

Religious Thought in China

Daosim



Daoism Overview

- Can be traced back to prehistoric Chinese folk religions
- Laozi regarded as founder
- Gained prominence during the Tang Dynasty and promoted actively by Song era rulers

Daoist Concepts/Beliefs

- Tao: (the way) the flow of the universe, bigger scale of qi
- Te: (power, virtue, integrity) the active expression of Dao, living “the way”
- Wu wei: (without action) knowing when to act and when not to act
- P’u: (uncarved block) perception without prejudice

Yin and Yang

- Dynamic force of the Dao
- Seemingly disconnected, but are interconnected
 - Constantly interact with one another

	Yin	Yang
Nature	Feminine Passive Receives Winter Low Left Dark	Masculine Active Creates Summer High Right Light
		
Symbols	Moon Tiger North	Sun Dragon South
Color	Black	Red
Numbers	Even	Odd
Chinese Character	陰	陽
Original Meaning	North side of the hill (i.e. away from the sun)	South side of the hill (i.e. facing the sun)

Daoist Doctrines

- Tao Te Ching: written by Lao Tzu, most influential Daoist text
- Daozang: the Daoist canon, written during the Jin, Tang, and Song Dynasties

Buddhism



Buddhism Overview

- Based on the religious teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, “The Enlightened One”
- Began in India
- Life involves suffering
 - Give up worldly desires and seek enlightenment
 - Achieve enlightenment, achieve nirvana
 - Entering nirvana means ending the cycle of rebirth

Prince Siddhartha

- Prince Siddhartha was kept in the palace, his father feared he would become an ascetic
 - Escaped the palace and saw four people
 - The Four Sights:
 1. An old man
 2. A sick person
 3. A corpse
 4. An ascetic
- The first three sights showed him the sufferings of life. The last sight gave him hope.

Gautama Buddha

- Siddhartha abandons the royal life and takes up a spiritual quest
- Discovered the Middle Way
- Sat under a fig tree to meditate and achieved enlightenment
 - The tree is known as the Bodhi tree

Buddhist Concepts/Beliefs

- Karma – actions that bring about a consequence
- Rebirth – a succession of many lifetimes in many possible forms, no self, an ever-changing process, 5 realms
- Samsara – sentient beings crave pleasure and are adverse to pain, perpetuate the cycle of rebirth

Suffering: Causes and Solutions

- The Four Noble Truths
 - First teaching of Gautama Buddha after attaining Nirvana
 1. Life leads to suffering.
 2. Suffering is caused by cravings and attachments.
 3. Suffering ends when craving ends, achieve enlightenment.
 4. To achieve enlightenment, one must follow the path Buddha has laid out.

Suffering: Causes and Solutions

- The Noble Eightfold Path

- The last of the noble truths is broken in to eight parts

1. right view: viewing reality as it is, not just as it appears to be
2. right intention: aspiring to rid yourself of bad qualities
3. right speech: no lying, gossiping, etc.
4. right action: don't partake in activities that will harm yourself or others
5. right livelihood: do not engage in an occupation that would bring harm to yourself or others
6. right effort: abandon harmful thought, words, or deeds
7. right mindfulness: be alert of what you are saying
8. right concentration: concentrating on an object and reaching a meditative state

Buddhist Doctrines

- Buddhavacana – the word of Buddha
- Sutras – what Gautama Buddha actually said (or thereabouts)
- Pali Canon (aka: the Tipiaka)

Buddhism in China

- Entered China during the Han Dynasty
- Gained momentum during the political instability between the Han and Tang Dynasties
 - Appeal: hope for salvation and an end to suffering
- Adapted to Chinese culture and absorbed elements of Daoism

Pure Land Buddhism

- Emphasis: salvation through faith
- Buddha Figure: Amitabha
- Practices: Nirvana is hard to attain, devotion to Amitabha is the only way to be reborn to the Pure Land (a perfect realm where enlightenment is guaranteed)

Chan Buddhism

- Chan means meditation
- Aka Zen Buddhism in Japan
- Emphasis: meditation, awareness is the way to achieve enlightenment. Not based on texts but experiences
- Buddha Figure: Bodhidharma (Indian Buddhist) came to China to spread his ideas; ideas turned in to teaching by Chinese monk Huieng
- Practices: meditation and dharma (the teachings); enlightenment can happen quickly due to sound or movement; puzzling riddles (“What is the sound of one hand clapping?”)

Criticism

- No roots in Chinese culture as Buddhism began in India
- Withdraw from the world where Chinese believed they should be involved in society and family life
- Buddhist institutions have too much wealth and power

Opposition to Buddhism

- Violence against Buddhism
 - Emperor Wuzong, daoist, ordered 4,600 Buddhist monasteries and 40,000 temples destroyed. 250,000 monks and nuns had to give up Buddhism
 - Buddhism never fully recovered in China
- Most opposition comes from followers of Confucianism

Confucianism



Confucianism Overview

- Ethical and moral beliefs based on the teachings of Confucius
- Main belief system before the arrival of Buddhism

Confucius

- Lived during political instability (Spring-Autumn Period through the Warring States Period) in China
- Aka Kong Qui
- From a warrior family but lived in poverty
- His ideas were meant to rebuild China and restore peace
 - Wanted to restore the Mandate of Heaven

Confucian Concepts

- Li: (ritual) norms, what people should do in everyday life
- Xiao: (relationships) people have specific duties depending on their station in life; social harmony – every one knowing their place in society

Filial Piety (Xiao)

- The Five Relationships:
 - Ruler to Subject
 - Father to Son
 - Husband to Wife
 - Friend to Friend
 - Elder Brother to Younger Brother
- Specific duties for each relationship
- Veneration of elders

More Confucian Concepts

- Zhong: (loyalty) scholars must enter the civil service, loyalty to China
- Ren: (humanity) to act humanely towards yourself and others
- Yi: (righteousness) do what is right and moral
- Chu-tzu: (ideal man) few people attain the ideal showing all the characteristics of moral, ethical attitude and benevolence

Meritocracy and Governance

- Nobility of virtue, not nobility of blood
- Led to civil service examination system
- Form of government for the Han Dynasty

Confucian Doctrines

- Analects of Confucius – record of the words and acts of Confucius and his disciples
- Five Classics – five ancient Chinese books used in Confucianism and according to tradition, compiled or edited by Confucius
 - Include the Classic of Rites and the Spring and Autumn Annals

Neo-Confucianism

- Confucianism lost favor during the Tang Dynasty
- A new revived philosophy/religion formed during the Song era that blended Daoism and Buddhism in to Confucianism
- Began interpreting the classic writings and posing questions about the meaning of life
- Most famous Neo-Confucianist: Zhu Xi
 - Live life according to the Dao (the way) – a process of learning and self-improvement, not retreating from life

Confucianism and its Effect on China

Confucian Principle	Effect on China
Respect for the social order	Peaceful and stable society
Respect for social rank	Obedience to people of a higher rank
Importance of education	A society that valued learning
Rulers' moral obligation to the people	Rulers who justified actions in terms of people's well-being