

## Timeline for *Confucius– His Life and Legacy in Art* Exhibition Related Resources

To fully appreciate historical temporality from a Confucian perspective, one should be prepared to engage Chinese principles of recording historical time based on dynastic cycles rather than the Gregorian calendar system used universally today and designated by BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era). While not entirely free of contested dating, the Chinese historical records were meticulously kept and carefully reconstructed throughout history. Archaeological finds continue to fill out a more complete understanding of very early times, but starting from the Zhou Dynasty, there is extremely reputable scholarship that provides very precise historical dating of events before and during Confucius’ lifetime. This timeline is provided to help contextualize major periods and specific events that are significant to Confucius’ life.

Before 2070 BCE	Legendary time of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors.
c. 2070 -1600 BCE	Legendary Xia Dynasty – a proto-dynasty that left no written records, but whose existence is attested to by early Chinese thinkers and whose ancestors the Shang acknowledge in their later divinatory bone inscriptions.
c. 1600 – 1045 BCE	Shang Dynasty – a line of 29 kings ( <i>wang</i> ) who rule for around 500 years over a small but strategically important state situated in the central plains. Important contributions to the development of Chinese civilization include a calendar based on astronomical observation; a hierarchical society codified in a system of rites in which the king assumes the role of intermediary between the living and the dead, or between heaven and earth; development of bronze technology geared to manufacturing ceremonial artifacts; and the development of a written language.
c. 1045 – 771 BCE	Western Zhou Dynasty – succeeding the Shang, the Zhou people adopted and then modified Shang practices in ancestor worship, patrilineal succession, bone divination, and social stratification. A people residing in the Wei River valley (in an area around present day Xi’an), the king takes a reign-name of Wen (‘cultured’) who begins attacking a number of small Shang vassal states. After King Wen’s death c. 1053 BCE, his son, King Wu (‘martial’) resumes wars against the Shang and engages the Shang army at the decisive battle at Muye outside the Shang Court of Anyang in 1045 BCE, thus founding the Zhou Dynasty.
	<p>c. 1043 BCE – Zhou King Wu dies setting off a concession crisis. King Wu’s younger brother, Zhou Gong Dan (aka The Duke of Zhou), has his young nephew King Cheng enthroned and becomes regent to the King. The Duke’s other brothers (and the overthrown Shang king’s surviving son) join forces and attempt to overthrow the patrilineal line of succession. They are defeated in the civil war that follows and surrounding polities are drawn into the conflict resulting in an expansion of territory under Zhou authority. Loyal Zhou princes are rewarded with state-sized fiefdoms creating a large federation of states pledging loyalty to the Zhou king; the cohesion of these feudal-like states will dissipate over time.</p>

771 BCE – The Quan Rong (a northern ‘barbarian’ tribe of nomadic people) sack the capital of Zongzhou (in the west near modern day Xi’an) and force the Court of Zhou to be reconstituted at Chengzhou (in the east near modern day Luoyang).

771 – 256 BCE

Eastern Zhou Dynasty – the Zhou court is significantly weakened and China becomes a land of contending small states run by hegemony who nominally pledge loyalty to the Zhou court but are guided by self-interest and opportunism to increase their territory. While politically a very chaotic time, it is also marked by a cultural and technological flourishing. China’s first canal systems, its first large-scale walls, and large-scale irrigation projects date from this period. It is also a period of great intellectual activity known for the ‘Hundred Schools of Thought’ (including, of course, Confucianism), a name for the numerous political, social, and cosmological theories that proliferated during this period.

722 – 476 BCE – Spring and Autumn Period, a further division of the Eastern Zhou period; the name derives from *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, a chronicle of events in the state of Lu sometimes ascribed to Confucius.

551 BCE – birth of Confucius at Mount Ni, located southeast of Qufu in Lu state (in present-day Shandong province), traditionally accepted as being on September 28.

549 BCE – When Confucius is three years old, his father dies.

535 BCE – Confucius’ mother dies when he is the age of 16 or 17 (other sources give this date as 527 BCE, when he was 23 or 24 years old).

533 BCE – At the age of 19, Confucius marries a woman from the Qiguan family of the Song state. Around this time, he gained employment as manager of the state granary.

532 BCE – Birth of Confucius’ son who is named Li (Carp) after Duke Zhao of Lu sent a carp as a gift. Around this time Confucius was promoted to state husbandry manager.

522 BCE – Around this time Confucius starts a private school and began to teach.

518 BCE – Confucius accepts Meng Yizi and Nangong Jinshu as disciples; Jinshu arranges for Confucius to travel to Luoyang, the Zhou capital, where he is attributed as meeting Laozi.

514 BCE – After conflict breaks out in Lu state, Confucius is forced to relocate briefly to the state of Qi.

516 BCE – Confucius returns to Lu.

	501 BCE – Confucius became the chief magistrate of Zhongdu, present-day Wenshang county in Shandong Province.
	500 BCE – Confucius becomes minister of justice and distinguishes himself at the conference between Lu and Qi at Jiagu.
	497 BCE – Confucius leaves the state of Lu and heads east to Wei state, beginning his sojourns in several states to promote his ideas.
	484 BCE – Confucius returned to his hometown, Qufu, in the state of Lu and focused on teaching and studying the <i>Rites of Zhou</i> .
	479 BCE – Death of Confucius at the age of 72 or 73.
	475 – 221 BCE – Warring States Period, a further layer of periodization within the Eastern Zhou Dynasty marked by large-scale intense warfare made possible by administrative reforms designed to maximize individual states' ability to raise armies.
221 - 206 BCE	Qin Dynasty – the western state of Qin eventually defeats and occupies all other states and King Zheng succeeds in unifying the territory and proclaims himself Shihuangdi, or 'First Emperor.' The empire adopts draconian legalist administration and is attributed with burning Confucian texts and killing Confucian scholars. At the same time, the Qin Dynasty unifies weights and measurements, promulgates a standard written script, as well as a standard monetary system. Nevertheless, the state is very unpopular and is overthrown by forces only fifteen years after its founding.
206 BCE – 9 CE	Western Han Dynasty – in 207 BCE, Liu Bang, a minor official of peasant stock (and one-time outlaw) creates a sizeable following and joins forces with an anti-Qin army led by Xiang Yu, an aristocrat from the former state of Chu. After jointly defeating and killing off the Qin royal family, the combined forces split and a power struggle ensues. Liu Bang eventually wins out and is enthroned as Emperor Gaodi of the Han Dynasty. The historian Sima Qian wrote of Liu Bang, “[he] removed the harsh corners of the Qin code and retreated to an easy roundness, whittled away the embellishments and achieved simplicity.” It is during the Western Han Dynasty that Confucian values are increasingly promoted by the state, evidenced by the court-sponsored study group to furnish acceptable versions of the five prescribed classics in 136 BCE ( <i>The Book of Documents, The Book of Songs, The Book of Changes, The Spring and Autumn Annals, and The Book of Rites</i> ).