For much of the past 100 years, Confucius has been vilified as the source of all of East Asia’s ills. Women blamed him for their secondary status in society, reformers for the region’s poverty and weakness before the West, and democrats for propping up oppressive governments. For Asia to become wealthy, powerful and modern it had to ditch its ancient Confucian traditions and copy the ways of the West. Even today, Confucius is being used by authoritarian regimes in China and elsewhere to justify their human rights abuses and suppression of civil liberties. Wouldn’t we be better off without Confucius? Well, not really. There have been many Confuciuses conjured up by politicians and scholars for more than 2,000 years to suit all sorts of purposes, both good and evil. That doesn’t mean Confucius has no value today. His ideals about moral righteousness and sound government transcend any age or culture, and can help us resolve society’s problems, see the world in new light and, most of all, become better people.

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