**2.2 The Role of Confucianism in the development of the Asian Tigers and China**

Confucianism – a ‘civil’ religion

Confucianism consists of a set of [rules of conduct](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/rules-of-conduct) concerned with how people adjust to living. Its lack of metaphysical foundations makes it an ethical doctrine rather than a theistic religion (Weber, 1951). Confucianism differs from other religions in three aspects (1) it has no deity but is based instead on rules of conduct; (2) it was not established in a way that competes with other religions; and (3) it has no large-scale institutional ‘church’ with priests and ceremonial and a laity (Redding, 1993, p.46).

### Confucianism and its core beliefs

Confucianism, which developed from the teachings of Confucius or Kung-fu-tzu, was the most influential Chinese religion. It was the state religion from the start of the Han Dynasty in 202 BC to the end of the imperial epoch in 1911. Confucius, a Chinese scholar and political figure, lived during feudal times (over 2,000 years ago). He established an ethical and moral system that governs all relationships: father and son, ruler and ruled, husband and wife, [elder](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/elderly-age-groups) brother and younger brother and between friends.

Confucianism views the family as the basic unit of society. Certain reciprocal relationships and responsibilities must be observed to preserve harmony. A specific hierarchy is [pragmatic](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/pragmatics), and Confucianism places the greatest importance on rank and age in all interactions. Saving face and not causing shame to another are important. Since the family is the core unit, all the actions of an individual reflect on the family when the virtues of kindness, righteousness, propriety, intelligence and faithfulness are practised

The interrelation of culture and development has been vastly taken into account, in particular with respect to the development of the Asian Tigers, as scholars were trying to discover whether these countries were following a unique path of growth, driven by their peculiar characteristics. Many economists have considered Confucianism as a barrier for economic growth, particularly in the early stages of development. The reason concerns the traditional system promoted by the religion itself that puts emphasis on hierarchy, on individuals and on respect for the authorities. Moreover, “the natural world and man's social world [are] seen as a unity and believed to be governed by the same moral principle..." and thus the natural order is used to "justify existing social norms and institutions”. 8 In accordance with this statement, many economists suggested that the principles of Confucianism could have prevented or at least slowed down the development of the Tigers because of the strong linkages with the historical traditions and institutions it endorses. Confucianism is indeed connected to a “feudalism” society, clearly in opposition to a “capitalist” society. Thus, they considered the religion as a factor impeding the process of modernization, necessary to sustain the contemporary competition and internationalization of the world’s markets. In contrast, the opposite front sustains that Confucianism, with the principles it incorporates, has favoured economic development in the South-East Asian regions. “Indeed,“[…], the Confucian values and tradition lead to a model of maximal government, with its myriad responsibilities, duties and obligations. The State is not just supervisory and regulatory in function but to a very large extent developmental, educational and mobilizational in emphasis. The bureaucracy is not just administrative and government functionaries but acts as guidance of national interests and is often perceived as leaders, intellectuals and teachers”. 9 8 Hane 1969: 357 9 Wei-Ming T.,(May 2008), The Rise of Industrial East Asia: The Role of Confucian Values, The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies 28 The conception of individualism, the importance of education and the perception of the government as a superior entity are just some of the values which have fostered the creation of strong states able to sustain the international Western competition and favoured the countries’ development. To conclude, economists supporting this view argued that the Confucian values which may have limited the initial development of the four Asian tigers, are the same values which have permitted and supported their extraordinary growth in the last decades.