

# Philosophy: East and West

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The word and concept of philosophy were invented in ancient Greece about 2,600 years ago. It means “love of wisdom” and pursuit of knowledge without considering the Greek gods. Due to the special characteristics of the city-states and the ample supply of slaves, ancient Greek citizens enjoyed plenty of leisure time and were free to ask all kinds of question about things around themselves, from why the sky is blue to why we are here. Thus, starting with Thales, father of philosophy, Western philosophy covers all the basic topics in nature, concrete and abstract, from living systems to nonliving systems. In contrast, at about the same time, in ancient China in the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC), starting with Confucius, Chinese philosophers had to look for jobs to support themselves and their family. And the only meaning job for them was to work for the government, the higher the better, i.e., getting close to the emperors. Since the top interest of the emperors was how to “stabilize the society” (*weiwèn*), political philosophy was what Confucius and others like him specialized in. Which, of course, involves the ways to maintain human relationships in harmony (usually by rigid hierarchy), giving rise to the impression that Chinese philosophies concentrate more in this area than those in the West. Here, the origins, characteristics and consequences of philosophy in the West and East are discussed. What we see today can be traced to the ancient times. There is not much new under the sun.

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