The ways that social hierarchy was cemented in classical Hindu and Confucian civilizations were: education levels, religion, and economy.

Education levels were very important in Confucian society; however, they were not so important in Hindu society. In Confucian civilization, your level of education could put you much higher on the social chain through the examination system, put in to place during the han dynasty. With this examination system, any male citizen was allowed to study the teachings of King Fuzi (known in the Western world as Confucius), and take an examination on them. If he passed the exam, the citizen would be able to become a part of the shi, thus increasing his social status. In Hindu civilization, however, education could not really affect a person’s social status. No matter how much education a person had, that person would not be able to move out of his cast; though he could, admittedly, move within that caste. This is probably because Confucianism focused more on intellectual pursuits—most notably the political philosophy that would keep the balance of the Mandate of Heaven. In Hindu society, the focus was instead on religion and reaching Nirvana, and education wouldn’t get you any closer, unless your Dharma calls for you to be educated. Hindu society did not value education as much as those in the Confucian societies.

While education was important in just the Confucian society, religion was an important factor contributing to the social hierarchy in Hindu society but not in Confucian. In the Hindu society, Hinduism contributed the caste system, which dictated a person’s position in the bigger picture of the social hierarchy. It also contributed dharma, which was what the individual would have to do with his life in order to move on in the caste system. In Confucianism, religion played no part in the social hierarchy. These differences come because religion was fairly unimportant to the Chinese—they were more concerned with bringing the balance necessitated by the Mandate of Heaven to their politics. In the Hindu civilization, however, religion was extremely important to the Hindu people. Religion did not contribute to social standing in Confucianism anywhere near the level that it contributed in that of the Hindus.

Merchants played a role in the social hierarchy of both the Confucian and Hindu societies. However, while in Confucian merchants were looked down upon and low in the hierarchy, in Hindu society, merchants were very necessary and were high up in the jātis of whatever caste they belonged to. Confucians believed that a person who lives to earn money—as merchants did—were not the best of people, as that took their focus away from their loyalty to the state. However, the fact that they did recognize that the merchants were actually necessary kept the merchants from being the actual lowest. In Hindu society, trade was a large part of the economy. Thus it becomes obvious that the merchants who conduct the trade would be considered important and well-respected. Merchants were considered with the opposite respect in the two societies—looked down upon in the Confucian and valued in Hindu.

The social hierarchies in the Confucian and Hindu societies were set up quite differently, based on the fact that the two civilizations had very different priorities. This made the three aspects of education, religion, and economy have different importance and thus effect on their hierarchies.