

4 Three Schools of Thought in China

Guide for Reading

- What were the teachings of Confucius?
- How did Confucian ideas help shape Chinese life?
- How did Legalist and Daoist views differ?
- **Vocabulary** *filial piety, alchemy*

“Lead the people by laws and regulate them by punishments, and the people will simply try to keep out of jail, but will have no sense of shame. Lead the people by virtue . . . and they will have a sense of shame and moreover will become good.”

The great philosopher Confucius* offered this advice to China’s rulers about 500 B.C. Government, he felt, was more than enforcing laws. Rulers must also set a good example.

Confucius lived in late Zhou times, when war raged across China. Economic and social changes were also disrupting old ways of life. Seeing the chaos, thinkers put forward ideas about how to end conflict and restore social order. Their ideas would shape Chinese civilization for the next 2,500 years.

The Wisdom of Confucius

China’s most influential philosopher, Confucius, was born in 551 B.C. to a noble but poor family. A brilliant scholar, Confucius hoped to become an adviser to a local ruler. For years, he wandered from court to court talking to rulers about how to govern. Perhaps because he was too outspoken in his views, he never got a permanent position at court. Instead, he turned to teaching. As his reputation for wisdom grew, he attracted many loyal students.

The Analects. Like two other influential thinkers who lived about the same time,

*The name Confucius is the western version of the name Kong Fuzi, or Master Kong.

Gautama Buddha in India and Socrates in Greece, Confucius never wrote down his ideas. After his death, students collected his sayings in *The Analects*.

Unlike the Buddha, Confucius took little interest in religious matters such as salvation. Instead, he was concerned with worldly goals, especially how to ensure social order and good government. Confucius studied ancient texts to learn the rules of conduct that had guided the ancestors.

Five relationships. Confucius taught that harmony resulted when people accepted their place in society. He stressed five key relationships: father to son, elder brother to younger brother, husband to wife, ruler to subject, friend to friend. Confucius believed that, except for friendship, none of these relationships was equal. Older people were superior to younger ones; men were superior to women. Confucius did bolster the status of women by teaching that mothers of sons should be respected.

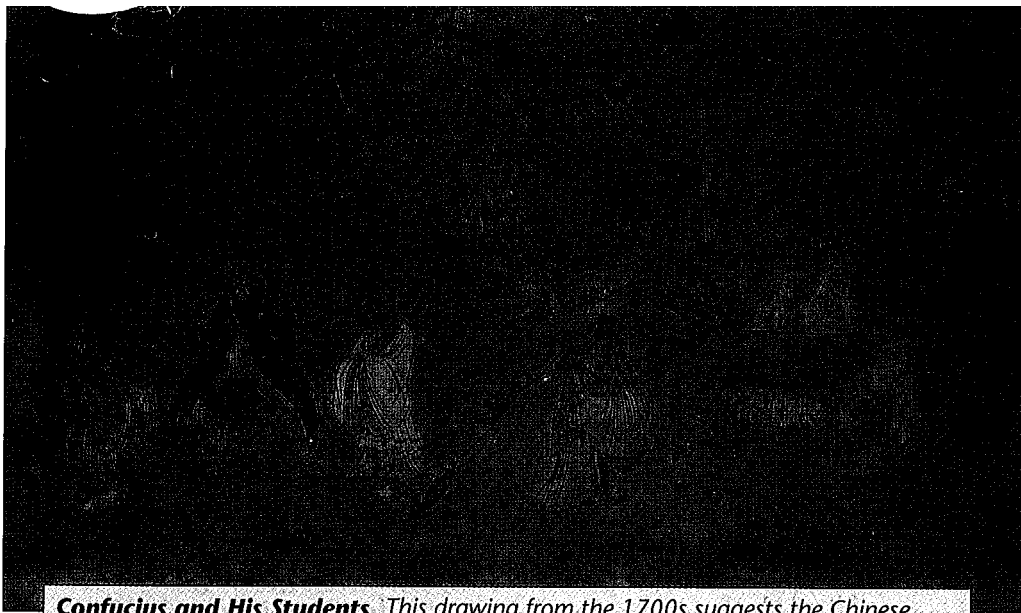
According to Confucius, everyone had duties and responsibilities, depending on his or her position. Superiors should care for their inferiors and set a good example, while inferiors owed loyalty and obedience to their superiors. A woman’s duty was to ensure the stability of the family and promote harmony in the home. Correct behavior, Confucius believed, would bring order and stability.

Confucius put **filial piety**, or respect for parents, above all other duties, even loyalty to the state. “While a father or mother is alive, a son should not travel far,” he said. Other Confucian values included honesty, hard work, and concern for others, which would promote harmony. “Do not do to others,” he declared, “what you do not wish yourself.”

Government. Confucius believed that people were naturally good. The best ruler was a virtuous man who led by example:

“If a ruler is upright, all will go well without orders. But if he himself is not upright, even though he gives orders, they will not be obeyed.”

Confucius put great faith in education for men. “By nature, men are pretty much alike,” he said. “It is learning and practice that set them apart.” He urged rulers to take the advice of



Confucius and His Students This drawing from the 1700s suggests the Chinese people's lasting respect for Confucius. Confucius sought to replace the conflict of his time with harmony and order. He believed that education should train people in proper values and rules of conduct. **Continuity and Change** Do you think that teachers today should instruct students in values and rules of conduct? Why or why not?

wise, educated men. Education would become the road to advancement in Chinese society.

Spread of Confucianism. In the centuries after Confucius died, his ideas influenced every area of Chinese life. Confucianism never became a religion, as Buddhism did. But Chinese rulers would base their government on Confucian ideas, choosing Confucian scholars as officials. The Confucian emphasis on filial piety bolstered traditional customs such as reverence for ancestors.

As Chinese civilization spread, hundreds of millions of people in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam accepted Confucian beliefs. Close to a third of the world's population came under the influence of these ideas.

The Harsh Ideas of Legalism

A very different school of thought grew out of the teachings of another Chinese philosopher, Hanfeizi (HAHN fay DZEE), who died in 233 B.C. According to Hanfeizi, "the nature of man is evil. His goodness is acquired." Greed, he declared, was the motive for most actions and the cause of most conflicts. Hanfeizi scoffed at the Confucian idea that people would follow the example of a good ruler. The only way to achieve order, he insisted, was to pass strict laws and enforce them with harsh punishments. Because of their emphasis on law, Hanfeizi's teachings were known as Legalism.

To Legalists, strength, not goodness, was a ruler's greatest virtue. "The ruler alone possesses power," declared Hanfeizi, "wielding it like lightning or like thunder."

Many feudal rulers chose Legalism as the most effective way to keep order. It was the official policy of the Qin (CHEENG) emperor who united China in 221 B.C. His laws were so cruel that later generations despised Legalism. Yet Legalist ideas survived in laws that forced people to work on government projects and punished those who shirked their duties.

Daoism: The Unspoken Way

A third Chinese philosophy, Daoism (DOW ihz uhm), differed from both Confucianism and Legalism. Daoists had no interest in bringing order to human affairs. Instead, they sought to live in harmony with nature.

The founder of Daoism was a mysterious figure known as Laozi (LOW DZEE), or "Old Master." He is said to have "lived without leaving any traces" at the time of Confucius. Although we know little about him, he is credited with writing *The Way of Virtue*, a book that had enormous influence on Chinese life.

Seeking "the Way." Laozi looked beyond everyday worries to focus on the *Dao*, or "the way" of the universe as a whole. How does one find the Dao? "Those who know the Dao do not speak of it," replied Laozi. "Those who

speak of it do not know it.” Daoists often gave such seemingly puzzling answers to show the conflict between human desires and the simple ways of nature.

Daoists rejected the world of conflict and strife. Instead, they emphasized the virtue of yielding. Water, they pointed out, does not resist, but yields to outside pressure. Yet it is an unstoppable force. In the same way, Daoists might give way in a conflict, only to return again, like water, to their natural course. Many Daoists turned away from the “unnatural” ways of society. Some became hermits, mystics, artists, or poets.

Government. Daoists viewed government as unnatural and, therefore, the cause of many problems. “If the people are difficult to govern,” Laozi declared, “it is because those in authority are too fond of action.” To Daoists, the best government was one that governed the least.

A popular religion. Although scholars kept to Laozi’s teachings, Daoism evolved into a popular religion with gods, goddesses, and magical practices. Chinese peasants turned to Daoist

priests for charms to protect them from unseen forces. Instead of accepting nature as it was, Daoist priests searched for a substance to bring immortality and experimented with **alchemy** (AL kuh mee), trying to transform ordinary metals into gold.

To achieve this goal, alchemists mixed chemistry and magic. Sometimes, their experiments led to advances in science. Efforts to find the key to eternal life may have contributed to discoveries in medicine. Daoists are thought to have invented gunpowder, which they first used in firecrackers to frighten ghosts.

A blend of ideas. Confucian and Daoist ideas influenced everyone from nobles and scholars to the poorest peasants. Although the two philosophies differed, people took beliefs and practices from each. Confucianism showed them how to behave. Daoism influenced their view of the natural world.

Buddhism in China

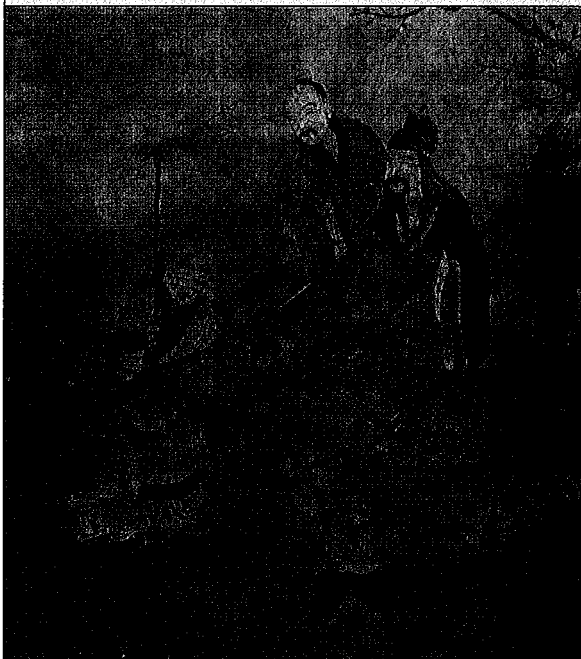
By A.D. 100, missionaries and merchants had spread Mahayana Buddhism from India into China. At first, the Chinese had trouble with the new faith. For example, Chinese tradition valued family loyalty, while Buddhism honored monks and nuns who gave up family life for solitary meditation. In addition, the Chinese language had no word for an unfamiliar, mystical concept like nirvana.

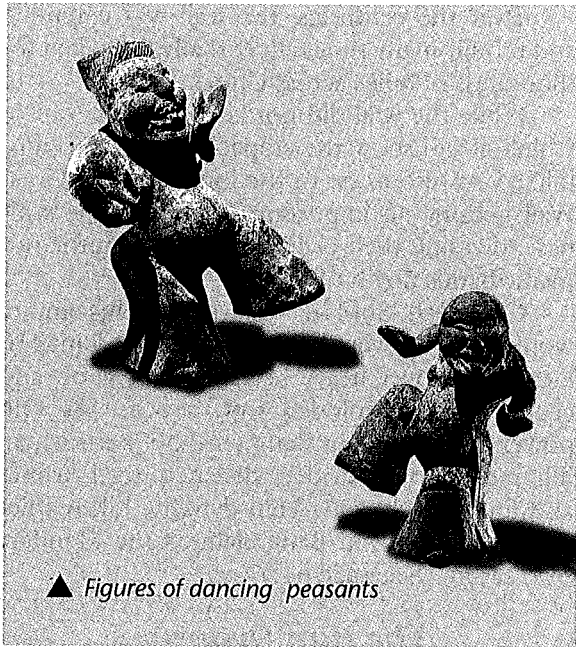
Despite obstacles such as these, Buddhism became more popular, especially in times of crisis. Its great appeal was the promise of escape from suffering. Mahayana Buddhism offered the hope of eternal happiness and presented Buddha as a compassionate, merciful god. Through prayer, good works, and devotion, anyone could hope to gain salvation. Neither Daoism nor Confucianism emphasized this idea of personal salvation.

In China, Buddhism absorbed Confucian and Daoist traditions. Some Chinese even believed that Laozi had gone to India, where he taught the Buddha. Chinese Buddhist monks stressed filial piety and honored Confucius as a person who had achieved enlightenment.

By A.D. 400, Buddhism had spread throughout China. From time to time, Chinese rulers persecuted Buddhists, but the new religion was

Yin and Yang “One must learn to be without desires beyond the immediate and simple needs of nature,” wrote Laozi, founder of Daoism. Here, a group of wise Daoists ponder the circular symbol for yin and yang. (See page 61.) **Religions and Value Systems** How does the ancient Chinese concept of yin and yang accord with Daoist beliefs?





generally tolerated. Large Buddhist monasteries became important centers of learning, literature, and the arts.

SECTION 4 REVIEW

1. **Identify** (a) *The Analects*, (b) Legalism, (c) Daoism.
2. **Define** (a) filial piety, (b) alchemy.
3. Explain how each of these thinkers believed an orderly society could be achieved: (a) Confucius, (b) Hanfeizi, (c) Laozi.
4. What ethical code of conduct did Confucius promote?
5. (a) Why did Buddhism appeal to many people in China? (b) How did Buddhism adapt to Chinese traditions?
6. **Critical Thinking Analyzing Information** "Rewards should be rich and certain so that the people will be attracted by them. Punishments should be severe and definite so that the people will fear them." Which of the philosophers discussed in this section expressed these ideas? Explain.
7. **ACTIVITY** Write a dialogue between Confucius, Hanfeizi, and Laozi on the proper role of government.

5 Strong Rulers Unite China

Guide for Reading

- How did Shi Huangdi unite China?
- How did Han rulers shape Chinese government?
- What advances did Han China make?
- **Vocabulary** *monopoly*

From his base in western China, the powerful ruler of Qin rose to unify all of China. An ancient Chinese poet and historian described how Zheng (JUHNG) crushed all his rivals:

“Cracking his long whip, he drove the universe before him, swallowing up the eastern and the western Zhou and overthrowing the feudal lords. He ascended to the highest position . . . and his might shook the four seas.”

In 221 B.C., Zheng proclaimed himself Shi Huangdi (SHEE hoo ahng DEE), or “First Emperor.” Though his methods were brutal, he ushered in China’s classical age.

Triumph of the First Emperor

Shi Huangdi was determined to end the divisions that had splintered Zhou China. He spent 20 years conquering most of the warring states. Then, he centralized power with the help of Legalist advisers. Using rewards for merit and punishments for failure, he built a strong, authoritarian government.

Sweeping changes. The emperor abolished the old feudal states and divided China into 36 military districts, each ruled by appointed officials. Inspectors, who were actually more like spies, checked on local officials and tax collectors. Shi Huangdi forced noble families to live in his capital at Xianyang, where he could keep an eye on them, and divided their lands among peasants. Still, peasants had to pay high taxes to support Shi Huangdi’s armies and building projects.