



## Chapter Overview

The Chinese call their traditions the three teachings. These are Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. In addition, there is the ubiquitous “popular religion” which is a syncretic mix of shamanistic folk traditions and elements from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Marked by an emphasis on right action instead of right belief, there is a general consensus about the religious parameters for the three elite traditions.

Confucius (551–479 BCE) was a transmitter of a tradition now called Confucianism, which originated during the Zhou dynasty and was based on the Five Classics: the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Later the *Analects* of Confucius also came to be considered part of the canon. The foundation of this system is based on a binary structure. With this as a foundation, openness to other possible explanations (e.g., Daoist, Buddhist) is possible and confrontation is limited. Everything existing in harmony with the Dao is the goal of Confucianism. This system begins in relationships: emperor and minister, father and son, elder and younger brothers, husband and wife, as well as the various relationships between friends, and it is developed through the praxis-orientated concepts of *ren* (humaneness), rites (and customs), filial piety, and rightness. Confucius’s ideas were developed by his students and various masters like Mencius, Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, and others, eventually producing philosophers of neo-Confucianism like Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming during the Song dynasty. Furthermore, there were a number of important female writers like Ban Zhao, Madame Zheng, and Song Ruozhao who helped in its development. There has been much activity in the twentieth century as the works of these masters are studied around the world and their influence continues to flow into New Confucianism.

In addition to the two major traditions of Confucianism and Daoism there are many other schools such as Mohism, the Legalists, the Naturalists, and more. Perhaps the most important of these many sects and schools is the popular religion: a loose collection of beliefs and practices.

The introduction of Buddhism during the Han dynasty presented some challenges to the Chinese Confucian state. Many Buddhist ideas and practices ran counter to Confucian notions of filial piety. Syncretic workings of Buddhism and the Daoist tradition, in addition to adaptations undertaken by the Buddhist tradition assisted in its assimilation into Chinese society. Persecutions of all Buddhist sects in the mid- to late-800s ended all lineages except the Chan and Jingtu. Reform movements towards socially engaged and humanistic interpretations of Buddhism have emerged more recently, from Taiwan in particular.

Korean religion was greatly influenced by Chinese religions but also has strong elements from non-Chinese shamanistic traditions, including an origin myth that became key to national Korean identity. A dynamic grew among native Korean elements, the Chinese elements, and Buddhism that was generally beneficial but at times antagonistic. Korean religion was greatly challenged by Christianity and Western ideas in the last centuries. Today, about half the population of Korea claims no religion and the remainder is equally divided between Buddhist and Christian beliefs.

Nonetheless, the three “foreign” traditions of Confucian, Buddhism, and Daoism, in conjunction with indigenous shamanist traditions continue to inform Korean culture and the numerous new religious movements that have arisen. Diaspora communities and scholars continue to debate the merits of a Confucian tradition that is based on morality and driven by Korean people as opposed to government institutions. Won Buddhism continues to grow both within South Korea as well as globally. Similarly, the People’s Republic of China has recently initiated international Daoist studies and instilled Confucian principals and Chinese people are revitalizing folk traditions locally. Both Korean and Chinese religions do not claim exclusive truths, aspire to harmonious relationships, and offer syncretic approaches to their pluralistic societies.

## Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you are encouraged to

- learn about the ancient Shang period with its corresponding folk traditions and ancient understandings of yin-yang, the *Classic of Changes*, seeking harmony, and divination;
- appreciate the ancient myths of Old Josean and origins of the Three Kingdoms of Korea;
- examine the Classical period from which the Confucian tradition occurred; Kongzi, Mengzi, and Xunzi’s thinking; the concept of the Mandate of Heaven; and the emergence of Laozi’s thinking, and early understandings of philosophical Daoism;
- explore the shared history of Korea and China—early migrations, syncretic religious blendings, and parallel texts;
- analyze the emergence and end of the Mohist tradition;
- outline the origins of Buddhism in China within the context of the Han dynasty and subsequent syncretic tendencies and critiques among the Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian traditions and occasional hostilities;
- examine important literary texts within each of the religious traditions through various dynastic periods within China and Korea, such as the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Five Classics*, *The Analects*, *Songs of the South*, *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts*, *Records of the Grand Historian*, *Jikeji*, and *Mirror of the Three Religions*;
- learn about women’s Confucian and neo-Confucian roles in both China and Korea;
- analyze reforms of each of the three main traditions in both Korea and China, such as the neo-Confucian, New Confucian, Religious Daoism, Linji and Caodong Buddhist sects and their respective practices;
- learn about the effects of modernity, foreign hostilities, and “Western” influences on the three main religious traditions and folk traditions within both Korea and China;
- appreciate recent developments within Korea and China as well as their respective diasporas in addressing the traditional religions of both countries.

## Key Terms

**Dao/dao** The “Way” in the sense of the Ultimate or the “way” in the sense of the path taken by followers of a particular tradition.

**Kongzi** The first teacher of Confucianism, known in the West as Confucius (551–479 BCE).

**Laozi** The “Old Master”; putative patriarch of Daoism and author of *Daodejing* who may or may not have been a real historical figure.

**Meng Ke** The second most prominent Confucian thinker, also known as Master Meng, Mengzi, and Mencius; believed that human nature is originally good.; lived 343–289 BCE.

**qigong** A “breath” discipline or set of exercises which enhances health and spiritual well-being; also the necessary energy that animates everything in the universe.

**ren** The central Confucian virtue, typically translated as humaneness, goodness, or compassion.

**wuwei** “Not-doing,” a state of acting without intention or self-interest; an ideal for both Confucians and, more prominently, with Daoists.

**xiao** Filial piety; using respect and duty to express a child’s love for its parents, the cornerstone of Confucianism, considered a virtue by all Chinese religions.

**Xunzi** The third most important classical Confucian thinker who maintained that human nature is evil; lived 310–219 BCE.

## Study Questions

See below for answers with page references.

1. What are the four categories of concerns in the Confucian classics and how are they understood?
2. How did religious ritual become an indispensable part of state governance in ancient China?
3. In an effort to create a female Confucian tradition, what did Madame Zheng emphasize?
4. What are three elements from the Daoist tradition that pique the interest of Westerners?
5. What was Laozi’s view of Confucian rites?
6. What was Zhuangzi’s idea of the sage?
7. In Daoism, the ultimate Void is formless; given this, how is it visualized?
8. What is the relationship between the popular and elite religion?

9. The Korean shamanistic approach to deities and spirits was expressed through which folk activities?
10. What are the *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts* and why are they important?
11. What are eight reasons for Buddhism's popularity in China?
12. What were the social conditions of the early Song dynasty that allowed for a re-assertion of Confucian ideas?
13. How did religion in China fare immediately after the 1966 Cultural Revolution?
14. What story explains how the mythical King Dangun founded Old Joseon?
15. Who are the traditional household deities in Korean folk or shamanistic traditions?

## Reflection Questions

1. Kongzi, Menzi, and Xunzi are all Confucian thinkers; however, they differ on what they consider to be the root cause of human suffering and our innate being. Can we ever know if we are innately good or evil? Can we be both? How does the view of a human being's innate nature affect our view on the root cause of suffering and how to approach the problem?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the concept of the Five Relationships, its hierarchical arrangements, and yet reciprocal duties? Do you agree that, "if a husband has a remonstrating wife, then he won't fall into evil ways?" Is this in the best interests of the state?
3. What was the Daoist fascination with physical immortality? Why was this movement so powerful that people ingested cinnabar (mercuric sulphide) in an effort to achieve their goal?
4. What do you think of the Jingtuo tradition and its reliance on "other-power" in order to achieve enlightenment? Do you think adding merit and demerit points as in some popular religious groups assists in obtaining enlightenment?
5. Why is there such a disparity between statistics that report a low "religiosity" among Korean and Chinese peoples, yet there is seemingly a vast network of institutional and popular traditions, both ancient and new? What accounts for this discrepancy?

## Research Paper Topics

1. What is the Mandate of Heaven and what role did the socio-economic conditions of the late Shang period have in establishing this concept? How did this concept impact Zhou understandings of royal governance and the Qin dynasty influence Kongzi's future thinking?

2. Dragon boat racing is now an international phenomenon and demanding sport. What is the history of this “sport” and relationship with Chinese folk traditions? How is it currently affiliated with various international racing events and how has it recently been incorporated in Olympic venues?
3. During the Han dynasty Confucian understandings of morality were based on economic welfare. Can Confucian ideals from 2,000 years ago be applied to our current global economy, corporate understandings, and distribution of wealth? Why or why not?
4. The concept of “emptiness” or the Void is common to both Daoist and Buddhist traditions. What are the philosophical underpinnings of this position within each of the traditions as they had developed throughout the Han dynasty? What may account for some of the similarities in thinking?
5. How did shifting the focus from monasticism to lay practices help Buddhism adapt to Chinese culture? How was the *Vimalakirti* text critical in assisting with this shift in focus?
6. Research the “practical” and “doctrinal” schools of Buddhism found at the end of the Tang dynasty. What forms of adaptation enabled the “practical” schools to survive the persecution of Buddhists that began in 845 CE?
7. Who founded White Cloud Monastery? What key principals form the foundation of this community’s approach and interpretation of its traditions? How has this assisted in its continued success from the twelfth century until present times?
8. How do the New Confucians differ from Neo-Confucians? How are they similar? Explore how notions of syncretism and harmony continue within diaspora understandings of Chinese identity and culture.
9. How has Taixu’s Foguangshan reframed Buddhism in light of modernity? Explain this school’s doctrinal approach as well as its practices. Does it continue to be “Chinese” in its nature or does this community invoke a more “cosmopolitan” approach to the notion of suffering?
10. The relationship between the Chogye Buddhist order and the Japanese during the 35-year occupation is a complex one. Can it be argued that in some way the Japanese “liberated” Buddhism from the mountains and returned it to mainstream Korean society? In other ways, Buddhism suffered under Japanese occupation. Discuss and analyze this paradox.

## Additional Resources

### Audio-Visual

*Living Chinese Philosophy*. Insight Media. 2007. 100 minutes.

*China: The Mandate of Heaven*. Central Television. 52 minutes.

## Print

- Buswell, Robert F., Jr., ed. 2007. *Religions of Korea in Practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Despeux, Catherine and Livia Kohn. 2005. *Women in Daoism*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Shahar, Meir. 2008. *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

## Internet

<http://www.chancenter.org/>

<http://tuweiming.net/>

<http://www.wonbuddhism.org/>

## Study Questions: Answer Key

1. The four categories are political, familial, individual, and cosmic. Political harmony is based on family harmony, which is the responsibility of the women in a family. Family and political harmony require the self-cultivation of husband and wife, which is itself based on quieting the heart-mind (*xin*), and attempting to attain the moral and spiritual nobility of sagehood in order to recover natural unity. In this way, the self is brought into harmony with Heaven and Earth. This is a cosmic harmony of humans, ghosts and spirits, deities, Heaven, and Earth. (pp. 270–275)
2. An intense interest in “right” governance and a belief in divine intervention through revelation to the king was expressed in the Shang dynasty through the duality of the king as a shaman who seeks communication with spirits. These spirits were thought to hold the real power over the land the king ruled. Thus, religious ritual became a central part of state governance. (p. 271)
3. Madame Zheng emphasized the importance for women of purity or chastity, filial piety, intelligence, and wisdom. The exemplary wife encourages her husband in good behaviour and guides him with modesty and deference. She uses music and rites, ranging from formal courtesy to religious rituals, to moderate his emotions. But Zheng also taught a wife should not obey her husband’s every command. (pp. 306–307)
4. Three elements that Westerners find appealing about the Daoist tradition are the main text, the *Daodejing*, the notion of “going with the flow”; and its interest in ecological thinking in Taiwan. (pp. 320–321)
5. Laozi takes a dim view of Confucian rites. He understood rites as the diminishing of loyalty, good faith, and the beginning of disorder. Like the Confucians, Laozi believes that the Way is

rooted indispensably in person, family, village, and state; however, Laozi sees discipline as achievable through the cosmic all-embracing Way, not through rites created by humans. (p. 283)

6. The sage's mind wanders in simplicity, blending with the vastness of the Way. He follows things as they are, through self-so-ness or spontaneity, without preconceived notions and rules, making clear assessments based on Oneness and emptiness. (p. 284)
7. It can be visualized as the highest deity: the Great One, Supreme Unity, or Supreme Oneness (*Taiyi*). Achieving oneness occurs through maintaining original unity by "holding fast to the One (*shouyi*)," "sitting and forgetting," visualizing the cosmos within one's body, or following the circulation of vital energy in the body. (p. 293)
8. Although the popular traditions often express universal ideals similar to those of the elite tradition, there are clear differences. The elite traditions have their own distinct texts, while the folk traditions syncretize their various ideas and rely on oral teachings even when semi-classical texts are available. The elite traditions are based on a canon with fixed systems of practices and beliefs that support orthodoxy. The folk traditions are fluid, without the clear standard of orthodoxy that the elite maintains. The goals of folk tradition tend to be prosaic, and focus on health, happiness, long life, prosperity, and status using emotional and dramatic rituals. (pp. 264, 269, 315)
9. Korean shamanism was expressed through native songs and dances dedicated to communicating with various deities and spirits: tutelary deities belonging to each village, pairs of spirit-generals responsible for all activities above and below the earth, and deities of hearth and roof beam. Shamans were also summoned in cases of demonic disturbances and to perform rituals during annual community celebrations and ceremonies of thanksgiving. (p. 325)
10. The *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts* are writings that were sealed in a tomb in 168 BCE during the Han dynasty. They were not discovered until 1973 during an archeological excavation. The manuscripts shed light on the Huang-Lao group that had been present the royal court during the Classical period but then disappeared after Emperor Wu made Confucianism the state religion. The Huang-Lao expressed early Daoist understandings of non-action (*wuwei*) being the best response by a sage king and established connections between Heaven, Earth, and human beings. (p. 285).
11. Buddhism gained popularity with many Chinese because of its art and architecture; the promise of enlightenment; structured practices involving meditation, chanting, and study; sophisticated doctrines of philosophy and discourses; a separate spiritual community without mundane distractions; new concepts such as *lunhui*, *niepan*, and *yinguo*; and new possibilities for women as monastics. (pp. 298–299)
12. The Song dynasty followed the end of the Tang dynasty which witnessed the persecution of Buddhists in latter part of the Tang period. Daoism had been stripped of its status as the state religion. Into this void, Confucian thinkers applied new ideas, synthesizing Buddhist and Daoist understandings within the Five Classics. The result was the re-assertion of Neo-Confucian ideas at the state level. (pp. 308–310)
13. The Communist government in the People's Republic of China was intolerant of all religions because Marxist ideology adopted the notion that religion was like an opiate that prevented the

masses from seeking justice and working towards a utopian society. As a result the temples and shrines of all Chinese religions were targeted for destruction and people who continued their religious practices were persecuted. (p. 319)

14. The mythical tale explains how the deity Hwanin helps his deity son Hwanung descend from heaven and settle in a cave on Mount Taebaek. Hwanung finds himself in the cave with a bear and a tiger. They recognize him as a god and ask to be transformed into humans. While the bear successfully transforms into a woman, the tiger did not follow Hwanung's instructions. The woman wants a child, so Hwanung transforms into a man in order to sleep with her. Their son is Dangun Wanggeom the King who founds Old Joseon. (p. 323)
15. The three household deities that are revered and petitioned in Korean shamanistic practices are the gods of the hearth, the roof beam, and the outhouse. The roof beam god protected the main room of a household where important functions took place, such as receiving guests or laying out a corpse. (p. 325)