

God in Other Cultures:
Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto

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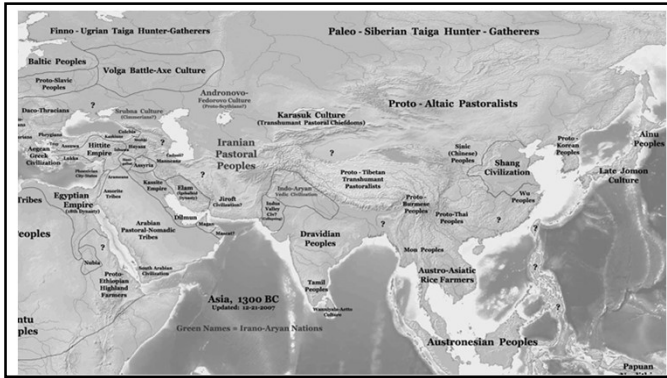
OVERVIEW

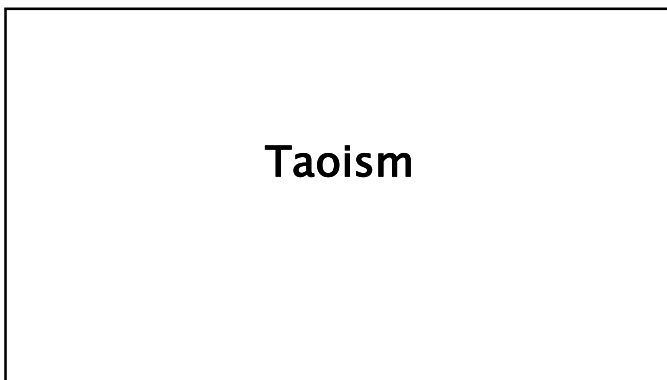
Basis for overview of religions:

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.
Always be prepared to give an
answer to everyone who asks you to give
the reason for the hope that you have.
But do this with gentleness and respect...


1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)







Taoism



Early Chinese religious thought

- **Yang and Yin**
 - **Yang: male side of the Dao (bright, warm, dry)**
 - **Yin: female side of the Dao (dark, cool, moist)**
 - **Duality of the universe**
 - Positive and negative
- **“Classic Texts”**
 - **I Ching - most important**

Early Chinese religious thought

- Animism
 - Spirit of the world of nature
 - Good spirits: shen
 - Bad spirits: kwei
 - Worship of the spirits of the dead
- Alter of Heaven
 - In Peking





Taoism (Daoism)

- “founder” = Lao Tzu
- Writing: Tao Te Ching
 - <http://www.chinapage.com/gnl.html>
- Tao means “the Way” – the cosmic force behind all phenomena

Nature of the Tao

- Imperceptible, indiscernible, formless, nameless
- “if you have named, explained or understood the Tao, it is not the Tao”
- Lies outside all categories
- Nothing can be predicted about Tao

Nature of the Tao

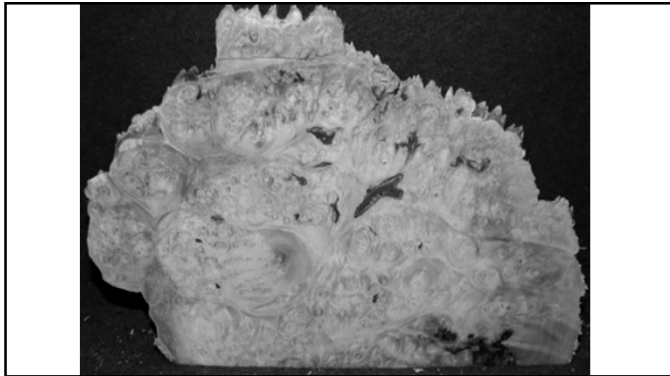
- Defies description as nonbeing
- Is primordial, undivided state underlying being and nonbeing
- Is the inherent, purposeless, impersonal amoral Cosmic Principle

Taoist concepts

- **Non-action (wu-wei)**
 - Does not imply anti-action or deliberate intervention (passive resistance)
 - Is non-striving; flowing with the natural course of things
 - the harmonious cyclical order of change and reversal

Taoist concepts

- Excludes efforts to fight for against something
- Reflected in nature - it does not support or resist cosmic rhythm; it lets things happen naturally



Taoist concepts

- **As a result, people are better off without extensive government or social structures**
- **Humans cannot conquer nature**
- **Education only corrupts the natural goodness of people**

Taoist concepts *

- **Relativity (chiao)**
 - **Nothing has intrinsic value**
 - **Purpose and value arise in relationship to something else**
 - **Judgments on what is right and wrong are relative to one's personal stance, situation and needs**

Taoist concepts

- **Return (fu)**
 - **Process by which all things return to their original state**
 - **Anything which develops a certain quality will inevitably revert to the opposite**
 - **Since everything comes from the Tao, it will ultimately return to it**



Taoist concepts*

- Transformation (hua)
 - Life is an eternal transformation from one form to another but not in a cause/effect type of moral relationship
 - Life is an infinite process with no absolute end – thus people are immortal
 - Only those who experience it are aware of the reality beyond duality

Taoism: Worldview

- Humans
 - Are best in their natural state – weak and simple
 - Old age is a sign of wisdom in the Tao
- Problem for Humans
 - Disharmony with the universe (Tao)
 - Suffering comes from trying to conquer nature, establishing artificial human organizations

Taoism: Worldview

- Solution
 - Returning to the simple life
 - Good, long life is the reward for learning to go with the flow of the Tao
 - Meditation on "the One" – both emptiness and nothingness or non-being leads to union with the Tao
 - Goal of mediation is to internalize the energies of the universe and promote health, long life

Taoism: Worldview

- **Community and Ethics**
 - Inaction is the secret to success (wu-wei)
 - By doing nothing, one has a positive effect on society
 - Ignoring one's neighbors is the evidence of wu-wei

Confucianism



Confucius

- **Born about 551 BC**
- **Died about 479 BC; lived about 78 years**
- **Seen as important or as great as Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus, or Muhammad**
- **This is more than likely because he sought and succeeded in becoming that which he taught was ideal**
 - the superior man
- **The Analects are attributed to him**
 - <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/conf1.htm>

Confucius

- Probably lived toward the end of the “golden age” of Chinese dynastic life – the Chou dynasty
- Father was an old soldier; mother raised him as traditional “gentleman” though he was poor
- Thus, he was very well educated
- Extremely well regarded as a teacher but was disappointed in the “system” that kept him out of royal court positions

Teachings

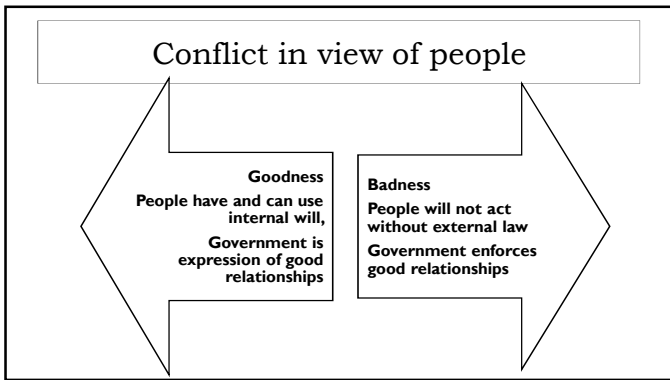
- Humans are basically good
- Humans learn best through example
- Society thus must produce *junzi* (*chun-tzu*) or a “great man” – superior man; ideal man
 - Opposite of the jealous, petty, selfish narrow-minded man
- Has much in common with Plato’s teachings

Summary of **JUNZI** (*chun tzu*)

1. People exert their own uprightness regardless of circumstances
2. People are freely magnanimous
3. People are sincere in word and action
4. People are earnest / have integrity: what you see is what you get
5. People are generous in their relationships

Conflicts with Confucianism

- **Taoists**
 - Believed the need and desirability for government was harmful to people
 - Confucius believed that a good ruler will produce a good state in which people can be truly happy



Neo-Confucianism

- **Mainly from Zhuxi (Chu Hsi)**
 - Dominate intellectual force between 960AD and 1912 AD (Republic of China)
 - Turned public view outward instead of inward
 - There is an impersonal absolute in the universe
 - More knowable than the hidden Tao
 - More positive than the Void / Nothingness of Buddhism

Formal End of Confucianism

- **Communism and the Cultural Revolution ended what was left of Confucian influence on Chinese society**
- **As religion, Confucianism is dead**
- **However, the culture which Confucianism fostered is very much a part of China**

Confucianism is a religion...

- **References to heaven, ancestor worship, ceremonial practices and temples**
- **More than a creed to be confessed or rejected**
- **Is a lifestyle and mindset**

Confucianism is NOT a religion

- **No religious structure (priests, institutions, temples, etc.)**
- **Presents a body of ethical teaching with little reference to "heaven" or "God"**
- **Temples are more memorial places than religious structures**
- **A creed to be rejected or accepted**

Shinto

Early Beginnings

- Predates written records
- In Japanese: *kami no michi*: the way of the gods
- Centers around KAMI – spirits which are everywhere present
 - Manifestations of absolute power in the phenomenal world
 - Worship of KAMI was communication between the two realms

Korean influence

- Brought writing and books
- Brought Buddhism which was a challenge to the idea of KAMI
- Caused the beliefs of KAMI to be gathered together and systematized
- “Shinto” comes from the Chinese “shen-tao” or the way of the spirits (shen)

Shinto Myth

- Islands of Japan are the result of the union between Izanagi and Izanami
- Because of the death of Izanami and Izanagi's search and reclaiming her, he became ritually polluted
 - out of this has come the purification rites that play such an important role in Shinto
- Offspring of Izanagi and Izanami were understood to be the emperors

Shinto Worship

- Stems from understand of KAMI
- It is not human attempt to obtain a special gift or blessing but to share – through ritual – fellowship with the kami
- KAMI or spirits can be either good or evil
- Purpose is to integrate the world of humans with the world of the KAMI

Warrior Code

- **Bushido**
 - Influenced by Confucianism's "junzi"
 - Influenced by Buddhism's teachings of harmony and self-discipline

Warrior Code

–Code includes

- Loyalty, gratitude, courage, justice
- Truthfulness, politeness, reserve, honor
- Men practice it as “hara-kiri”
- Women practice it as “jigai”
- Death is better than disgrace or failure

State Shinto

- Though present in times past, presence and influence of the West sharpened the ideals
- Resulted from an internal disagreement among Japanese leaders about who should be in charge and what the direction should be
 - Deeply influenced by the bushido code of honor and respect
 - When leaders disagreed with the shogun, he resigned rather than pushed “his” way

Present day Japan

- Shinto and Buddhism often practiced together
- Three “forms” of Shinto recognized

Shinto: Worldview

- **The World**

- Is good; Japanese islands were created specifically for the Japanese; foreigners will never have a complete share in the country

Shinto: Worldview

- **Humans**

- Shinto focuses on Japanese people rather than all
- Freedom is limited
- People came from KAMI and are potentially KAMI
- People are not isolated or independent
- People achieve their highest value as parts of the nation

Shinto: Worldview

- **Problem for Humans**

- **Alienation**
 - loss of honor or “face”
 - Ritually unclean
 - Estranged from KAMI or from family, ancestors, community

- **Solution**

- **Reconciliation**
 - Purification, offering and prayers, heroic deeds, suicide

Shinto: Worldview

- **Community and Ethics**
 - Devotion to family and nation is above all else
 - Unethical behavior can result in retribution of KAMI
- **Rituals and Symbols**
 - Pilgrimages are outward example of proper KAMI treatment, especially to the Shrine of Ise

Grand Shrine Ise



Shinto: Worldview

- **Life after Death**
 - At death the body is cremated and the person joins his ancestors
 - Ancestors can assist their family members in the journey of life
 - Some influence of Buddhism seen here
 - Becoming a KAMI takes time
