

Key Concept 2.1

The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

As states and empires increased in size and contacts between regions multiplied, religious and cultural systems were transformed. Religions and belief systems provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by. These shared beliefs also influenced and reinforced political, economic, and occupational stratification. Religious and political authority often merged as rulers (some of whom were considered divine) used religion, along with military and legal structures, to justify their rule and ensure its continuation. Religions and belief systems could also generate conflict, partly because beliefs and practices varied greatly within and among societies.

FOCUS ON THE FOUR RELIGIONS/BELIEF SYSTEMS FOUNDED IN THIS ERA



When it comes to the foundation of BUDDHISM, there are two key people you need to focus on: **BUDDHA & ASOKA.**

Setting into motion the **WHEEL OF LAW**... **BUDDHA's FIRST SERMON c. 520**

"And the Blessed one thus addressed the five [monks]. "There are two extremes, O [monks], which he who has given up the world, ought to avoid. What are these two extremes? A life given to pleasures, devoted to pleasures and lusts: this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, ignoble, and profitless; and a life given to mortifications [*asceticism*]: this is painful, ignoble, and profitless. By avoiding these two extremes, O [monks], the Tathagata [*a title of Buddha meaning perhaps "he who has arrived at the truth"*] has gained the knowledge of the Middle Path which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to the Sambodhi [*total enlightenment*], to Nirvana [*state of release from samsara, the cycle of existence and rebirth*]..."

Four Noble Truths

- 1 "This, O [monks], is the Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering.
- 2 "This, O [monks], is the Noble Truth of the Cause of suffering [*desire*], which leads to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there.
- 3 "This, O [monks], is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering: it ceases with the complete cessation of this [*desire*]. -- a cessation which consists in the absence of every passion ...
- 4 This, O [monks], is the Noble Truth of the Path which leads to the cessation of suffering: that Holy Eightfold Path

"In the history of the world there have been thousands of kings and emperors who called themselves 'their highnesses,' 'their majesties,' and 'their exalted majesties' and so on. They shone for a brief moment, and as quickly disappeared. But Asoka shines and shines brightly like a bright star, even unto this day."

King Asoka, the third monarch of the Indian Mauryan dynasty, set out to spread the ideals of Buddhism after his conversion. He had his EDICTS written on ROCKS & PILLARS all over his empire. Asoka's edicts are mainly concerned with the reforms he instituted and the moral principles he recommended in his attempt to create a just and humane society. Two of them are below.

"Beloved-of-the-Gods, King [Asoka], conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, [Asoka] came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dharma (Buddhism), a love for the Dharma and for instruction in Dharma. Now [Asoka] feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas."
"King [Asoka], desires that all religions should reside everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart. But people have various desires and various passions, and they may practice all of what they should or only a part of it. But one who receives great gifts yet is lacking in self-control, purity of heart, gratitude and firm devotion, such a person is mean."



DAOISM/TAOISM is a hard to grasp belief system that originated in China c. 500 BCE.

Laozi (or Lao Tzu) was the head librarian (Keeper of Records) for the Zhou Empire. Many legends surround Laozi, including that he was born as a 62 year old man. Below are two accounts of one of history's most elusive sages...

"When Confucius was still a young man, although already widely known for his knowledge, he received reports that an old archivist, in the Imperial Library, known as Lao-tze, was expounding strange metaphysical doctrines. Confucius, who had always been disturbed by the unusual, decided to meet with Lao-tze. Confucius also wished to examine an old manuscript in the Imperial Library, creating the perfect opportunity to meet. Confucius put on his most formal gown, in a sign of politeness to his elder, Lao-tze. The elaborate gown, however, only annoyed Lao-tze during their meeting.

"Confucius brought many questions to ask the Librarian, but before he could ask them, Lao-tze began to berate him with questions of his own. "What do you want?" asked Lao-tze. "To study the ancients," replied Confucius. Lao-tze then asked, "Why study the Ancients, whose bones have turned to dust?" As Confucius tried to respond, he was cut off by Lao-tze, "Put away your polite airs and fine robes. The wise man does not display his treasure." Confucius later referred to the Librarian as the "*Old Dragon*."


Little is known of the "Old Dragon". Just before he left China (on the back of a water buffalo) he wrote down his ideas in the Tao te Ching, a concise ambiguous book describing his belief system. Unfortunately, the main idea of the book is that the Tao cannot be described in words.

The Dao (this spelling is the closest to the way it is pronounced in Chinese) is the ultimate creative principle in the universe. It is, literally, "the Way or the Road". All things are connected to the Dao. It is not a God and should not be worshipped as one. It follows the Yin & Yang or the Good and Bad.

In contrast to Confucianism, the goal of Daoism is to achieve harmony or union with nature. Whereas Confucianism relies on RITUAL & ORDER, Daoism espouses wild nature and individualism.

If you are having trouble understanding DAOISM, don't worry. That seems to be by design as Laozi said, "*The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao.*"

FOCUS ON THE FOUR RELIGIONS/BELIEF SYSTEMS FOUNDED IN THIS ERA

 **CONFUCIANISM** is the set of beliefs based on the teachings of K'ung Fu-tse (Confucius) c. 500 BCE.

Confucianism, with a few exceptions, will be the main source of Chinese thought after the Qin Dynasty.

The same century that produced the Buddha, and Laozi, produced Confucius. He was not of princely birth or a son of nobility. Although legend later claimed that he was of Royal lineage, Kung himself stated that he was "without rank and in humble circumstances."

Little is known about his early life. It is believed that he was the youngest of twelve children (ten of which were girls). His father died when he was young and his mother struggled to keep the family alive. She was able to afford K'ung an education. He quickly found that education requires "Good teachers and good students." Born into a turbulent era in Chinese history, K'ung devoted his studies to how a peaceful, honest government might be attained.

He got a government post and began to study everything he could find. He quickly picked up the nickname "K'ung-fu-tse" or K'ung the Philosopher (from which we get name Confucius). He quit his job to devote his time to study. People came from all around to study with K'ung. By his 30s, he had over 3,000 followers.

K'ung taught on all types of subjects. However, he never spoke on gods, the Universe, or the afterlife.

THE FIVE CONFUCIAN RELATIONSHIPS

RULER & SUBJECT:

"Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son... To govern is to correct. If you set an example by being correct, who would dare to remain incorrect?"

FATHER & SON:

"Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man's character... Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence (respect), where is the difference?"

ELDER BROTHER & YOUNGER BROTHER:


"Should one immediately put into practice what one has heard?" "As your father and elder brothers are still alive, you are hardly in a position immediately to put into practice what you have heard."

HUSBAND & WIFE:

"The woman follows the man. In her youth she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son"

FRIEND & FRIEND:

"Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say. Do not accept as friend anyone who is not as good as you"

 The world's largest religion was founded in this era by a carpenter in Judea claiming to be the son of god.

Jesus of Nazareth (4 BCE-33 CE) was a Jewish carpenter who claimed to be the son of god and was later executed by the Romans. Below is his most famous sermon that encompasses his main beliefs.

A ND seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain:
** and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

13 If ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.

1 6 Even so let your light shine before men, that they may See your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

1 7 Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfill.