

**SELECTIONS FROM THE CONFUCIAN ANALECTS:
ON GOVERNMENT**

Introduction

Confucius (the Latinized version of Kong Fuzi, “master Kong”) or, to call him by his proper name, Kong Qiu (551-479 BCE) lived at a time of political turmoil and transition. The China of his time consisted of a number of small feudal states, which, although theoretically subject to the kings of the Zhou Dynasty, were actually independent. Confucius and many of his contemporaries were concerned about the state of turmoil, competition, and warfare between the feudal states. They sought philosophical and practical solutions to the problems of government — solutions that, they hoped, would lead to a restoration of unity and stability. Confucius had no notable success as a government official, but he was renowned even in his own time as a teacher. His followers recorded his teachings a generation or two after his death, and these teachings remain influential in China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan to this day. The anecdotes and records of short conversations compiled by his disciples go under the English title of the *Analects*. The excerpts from the *Analects* presented below are specifically concerned with the problem of government.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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*Selections from the Confucian Analects:
On Government*

1:5 The Master said, “In ruling a state of a thousand chariots, one is reverent in the handling of affairs and shows himself to be trustworthy. One is economical in expenditures, loves the people, and uses them only at the proper season.”

2:3 The Master said, “Lead them by means of regulations and keep order among them through punishments, and the people will evade them and will lack any sense of shame.¹ Lead them through moral force (*de*) and keep order among them through rites (*li*), and they will have a sense of shame and will also correct themselves.”

12:11 Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, “Let the ruler be a ruler; the minister, a minister; the father, a father; the son, a son.” “Excellent,” said the duke. “Truly, if the ruler is not a ruler, the subject is not a subject, the father is not a father, and the son is not a son, though I have grain, will I get to eat it?”

¹ Or, as Arthur Waley interprets it, “self-respect.”

Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQs) on
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Questions:

1. Why is reverence an important part of rulership? What do you think that Confucius meant by reverence?
2. Confucius lived in an agricultural society — what might he mean when he advises a ruler to use the people “only at the proper season?” How would this benefit the people? How would it benefit the ruler himself?
3. What does Confucius think is the proper way of ruling: ruling through law or ruling by moral example? Why? Do you think that Confucius is right? Why or why not?
4. Do you see any similarity between family structure and government in Confucius’ mind? How so? What might be the role of women in government?
5. Compare Confucius’ ideas on government to those of the Legalist philosophers who lived a few generations after Confucius. What are the differences between Confucius and the Legalists? Do they share any points of view or assumptions about government?