The Song dynasty scholar Zhu Xi streamlined Confucian education by compiling the Four Books: Mencius, Analects, Great Learning, and Centrality and Commonality. These texts influenced Chinese culture more than any other classics during the last six centuries of the dynastic period. Zhu Xi, by emphasizing the Four Books, removed many Daoist and Buddhist tendencies from neo-Confucianism. It is no exaggeration to state that the Four Books influenced Chinese culture more than any other classics during the last six hundred years of the dynastic period.

The Mencius describes the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Mencius and expands Confucius's ideas, stressing the inner quality of the virtues and advocating humanitarian rulership. The Analects contains the teachings of Confucius and advocates moral self-cultivation and rulership based on virtue. The Great Learning explains the chain reaction that starts with the “investigation of things,” beginning a process of moral cultivation that regulates the family, brings order to the state, and ultimately creates peace on Earth. Centrality and Commonality is usually mistranslated as the Doctrine of the Mean, which incorrectly implies that the work is similar to the Greek philosopher Aristotle's Golden Mean or the Buddha's Middle Way. However, whereas Aristotle sought a balance between extremes, and the Buddha proposed a way to eliminate extremes, the Confucian concept of centrality is defined as the natural condition “before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy come forth.”

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Further Reading


