought order to China.
- A king should lead by example, inspiring good behavior in all of his subjects.
- The lower classes would learn by following the example of their superiors.

Confucius expressed this idea when he told kings:

“Lead the people by means of government policies and regulate them through punishments, and they will be evasive and have no sense of shame. Lead them by means of virtue . . . and they will have a sense of shame and moreover have standards.”

—Confucius, from The Analects

As Confucius traveled to many different regions, he earned the reputation of a respected teacher. His ideas were passed down through his students and later compiled into a book called The Analects.

Because Confucianism focuses on morality, family, society, and government, people often think of it as a philosophy or way of thinking. But it is much more. Confucianism is a unique teaching that is both philosophical and religious. It has been a guiding force in human behavior and religious understanding in China.

Confucius believed that when people behaved well and acted morally, they were simply carrying out what heaven expected of them. Over the centuries Confucius’s ideas about virtue, kindness, and learning became the dominant beliefs in China.

**BIOGRAPHY**

**Confucius**

551–479 BC

Confucius, whose Chinese title is Kongfuzi, grew up in extreme poverty. Confucius was a dedicated student into his teenage years. Little is known about how he received his formal education, but he mastered many subjects, including music, mathematics, poetry, and history. He served in minor government positions, then he became a teacher. He never knew his teachings would transform Chinese life and thought.

**Drawing Inferences** How do you think Confucius’s government jobs helped shape his teachings?

**VIDEO**

Confucius: Words of Wisdom

hmhsocialstudies.com

---

**READING CHECK**

Identifying Points of View

What did Confucius believe about good behavior?
Daoism and Legalism

Other beliefs besides Confucianism influenced China during the Zhou period. Two in particular attracted many followers.

Daoism

Daoism (DOW-ih-zum) takes its name from Dao, meaning “the way.” Daoism stressed living in harmony with the Dao, the guiding force of all reality. In Daoist teachings, the Dao gave birth to the universe and all things in it. Daoism developed in part as a reaction to Confucianism. Daoists didn’t agree with the idea that active, involved leaders brought social harmony. Instead, they wanted the government to stay out of people’s lives. Daoists believed that people should avoid interfering with nature or each other. They should be like water and simply let things flow in a natural way. For Daoists, the ideal ruler was a wise man who was in harmony with the Dao. He would govern so effortlessly that his people would not even know they were being governed.

Daoists taught that the universe is a balance of opposites: female and male, light and dark, low and high. In each case, opposing forces should be in harmony. While Confucianism focused its followers’ attention on the human world, Daoists paid more attention to the natural world. Daoists regarded humans as just a part of nature, not better than any other thing. In time the Dao, as represented by nature, became so important to the Daoists that they worshipped it.

Laozi (LOWD-zuh) was the most famous Daoist teacher. He taught that people should not try to gain wealth, nor should they seek power. Laozi is credited with writing the basic text of Daoism, The Way and Its Power. Later writers created many legends about Laozi’s achievements.

Legalism

Legalism, the belief that people were bad by nature and needed to be controlled, contrasted with both Confucianism and Daoism. Unlike the other two beliefs, Legalism was a political philosophy without religious concerns. Instead, it dealt only with government and social
control. Followers of Legalism disagreed with the moral preaching of Confucius. Legalists also rejected Daoism because it didn’t stress respect for authority.

Legalists felt that society needed strict laws to keep people in line and that punishments should fit crimes. For example, they believed that citizens should be held responsible for each other’s conduct. A guilty person’s relatives and neighbors should also be punished. This way, everyone would obey the laws.

Unity and efficiency were also important to Legalists. They wanted appointed officials, not nobles, to run China. Legalists wanted the empire to continue to expand. Therefore, they urged the state to always be prepared for war.

Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism competed for followers. All three beliefs became popular, but the Legalists were the first to put their ideas into practice throughout China.

**READING CHECK**

**Contrasting** How did Daoism and Legalism differ in their theories about government?

---

**Biography**

**Laozi**

c. 500s or 400s BC

Scholars have found little reliable information about Laozi’s life. Some believe that his book on Daoism was actually the work of several different authors. Most ancient sources of information about Laozi are myths. For example, one legend states that when Laozi was born, he was already an old man. In Chinese Laozi can mean “Old Baby.” Over the years, many Daoists have worshipped Laozi as a supernatural being.

**Drawing Inferences** What do you think it meant to say Laozi was born “old”?

---

**Summary and Preview** When the Zhou dynasty crumbled, political and social chaos erupted. In response, the new teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism emerged. In the next section you will learn how the Qin dynasty applied the teachings of Legalism.

---

**Section 2 Assessment**

**Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People**

1. **a. Identify** What is the mandate of heaven?
   **b. Explain** Describe the political order used by the Zhou kings to rule distant lands.
   **c. Elaborate** What happened when nobles began to reject the Zhou king’s authority?

2. **a. Identify** Who was Confucius?
   **b. Analyze** Why did many of the teachings of Confucius focus on the family?

3. **a. Identify** Who was the most famous Daoist teacher?
   **b. Summarize** What were the main ideas of Daoism?
   **c. Elaborate** What might be some disadvantages of Legalism?

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Finding Main Ideas**
   Draw a chart like the one here. Use it and your notes on the Zhou dynasty to list two main ideas about each set of beliefs.

**Focus on Speaking**

5. **Exploring the Importance of Historical Figures**
   Many important people in history are rulers or conquerors. People who think and teach, however, have also played major roles in history. How did thinkers and teachers shape China’s history? Write some ideas in your notebook.