The **Warring States Period (475–221 BC)** was an era of division in ancient China. After the relatively peaceful and philosophical Spring and Autumn Period, various states were at war before the Qin state conquered them all, and China was reunited under the Qin Dynasty.

Quick Facts About the Warring States Period

* It was the **last of three periods of the Zhou Dynasty era** (1046–221 BC): Western Zhou Dynasty, Spring and Autumn Period (771–476 BC), Warring States Period
* **States declared independence** from the Zhou Dynasty, and kingdoms fought for territory, during this period.
* **By 334 BC there were 7 warring states:** Qin, Chu, Zhao, Wei, Han, Yan, and Qi.
* The Warring States Period **ended with Qin's conquest** of the other states.
* It was **succeeded by the Qin Dynasty** in 221 BC, which marked the transition between ancient China and Imperial China.

The Fracture of Zhou into Warring States (475–246 BC)

During the Warring States Period, nobles stopped supporting the [Zhou Dynasty](https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/the-zhou-dynasty.htm) (1046–221 BC), and Zhou's vassal states declared themselves independent from Zhou, becoming **kingdoms or warring states**.

Chu became the biggest state. It controlled the southern third of the entire region of the Warring States. Qin also controlled about a third of the territory in the west. The rest of the states comprised the northeastern third of the region of the Warring States.

The Warring States Period's Start Date is Disputed (481–405 BC)

481 BC was the end of the Spring and Autumn Period according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. 475 BC, start of King Yuan of Zhou's rule, is the generally accepted date. 403 BC was when the Jin State officially parted into Zhao, Wei, and Han.

The Partition of Jin (455–403 BC)

The Jin state was a major state during the middle part of the Zhou Dynasty, in central northern China, but the Jin duke lost power to his nobles.

**The states of Zhao, Wei, and Han** were effectively all that was left of Jin after the battle of Jinyang (455–453 BC). In 403 BC, the Jin state was recognized by the Zhou Dynasty as split into the three successor states.

Qi Became Independent(379–343 BC)

The Qi state had been ruled by the Jiang family since it was founded. In 379 BC, Duke Kang of Qi died with no heir and King Wei from the Tian family took the throne.

The new ruler launched several successful campaigns against other states, extending Qi's territory. By the end of King Wei's reign (379–343 BC), Qi was **one of the strongest states**, and independent from the Zhou Dynasty.

Shang Yang Reformed Qin (361–338 BC)

In 361 BC, a legalist called **Shang Yang**, who was born in the Wei state, went to Qin, and his legalist reform proposal was adopted by Duke Xiao of Qin (ruled 362–338 BC).

Shang Yang espoused rule according to a defined set of strict rules and a clear political philosophy. By 338 BC, although Shang Yang was eventually killed, his reform had made Qin **the most powerful and ruthless state**, both in military and economic terms.

Chu Conquered Yue (334 BC)

In the late 390s BC, King Dao of Chu (ruled 401–381 BC) made **Wu Qi** his chancellor. Wu's reforms began to transform Chu into an efficient and powerful state.

In 334 BC, Chu's power reached its peak when it **conquered Yue**.

Qin and Yan Defected (325–323 BC)

With the Zhou government's weakness, more and more states proclaimed themselves to be **independent kingdoms**.

In 325 BC, Duke Hui of Qin proclaimed himself "King Hui of Qin".

In 323 BC, the Yan state followed suit.

The End of the Warring States Period (246–221 BC)

**Seven warring states remained** by the third century BC: Qin, Chu, Qi, Yan, Han, Wei, and Zhao.

The Qin Military Buildup (246–230 BC)

Thanks to Shang Yang's reforms, Qin had become the most powerful and ruthless state, and possessed the power to unify the Warring States.

**King Zheng**, later to become [the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty](http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/first-emperor-facts.htm), started to "rule" the Qin state in 246 BC when he was 13. His ruling court mobilized Qin for conquests, and Zheng was in full control by the time preparations were made in 230 BC.

The Conquests of the Qin State (230–221 BC)

In 230 BC, King Zheng started his conquest of the Warring States. He adopted his chancellor Li Si's idea that the whole conquest should be carried out in order of difficulty.

* Han was conquered first in 230 BC.
* In 228 BC, Qin occupied the territory of Zhao.
* In 226 BC, Qin occupied the Yan capital, Ji (now Beijing), and the King of Yan moved his capital to Liaodong.
* In 225 BC, Qin conquered Wei.
* In 223 BC, Qin conquered Chu.
* In 222 BC, Qin conquered the rest of Yan and Zhao.
* In 221 BC, Qin conquered Qi, and [the Qin Dynasty](https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/the-qin-dynasty.htm) ruled over a united China.

Confucius was born at a time of philosophical creativity around the end of the [Spring and Autumn Period](https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-history/spring-and-autumn-period.htm) (770–476 BC) during the reign of the [Zhou Dynasty](https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/the-zhou-dynasty.htm) (1045–255 BC). Confucius has been the **most popular and influential** of all the ancient teachers of the region.

Born at an Opportune Time in History

Confucius was born in an **era of philosophical creativity**. The rulers and subjects of the various regions sought for knowledge and power in uncertain times.

He tried to teach**ancient truth in a time of political confusion and crisis** as the Zhou Dynasty was falling from power. Dozens of regions of their empire transformed to be independent kingdoms and tried to conquer each other.

The kings and rulers battled for survival and dominance in the region, and they wanted to know what to do. They **sought for knowledge** about how best to rule their kingdoms and survive in the dangerous times.

Making a mistake might mean their deaths or the destruction of their kingdom, so there was a demand for knowledge, political strategies, and power. Courts and rulers employed **traveling teachers** to teach or be officials. Confucius was both an itinerant teacher and an official.

The One Hundred Schools of Thought

Confucius was born at an **opportune time to be an influential philosopher**. In Chinese history, the dominant rulers generally squelch or discourage philosophical expression that contradicts their own. When there were many separate small powers, different schools of thought could survive in the land at the same time.

At the time that Confucius was born, there were **hundreds of other teachers**, philosophers, and religious leaders promoting various ideas. Probably hundreds of philosophical schools existed in the dozens of kingdoms in the region that each had their own historical and ethnic backgrounds.

His era was called the era of the “**One Hundred Schools of Thought**.” The period lasted until the end of the [Warring States Period](https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/warring-states-period.htm) when the [Qin Empire](https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/china-history/the-qin-dynasty.htm) conquered the region to impose a standard philosophy and religion.

Confucius' Early Life

It isn't exactly clear **when Confucius was born**, but it was sometime around the end of the Spring and Autumn Period. His name was Kong Qiu, and he is said to have been born in 551 in [Qufu](https://www.chinahighlights.com/qufu/) in the State of Lu, that is now in [Shandong Province](https://www.chinahighlights.com/shandong/). Scholars do not agree on the dating of his birth or the details of his early life however.

His mother was said to have been a concubine who left to avoid the mistreatment from the wife. She and Confucius were very poor, but he studied hard. Some accounts say that his mother died when he was 17. Then he married three years later. He left his family to become an itinerant teacher.

Confucius' Adult Life

There are differing accounts about his adult life as well. In some accounts, Confucius is said to have worked as a **governor of a town** in the Lu Kingdom in 501 BC. If the dating of his birth above is true, this would mean that he was about 50 years old at that time.

The kingdom **fell into civil war**. Different powerful clans battled each other. Confucius is said to have sought a righteous solution during very unrighteous violence.

In 497 BC, he left the Kingdom of Lu. It is said that he **visited various small kingdoms** such as Wei, Cai, Chen, and Song. His political ideas were not implemented.

Some accounts said that when he was 68 years old, he **taught his philosophy** to about 68 or 77 disciples.

He lived to be about 72. Some accounts say that he died about the year 479 BC. It is said that he was buried in a cemetery called [Kong Lin](https://www.chinahighlights.com/qufu/attraction/cemetery-of-confucius.htm).

Confucius's Teachings About the Mandate of Heaven

In the *Analects*, a book of his pithy sayings, it is recorded that he said that he didn't invent any of his philosophy. He was only transmitting the ancient teachings to his disciples. He wanted them to read the ancient texts. He said he wanted to **teach about the Mandate of Heaven**.

This important belief of his **political philosophy** was that Heaven would choose a person and his clan to rule.

He mixed his theology with his **ideas of politics**. So he encouraged everybody to behave as they should in whatever role they had in their society. He said that if they did so, there would be harmony and prosperity and happiness.

He taught what is called the **Silver Rule** of behavior that is less expansive than the Golden Rule:

*Zi Gong (a disciple of Confucius) asked: "Is there any one word that could guide a person throughout life?"  
The Master replied: "How about shu? Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself."*

Here are other well-known sayings:  
*With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my crooked arm for a pillow—is not joy to be found therein? Riches and honors acquired through unrighteousness are to me as the floating clouds."*

*Knowledge is recognizing what you know and what you don't.*

**Comparing this last statement** with the Dao De Jing's….

*A way that can be the Way, is not the usual way.*   
*A name that can be a name, is an unusual name.*

…is really confusing.

Disciples of Confucius

His disciples went around the Warring States and spread these teachings. *The Analects of Confucius* is a book of pithy sayings attributed to Confucius and recorded by his disciples. For foreigners who want a taste of this Confucian philosophy, **reading the *Analects of Confucius* is a good introduction** since the statements are usually simple and like common sense.

It is thought that after he died, two disciples became **influential philosophers who introduced important conflicting ideas** that it isn't recorded that Confucius taught himself. These were Mencius (孟子, 371–289) and Xun Zi (荀子, c300–237 BC).

**Mencius** is said to be the writer of the Confucian text called *Mencius* that is an important collection of philosophical dialogues. He may have been a disciple of Confucius' own grandson.

One of his basic teachings was that human nature is basically good but needs training, and he bases a lot of his philosophical theory on this axiom. This variety of Confucian philosophy was most widely accepted in later eras and by Neo-Confucianists.

**Xun Zi** taught that human nature is evil, and it is the antithesis of what Mencius taught.