

Four Books and Five Classics

The **Four Books and Five Classics** ([simplified Chinese](#): 四书五经; [traditional Chinese](#): 四書五經; [pinyin](#): *Sìshū Wǔjīng*) are the authoritative books of [Confucianism](#) in [China](#) written before 300 BC.

Four Books

The **Four Books** of [Confucianism](#) ([traditional Chinese](#): 四書; [pinyin](#): *Sì Shū*) are [Chinese classic texts](#) that [Zhu Xi](#) selected, in the [Song dynasty](#), as an introduction to Confucianism. They were, in the [Ming](#) and [Qing](#) Dynasties, made the core of the official curriculum for the [civil service examinations](#). They are:

Title (English)	Title (Chinese)	Brief Description
Great Learning	大學	Originally one chapter in the Classic of Rites . It consists of a short main text attributed to Confucius and nine commentary chapters by Zeng Zi , one of Confucius's disciples. Its importance is illustrated by Zeng Zi's foreword that this is the gateway of learning. It is significant because it expresses many themes of Chinese philosophy and political thinking, and has therefore been extremely influential both in classical and modern Chinese thought. Government, self cultivation and investigation of things are linked.
Doctrine of the Mean	中庸	Another chapter in Classic of Rites , attributed to Confucius ' grandson Zisi . The purpose of this small, 33-chapter book is to demonstrate the usefulness of a golden way to gain perfect virtue. It focuses on the "way" (道) that is prescribed by a heavenly mandate not only to the ruler but to everyone. To follow these heavenly instructions by learning and teaching will automatically result in a Confucian virtue. Because Heaven has laid down what is the way to perfect virtue, it is not that difficult to follow the steps of the holy rulers of old if one only knows what is the right way.
Analects of Confucius	論語	A compilation of speeches by Confucius and his disciples, as well as the discussions they held. Since Confucius's time, the Analects has heavily influenced the philosophy and moral values of China and later other East Asian countries as well. The Imperial examinations , started in the Jin Dynasty and eventually abolished with the founding of the Republic of China , emphasized Confucian studies and expected candidates to quote and apply the words of Confucius in their essays.
Mencius	孟子	A collection of conversations of the scholar Mencius with kings of his time. In contrast to the sayings of Confucius , which are short and self-contained, the Mencius consists of long dialogues with extensive prose.

Five Classics

The **Five Classics** ([simplified Chinese](#): 五经; [traditional Chinese](#): 五經; [pinyin](#): *Wǔ Jīng*) are five ancient Chinese books used by Confucianism as the basis of studies. These books were compiled or edited by Confucius himself. They are:

Title	Title	Brief Description
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(English) (Chinese)

[Classic of Poetry](#)

詩經

A collection of 305 poems divided into 160 folk songs, 105 festal songs sung at court ceremonies, and 40 hymns and eulogies sung at sacrifices to gods and ancestral spirits of the royal house.

[Classic of History](#)

書經

A collection of documents and speeches alleged to have been written by rulers and officials of the early Zhou period and before. It is possibly the oldest Chinese narrative, and may date from the 6th century B.C. It includes examples of early Chinese prose.

[Classic of Rites](#)

禮記

Describes ancient rites, social forms and court ceremonies, a restoration of the original Lijing lost in the third century B.C.

[Classic of Changes](#)

易經

Also known as *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*. The book contains a [divination](#) system comparable to Western [geomancy](#) or the West African [Ifá](#) system. In [Western](#) cultures and modern East Asia, it is still widely used for this purpose.

[Spring and Autumn Annals](#)

春秋

Also known as *Līn Jīng* (麟經), a historical record of the state of Lu, Confucius's native state, from 722 B.C. to 481 B.C. compiled by Confucius, with implied condemnation of usurpations, murder, incest, etc.

The [Classic of Music](#) (樂經) is sometimes considered as the sixth classic. Since most parts of it are destroyed during the [Burning of the Books](#), the remaining sections are collected as two books in the [Classic of Rites](#).

The Four Books

[The Great Learning](#) • [The Doctrine of the Mean](#) • [The Analects](#) • [The Mencius](#)

The Five Classics

[Classic of Poetry](#) • [Classic of History](#) • [Classic of Rites](#) • [Classic of Changes](#) • [Spring and Autumn Annals](#)

[The Three Commentaries](#)

[The Commentary of Zuo](#) • [The Commentary of Gongyang](#) • [The Commentary of Guliang](#)

[The Thirteen Classics](#)

[The Book of Poetry](#) • [The Book of Documents](#) • [The Rites of Zhou](#) • [The Ceremonies and Rites](#) • [The Record of Rites](#) • [The Book of Changes](#) • [The Commentary of Zuo](#) • [The Commentary of Gongyang](#) • [The Commentary of Guliang](#) • [The Analects](#) • [Luxuriant and Refined Words](#) • [The Classic of Filial Piety](#) • [The Mencius](#)

Other

[Han Kitab](#) • [Interactions Between Heaven and Mankind](#) • [Old Texts](#) • [The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars](#)

