

Biopic shows Confucius has new status in China

Last Updated: Thursday, January 14, 2010 | 1:51 PM ET
[CBC News](#)



Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-fat speaks during a news conference for his movie *Confucius* in Beijing on Thursday. (Alexander F. Yuan/Associated Press)

The ancient philosopher Confucius is enjoying a resurgence in China that includes an expensive biopic backed by the Chinese government.

Reviled by Communist leader Mao Zedong for advocating harmony and respect for the social order, the Chinese sage was out of favour for decades.

Now, his writings are being given higher status at Chinese universities and the Chinese government is setting up Confucius Institutes abroad to promote Chinese language

and culture.

The philosopher who lived from 551-479 B.C. is played by Hong Kong star Chow Yun-fat in a biopic to open in China Jan. 22.

The \$22-million US movie has been produced by Beijing's Dadi Century Film and China Film Group and is to be given an even bigger opening than another film meant to glorify Chinese history, *The Founding of the Republic*.

The film will be sent to 2,500 cinemas in China, virtually every theatre in the country. *The Founding of the Republic* opened on 1,450 screens.

Chow, 54, made his career as an action star in Hong Kong gangster thrillers such as *A Better Tomorrow* and has moved on to Hollywood pictures such as *The Replacement Killers* and *Anna and the King*.

He plays a much more sober role as Confucius, who emphasized the importance of study and counselled ways to move his warring country into an age of peace and prosperity.

Chow had high praise for the film after its Beijing opening Thursday, saying box office receipts could rival *Avatar*, which earned \$4.8 million on its first day in China.

"They are two different kinds of movies, but they are both about humanity," he said.

Confucius was directed by China's Hu Mei, who has produced historical dramas for TV.

Hu told Xinhua the biopic was an effort to promote the great philosopher's life and thoughts, and Chinese culture.



People present flower baskets to celebrate Confucius' birthday at the Confucius Temple in his birthplace of Qufu, on Sept. 28, 2009, said to be his 2,560th birthday. (Fan Changguo/Xinhua/Associated Press)

The story focuses on Confucius' transformation from an ordinary bookkeeper to a philosopher and sage, and the journey he made to spread his thinking around then-warring kingdoms of northern China.

Pop singer Faye Wong interrupted a hiatus in her career to sing the theme for the film.

During the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution Confucius' family home, family grave plot and a temple honouring him in his hometown of Qufu were smashed and relics were lost.

But Chinese students are now studying his *Analects* and the government is again promoting Confucius as a representative of Chinese culture.