

# History of Ancient China

## Section 4



### MAIN IDEAS

1. Confucianism, based on Confucius’s teachings about proper behavior, dramatically influenced the Song system of government.
2. Scholar-officials ran China’s government during the Song dynasty.

## Key Terms

**bureaucracy** body of unelected government officials

**civil service** service as a government official

**scholar-official** an educated member of the government

## Section Summary

### CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is the name given to the ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Confucius’s teachings focused on ethics, or proper behavior, of individuals and governments. He argued that society would function best if everyone followed two principles, *ren* and *li*. *Ren* means concern for others, and *li* means appropriate behavior. Order in society is maintained when people know their place and behave appropriately.

For a thousand years after his death, Confucius’s ideas went in and out of favor several times. Early in the Song dynasty, however, a new version of Confucianism, known as Neo-Confucianism, was adopted as official government policy. In addition to teaching proper behavior, Neo-Confucian scholars and officials discussed spiritual questions like what made human beings do bad things even if their basic nature was good.

**Conduct some research to find the title usually given in English to a book containing Confucius’s ideas. Write that title here.**

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**Before the Song dynasty, what religious belief probably had a negative effect on the popularity of Confucianism in China?**

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**SCHOLAR-OFFICIALS**

The Song dynasty took another major step that would affect the Chinese imperial state for centuries to come. The Song improved the system by which people went to work for the government. These workers formed a large **bureaucracy** by passing a series of written **civil service** examinations.

The tests covered both the traditional teachings of Confucius and related ideas. Because the tests were extremely difficult, students spent years preparing for them. Candidates had a strong incentive for studying hard. Passing the tests meant life as a **scholar-official**, whose benefits included considerable respect and reduced penalties for breaking the law.

The civil service examination system helped ensure that talented, intelligent people became scholar-officials. This system was a major factor in the stability of the Song government.

**Name a well-known government division today that has a large bureaucracy.**

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**Draw a picture of what you think a Song scholar-official might look like.**

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** Write a short essay on the relation between the Song dynasty development of civil service and the Confucian ideals of *ren* and *li*.