

**Historian tip # 12:** Historians will sometimes roleplay situations from the past in order to get a better understanding of the people in those situations.

## Today's investigation: **Confucian relationships**

**Outcome of the investigation:** Our historians will be able to

1. outline the 5 relationships (superiors / inferiors) of Confucianism,
2. identify such relationships as depicted in a film clip of "Mulan"
3. role play Confucian relationships using proper honorifics
4. assess why Confucius thought that following these relationships would help bring order and stability to ancient China.

**Vocabulary:** honorifics  
mandate of heaven

**Materials:** film clip from Disney's Mulan  
role play sheet

**Mini lesson:** Confucius believed that an important way for everyone to become as good as possible would be to know and follow his or her "proper place" in society. This would help order come to society. He talked about five relationships that needed to be followed:

1. A ruler is superior to the ruled
2. A father is superior to his son
3. An older brother is superior to his younger brother
4. A husband is superior to his wife
5. Friends are equal and each must respect the other

Women were inferior to all grown men. Everyone in the society had to be good, and everyone had to treat their superiors with a great deal of respect, ALL OF THE TIME. This included speaking with honorifics, which means using someone's title and very respectful language (point out the word honor in honorifics). The ruler was required to be especially good, as a role model for all of the others to follow. One of Confucius' followers added the idea that if the ruler acts badly, people have the right to overthrow him. He said that rulers have a "mandate of heaven," meaning that heaven approved of him. However, if the ruler acted badly, he could lose the mandate of heaven.

**Activities:** Show an excerpt from the film “Mulan” (the excerpt begins about 22 minutes from when movies is put in; it is the section where the emperor’s messenger comes to the village to ask for one man from each family to sign up for war). Play the clip twice, while students record in their notebooks any evidence of Confucian relationships that they notice. Their responses can be shared with partners.

In groups of 6 students will now roleplay the different Confucian relationships. Students should be cast in the following roles to discuss **which one of the men in the family should go to war.** Photocopy the rolesheet and cut it into strips, giving all of the students playing “grandfather” the grandfather strip (and so on down the line). Each family member has his or her own reason for arguing for or against their own or someone else’s participation. Students should wear nametages for which family member they are roleplaying.

grandfather  
father and mother  
older son  
friend of the older son  
younger son

These relationships **MUST** be honored while the family problem is being addressed. This includes using honorifics, and speaking with a great deal of respect to “superiors.” In the end, one man must be chosen to go to war.

**Group share:** A debriefing on the roleplay (especially on whether roles were carefully followed) and comments on how such behavior could have contributed to restoring order to a chaotic society.

**Connecting past to present:** In your historian’s notebook tonight, keep track of how people in your family treat each other. Then jot some notes about whether or not you think that your family follows Confucian ideas. If not, do you think following these ideas would bring more order to the family? What would be some of the positives and negatives?