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# Religious and Beliefs of Ancient China

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# Key Terms

Philosophy: set of beliefs about the world and how to live.

Ancestor Worship: practices of honoring the spirits of the dead

Confucianism: teachings of the thinker Confucius

Filial Piety: the devotion of children to their parents

Daoism: an ancient Chinese way of life that emphasizes a simple and natural existence

# Spiritual Traditions

- Both heaven and Earth were populated by a variety of spirits.
- Heaven contained the spirits of sun, moon, stars, and storms.
- Earth contained the spirits of hills, rivers, rocks, and seas.
- There were good spirits and bad spirits. Good ones brought happiness and the bad ones brought bad luck and danger.
- During festivals, loud sounds were used to scare off the bad spirits.
- The most important spirits were the ones of their ancestors. They were supported and cared for and remained part of the family and in return the ancestors would protect them and guide them.
- The Chinese developed many rituals to honor their ancestors. They created shrines with tablets inscribed with their ancestor's names, set out food on special occasions for them, burned "spirit" money to provide them with income in the afterlife. These are all known as ancestor worship and are still practiced today.

# The Teachings of Confucius

- Confucius is one of the most important philosophies that developed in China. He and later thinkers at the end of the Zhou dynasty looked for solutions to China's problems.
- He is known as the "First Teacher" and is honored for his great wisdom.
- He saw for himself some of the problems of his time, such as greed and cruelty. Officials often did not enforce the law. Some took bribes or illegal payments, to do favors for the rich. Peasants starved while rulers taxed them to pay for wars.
- Confucius believed that the cause of the disorder was that the Chinese had turned away from the traditional roles and the values of the early Zhou.
- Only a return to those ideals would bring order to China and made his life's work teaching the wise ways of the ancestors.

# Continued Notes

- The heart of Confucianism lay in the five relationships.
  - Ruler and subject
  - Father and son
  - Husband and wife
  - Older and younger brothers
  - Two friends
- The important relationship was between father and son, or parents and their children. This was based on the filial piety, which he referred to as “the source of all virtues”.
- The higher person of higher status must fulfill the responsibilities of their roles.
- The person of the lower status should respect the senior person.
- Confucius believed order and harmony would come to society once all people acted according to their roles.

# Beliefs of Daoism

- Another group of thinkers saw the disorder and responded with the development of Daoism.
- It is the philosophy of following the Dao, the natural way of the universe.
- A man named Laozi founded Daoism, he is known as a sage, or wise person and is said to have written down the beliefs in a book called the *Dao De Jing*.
- Ancient Chinese people believe in two great forces of nature called Yin and Yang. They are opposite forces that work together to create harmony. Yin is a female force that is dark, cool, and quiet. Yang is a male force that is bright, warm, and active.
- Daoists see the Dao (the path of the way) as the source of yin and yang. Order comes when people keep their life simple instead of competing for wealth and power.
- Daoists were not concerned with the morals, rituals, and learning that the Confucians valued.
- Ancient Chinese thinkers used ideas from both ways of life to influence Chinese culture and history.