

## Confucianism and Taoism: The Chinese Search for Harmony

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### Folk Religion: Popular Beliefs & Practices

- the “Great Church”
  - Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism
  - distinctly Eastern sensibility
  - *not* denominationalist
- popular or folk religion
  - “of the people”
  - melds religion, magic, superstition
  - harmony with nature, ancestor worship

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### the Yin and the Yang

- *yang-yin / yin-yang*
- unity, balance, wholeness
- constant ebb and flow of forces in the universe
- dynamic tension
  - complementary not competitive
  - key: balance

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### the Yin . . .

- negative
- receptive
- stillness
- feminine
- dark, wet
- quiet, yielding
- valley
- moon

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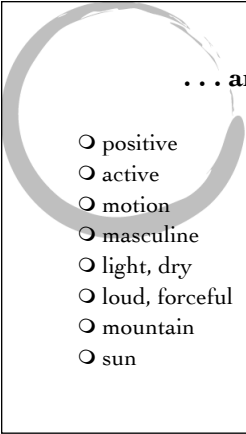
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**... and the Yang**

- positive
- active
- motion
- masculine
- light, dry
- loud, forceful
- mountain
- sun



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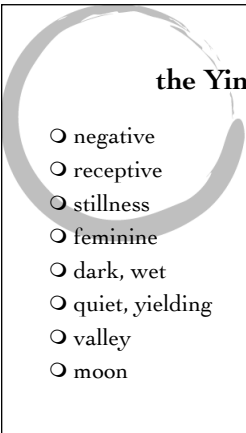
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**the Yin and the Yang**

○ negative	○ positive
○ receptive	○ active
○ stillness	○ motion
○ feminine	○ masculine
○ dark, wet	○ light, dry
○ quiet, yielding	○ loud, forceful
○ valley	○ mountain
○ moon	○ sun



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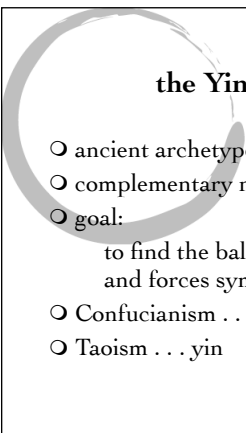
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**the Yin and the Yang**

- ancient archetypes
- complementary not competing
- goal:
  - to find the balance between attributes and forces symbolized by the yin-yang
- Confucianism . . . yang
- Taoism . . . yin



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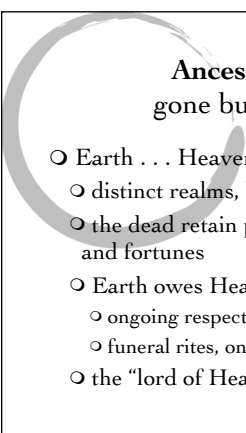
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**Ancestor Worship:  
gone but not forgotten**

- Earth . . . Heaven
  - distinct realms, but intimately linked
  - the dead retain power over Earthly affairs and fortunes
- Earth owes Heaven
  - ongoing respect and honor
  - funeral rites, ongoing sacrifices, rituals
- the "lord of Heaven"



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**Shintoism:**  
the way of the gods

- traditional religion of Japan
- spirits . . . *kami*
- like Confucianism
  - respect for elders
  - obedience to authority
- like Taoism
  - reverence for nature
  - archways-without-buildings

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**Confucianism:**  
Creating Social Harmony

- Confucius
  - K'ung Fu-tzu
    - Kung the Master, the First Teacher
  - 551-479 BCE
  - raised by his mother
  - minor government official
  - became an itinerant teacher

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**Confucius: the man**

- a “one-man university”
- an extraordinary teacher
- champion of the common people
- longed for a career in public office
- valued his integrity over political success, power or fame
- became influential only after his death

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**the Period of the Warring States**

- China in Confucius' lifetime
  - social anarchy
  - political corruption
  - unrestrained violence and bloodshed
- breakdown of traditional values, bonds among people
  - from group consciousness to individual self-consciousness & self-interest

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## the Confucian Remedy

- the Age of the Grand Harmony
  - Chou Dynasty
  - 500 years earlier
  - a golden age of peace and social harmony
  - became the touchstone for the Confucian project: the revitalization of Chinese society
  - forging of a deliberate tradition

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## a deliberate Tradition

- a framework for ethical living
- a return to classical writings, social rituals, moral teachings, songs
- nothing new
- rather, a return to earlier wisdom
- a reformer
- social optimist:  
“Human beings are by nature good.”

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## Education & Ethics

- *Analects*
  - collection of Confucius' teachings
  - discussions with his students
  - proverbs
- 4 key areas:
  - culture, moral conduct, sincerity, truthfulness
- “learning how to be virtuous” (HQ 228)

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## the Virtue of Virtues

- *jen (ren)*
- humanity-at-its-best, humaneness, human-heartedness
- character for **human being** and **two**
  - literally “what happens when two people meet”
  - Confucian twist: what *should* happen when two people meet

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### Doing unto others . . .

“What you do not wish for yourself, do not impose on others.” (*Analects* 12.2)

- basis for morality: how people should interact with one another to maintain social harmony and cohesion
  - benevolence, loving-kindness, charity
  - treating others as we wish to be treated
  - to be “big” rather than “small”

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### Doing unto others . . .

- to ignore human-ness is to invite social disharmony, disorder, imbalance and chaos
- *chun tzu*
  - the embodiment of the Confucian ideal

“People need humanity (*ren*) more than fire and water.”  
(*Analects* 15.35)

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### Knowing what's right

- *li*
  - means **right** (the right thing to do)
  - and **rite** (ritual)
  - social rituals that embody good manners and politeness
    - maintain social harmony
    - insure one feels secure in any situation

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### It's all about relationship

- the Five Constant Relationships:

Parent . . . Child

Husband . . . Wife

Elder Sibling . . . Younger Sibling

Elder Friend . . . Younger Friend

Ruler . . . Subject

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### It's all about relationship

- the Five Constant Relationships
  - inherently unequal
  - yet bound by mutuality
    - the respect and obedience that is shown to the more powerful individual **must be earned, not simply granted**
    - if not, "true obedience" is to disobey

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### It's all about relationship

- Rectification of Names
  - the character and behavior of one in a social role must match the highest ideal of that role:
    - father
    - husband
    - elder sibling or friend
    - ruler

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### It's all about relationship

- family: the foundation of society
- honor and respect are key
  - within the family
    - for parents
    - for elders
    - filial piety
  - within the nation
    - for rulers

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### It's all about relationship

- mutuality
- highest expectation on the more powerful party in any relationship
- "contagion" of goodness or weakness
- potential for distortion
- antidote: true obedience
  - "Heaven sees as the people see;  
Heaven wills as the people will."

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### the Confucian Project

- to become better, more fully human
- context: web of relationships
  - self-in-relationship
- ever-widening circles of empathy:
  - family . . . friends
  - community . . . nation
  - all humans . . . all life
  - the cosmos itself

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### a religion or a way of life?

- Confucius spoke little of religion or religious matters
- his emphasis was on the needs of Earth rather than those of Heaven:
  - “When you are not yet able to serve people, how can you serve the spirits?”
- yet Confucianism became a religion
  - shrines and rituals

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### a religion of a way of life?

- the Mandate of Heaven
    - cosmic power on the side of right
    - supported his teachings
    - Heaven best served when life on Earth is the best it can be
- “Heaven only is great. Earth is small.”
- “He who offends the gods has no one to pray to.”

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### the last word

“I will not grieve that others do not know me. I will grieve that I do not know others.”

○ Confucius

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**Taoism:**  
Harmony with Nature

- the yin to balance the Confucian yang
- harmony
  - within each person
  - with nature
  - with the natural order
  - with the deepest reality underlying human existence

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**the Old Master**

- Lao-Tzu
  - “a mosaic of legends”
  - came to be revered as a god
  - older contemporary of Confucius
  - minor government official
  - ended his life as a hermit in the western mountains
  - author of the *Tao Te Ching*

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**the Way**

- the *Tao*
  - means “the Way”
  - not a pathway leading to a specific place
  - but the “way of all things”
    - in the universe
    - among all people
    - within each person

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**the Way**

“The *Tao* is like a well:  
used but never used up.  
It is like the eternal void:  
filled with infinite possibilities . . .  
Every being in the universe  
is an expression of the *Tao*.”  
(*Tao Te Ching* 4, 51)

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### the Way . . .

- like Brahman
  - it is the reality that underlies and supports all beings and all being
- like *sunyata*
  - it is the emptiness that is filled with potential
- and its power is always there, waiting

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### . . . and Its Power

- the *Tao Te Ching*
  - the Way and Its Power
  - 5000 characters
    - “It can be read in half an hour or a lifetime.”  
Huston Smith
- guide for how to tap into the ever-flowing power of the Tao
  - naturalness, spontaneity
  - unforced action

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### In harmony with the *Tao*

- *wu wei*
  - literally, inaction
  - but not inactivity
  - the virtue of virtues in Taoism
  - more accurately, unforced action, going with the flow, getting out of the way

“Practice not-doing  
and everything will fall into place.”

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In harmony with the *Tao*,  
the sky is clear and spacious,  
the earth is solid and full,  
all creatures flourish together,  
content with the way they are,  
endlessly repeating themselves,  
endlessly renewed.

When man interferes with the *Tao*,  
the sky becomes filthy,  
the earth becomes depleted,  
the equilibrium crumbles,  
creatures become extinct.

(*Tao Te Ching* 39)

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### the Watercourse Way

- water
- both symbol and model
- yielding yet inexorable
  - the Colorado River & the Grand Canyon
- gentle yet powerful
  - water on rock
  - spring rain . . . a flood

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### the Watercourse Way

- water
- without following direction or rules, always seeking the lower place, yet able to reach its goal, find its way to the source
  - from mountain top to ocean
- through stillness comes clarity:  
"Muddy water, let stand, will clear."

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### Applications of the Taoist Way

- the Martial Arts
  - a melding of Taoism & Zen Buddhism
- *Tai-chi chuan*
  - choreographed meditation
  - *wu wei* applied to movement
    - each movement flows into the next without the sacrifice of balance or mental alertness

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### Applications of the Taoist Way

- *Chi*
  - literally, breath
  - an inner life-force that may be released to flow freely or blocked
- *Chi Kung*
  - healing arts
  - acupuncture, acupressure
  - healing herbs

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## Applications of the Taoist Way

- art & architecture
- humans against the backdrop of the natural world
- temples built to blend in with their surroundings
- *feng shui*
  - spaces where we live or work should allow for the flow of chi as well
  - harmony, simplicity, naturalness

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## the last word

Open yourself to the Tao,  
then trust your natural responses;  
and everything  
will fall into place.

*Tao Te Ching*

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