

## CONFUCIANISM

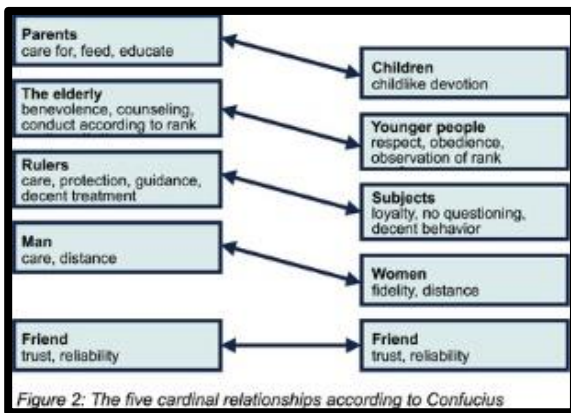
Confucianism is a system of beliefs based on the teachings of Kong Fuzi (called Confucius by Europeans), a man who lived in China from 551 to 479 BCE. He worked as an accountant for the ruling Zhou (pronounced JOE) dynasty. As the Zhou Empire weakened and various Chinese states began battling for power, Confucius became concerned. He recalled the virtues of past rulers who had maintained a peaceful and stable society. Gradually he gathered followers and taught them what he believed was the proper way to live. After his death, his followers compiled his sayings into a book called Analects which became the most important source of his teachings.

Confucianism is a philosophy that defines proper conduct for people and governments. According to Confucius, people are naturally good and should concentrate on improving their behavior and doing what they know is right. He called this proper behavior, *li* (pronounced LEE). Confucius believed that if everyone followed *li*, society would be ordered and peaceful.



Figure 1: The Confucian symbol, *li*

He taught that a harmonious society had to be built upon Five Key Relationships in which the participants follow *li*: 1) ruler and subject, 2) parent and child, 3) husband and wife, 4) older person to younger person, and 5) friend and friend. The first four were hierarchical relationships in which one person is viewed as the superior and worthy of respect and obedience. In turn, this superior person is expected to be benevolent and to set a good example of moral behavior. The fifth relationship is the only one in which the persons are considered equal. In addition to each person behaving properly, Confucius believed that for society to be strong, rulers had to be models of virtue.



Few rulers during Confucius' time accepted his ideas. However, long after his death, his teachings spread throughout China. Beginning with the Han dynasty, which ruled from 206 BCE to 220 CE, Confucianism became the official state belief system. Confucian teachings allowed the Han to have a more stable government. Under the Han and later rulers, governments officials were chosen based on their education in Confucian teachings and performance on examinations which were intended to reveal who were "worthy Confucian" individuals.

### CONFUCIANISM IS INFLUENCED BY BUDDHISM

After the Han collapsed, Buddhism diffused into China via the Silk Road. It competed with Daoism and Confucianism for dominance. Buddhism brought with it more metaphysical (bigger picture, cosmogony) outlooks. And as the Chinese came to understand and appreciate these doctrines, Buddhism became a magnet for the best minds.

Confucianism (as social morality or learning needed for government service) was regarded as a complement to the more spiritual Buddhism. But its approach to self-improvement seemed boring in comparison with an enlightenment to be achieved through the inner discipline of meditation provided by Buddhism.

Buddhism reached a creative and flourishing peak during the 7<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. And that, the Chinese government encouraged a reaction against the "foreign" religion and a revitalization of Confucianism.

This renewed or "neo"-Confucian vision equals the scope of Buddhism. It was affected, however, not by borrowing, but by creative reinterpretation of traditional Confucianism to meet new spiritual expectations. It answers the Buddhist focus on the bigger picture. Human interpersonal relationships and concern for society and government are inseparable from the path to ultimate personal fulfillment.

## TAOISM (DAOISM)

Taoism is a belief system based on the writings of a Chinese wise person, named Laozi (pronounced Lau-ZUH). Scholars know so little about his life, but most scholars believe that Laozi was born in the late sixth century BCE, and kept records in the court of the Zhou (pronounced JOE) Empire. Laozi believed that striving for power and wealth was harmful because it was unnatural. He wrote down his ideas, which was collected in a book called, "The Way and Its Power."

Taoism is a philosophy that teaches that people can gain peace and happiness by becoming one with the Dao, or the Way. The Dao is a universal force connected to nature that creates order. Taoism teaches that people should see themselves as part of nature and lead a life in harmony with it. Laozi believed that people should notice how nothing in nature strives for fame, power, or knowledge. Instead, nature accepts what comes its way, like a piece of grass that bends when the breeze blows.



Figure 3: Laozi

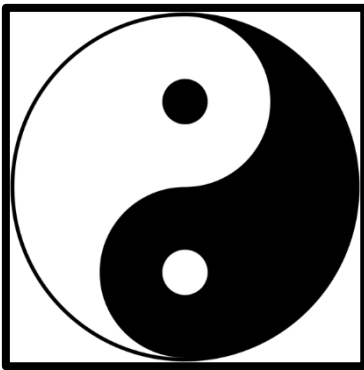


Figure 4: Yin and Yang

True harmony comes from balancing the opposite forces of nature, called *yin* and *yang*. Laozi taught that it is impossible to have good without bad, beauty without ugliness, or pleasure without pain. Because Taoists see good and bad as connected, they try to accept both.

Laozi taught rulers to make fewer laws. He called the way of ruling *wuwei* (pronounced WOO-WAY), or "action through inaction." Rather than attempting to take control and guide the people, a ruler should take very little action and only support people in achieving what they naturally desire. Just as a farmer cannot force a plant to grow, Laozi thought that a ruler cannot force the people to prosper.

During the Han Dynasty, from 206 BCE to 220 CE, Confucianism became the official belief system. However, Han rulers also adopted some Taoist principles. For example, they made fewer laws and fought fewer wars, believing that laws and wars do not naturally strengthen society. One emperor followed Taoist advice and eliminated a heavy land tax on poor farmers. For a time, this policy helped ease the hunger of poor people.

Over the next thousand years, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (which had arrived from India) competed for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people and government. In Chinese philosophy, the phrase "Three Teachings" refers to these three philosophies existing in harmony. However, evidence has shown that each practice has dominated, or risen to favor, during certain alternating periods of time. Emperors who chose to follow one specific system may have discriminated against the others. A minority also claims that the phrase "three teachings" proposes that these mutually exclusive and fundamentally incomparable teachings are equal. Confucianism focuses on societal rules and moral values, whereas Taoism advocates simplicity and living happily while in tune with nature. On the other hand, Buddhism reiterates the ideas of suffering, impermanence of material items, and reincarnation while stressing the idea of reaching salvation beyond.

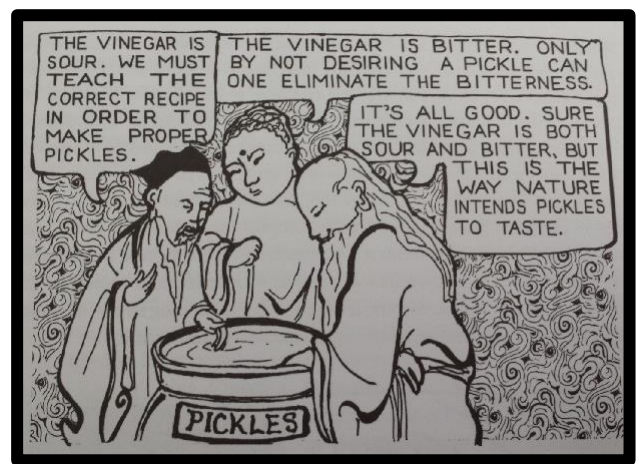


Figure 5: The Three Vinegar Tasters shows the philosophical differences of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist thought.

## ANIMISM

Animism is a category of beliefs not a singular religion. Belief systems classified as animistic hold that objects in nature, creatures and physical items possess distinct spirits that can affect human life. Animism perceives all things—animals, plants, rocks, rivers, weather systems, etc.—as animated and alive. Animism is often used to describe the belief systems of indigenous societies in contrast to the relatively more recent development of organized religions.

Animistic religions are usually practiced in more remote, less developed areas. Indigenous religions followed by Native Americans, sub-Saharan Africans, and Aboriginal communities in Australia reflect animistic beliefs

Uluru (Ayer's Rock) in Australia is sacred to aboriginal people in Australia. Uluru is a living and breathing landscape that is incredibly special, sacred and spiritual to the land's indigenous owners for thousands of years. Uluru is said to have been formed in the Dreamtime, the earliest period of time. The local Anangu people believe Uluru to be hollow and that it contains an energy source that marks the spot where their dreamtime began.



Figure 7: Uluru (Ayer's Rock)

In animistic religions, a shaman often serves as an intermediary between the spirit forces and the people.

Shinto, a traditional folk religion in Japan, has animistic characteristics. The kami, a class of supernatural beings, are central to Shinto. All things, including natural forces and well-known geographical locations, are thought to be home to the kami. A torii gate (most commonly found at the entrance of or within a Shinto shrine) is symbolically marks the transition from the earthly world to the sacred and a spot where kami are welcomed and thought to travel through.



Figure 8: Shinto Torii Gate

Animism is still widespread in Africa with an estimated 100 million adherent across many varieties of traditional beliefs. An example is the practice of Vodun in West Africa. It is prevalent in Benin, Togo and Nigeria in West Africa.



Figure 9: West African Vodun

Animism is often syncretic with universalizing religions. In sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity brought by imperialist Europeans often mixed with or borrowed animistic beliefs or customs to attract new adherents. It is also practiced in places culturally influenced by Catholicism with a strong presence of African descended inhabitants due to the forced diaspora of the Slave Trade. An example of syncretism arising from the intermixing of animistic religions and Roman Catholicism is Haitian Voodoo. Haiti, a Caribbean nation, was a French (Roman Catholic) colony almost entirely populated by African slaves.

## SIKHISM

The founder of the Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak, was born in the 1400s in the Punjab region of South Asia. The Punjab is an area currently split between Pakistan and the northwestern area of India. A majority of the global Sikh population still resides in Punjab on the Indian side of the border, where they make up 60% of the population. Approximately 25 million people practice Sikhism making it the world's 5<sup>th</sup> largest religion.



Figure 10: The Punjab region

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, was disillusioned by social inequities and religious hypocrisy. He believed that people of all faiths worship one Divine Being who created this world. Sikhism can be seen as syncretic by reflecting both Muslim and Hindu ideas prevalent in Northern India. Its focus on one God can be seen as influenced by the monotheism of Islam, while Sikhism also accepts reincarnation and unification with the ultimate reality which is found in Karmic religions such as Hinduism.

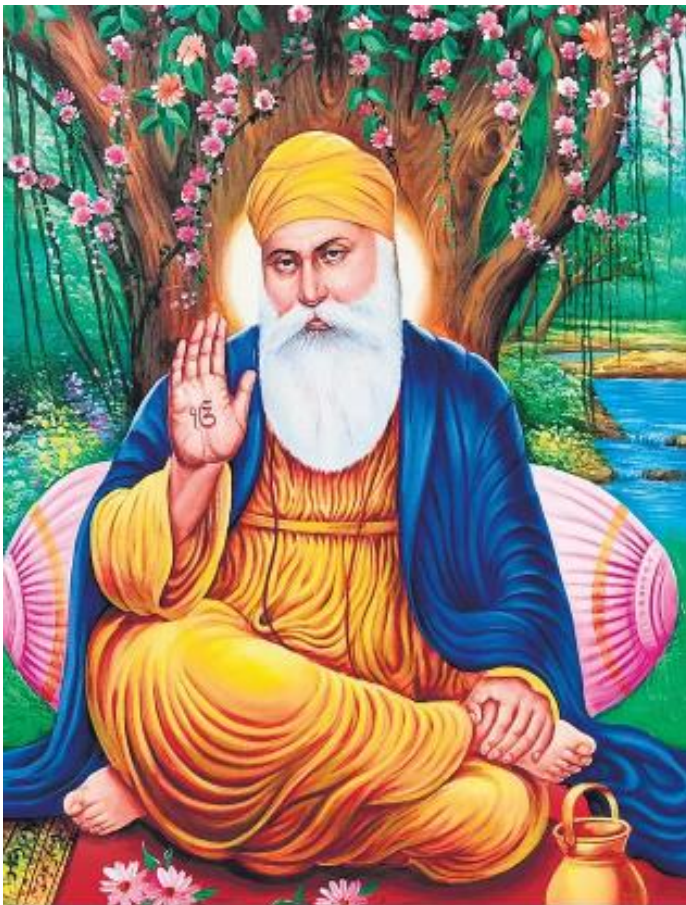


Figure 11: Guru Nanak

He asserted that all people are equally divine and deserve to be treated as such. From the Sikh perspective, there are no theological grounds to discriminate against people based on their social identities (gender, caste, ethnicity, or otherwise) and rejects all social distinctions that produce inequities. This thinking would apply to the Sikh rejection of the predominant structure for social hierarchy in South Asia, the caste system. The Sikh community does not have clergy or priests; each person can connect with the Creator directly and all positions of leadership and authority in Sikh religious and political life are open to people of all backgrounds. In the Sikh tradition, a truly religious person is one who cultivates the spiritual self while also serving the communities around them – or a saint-soldier. The saint-soldier ideal applies to women and men alike.

The Sikh scripture is referred to as the Guru Granth Sahib and holds ultimate authority within the Sikh tradition. The text was compiled by the Gurus themselves. The themes of the scriptural compositions have largely to do with the nature of divine experience and the steps one can take to achieve it. The entirety of the text is written in verse poetry, and a vast majority of it is set to music. Sikhs consider the Guru Granth Sahib to be a revealed text, and it

The Gurdwara is the Sikh place of learning and worship where the community gathers. The gurdwara is modeled after an imperial court in early modern South Asia, which helps remind worshipers of its sovereign and authoritative status. The most holy Gurdwara in Sikhism is the Golden Temple at Amritsar.



Figure 12: The Golden Temple at Amritsar



Figure 13: The khanda

In this spirit, Sikh women and men maintain five articles of faith, popularly known as the five Ks. These are: kes (long, uncut hair and beards), kara (steel bracelet), kanga (wooden comb), kirpan (small sword) and kachera (soldier-shorts). Although little historical evidence exists to explain why these particular articles were chosen, the 5 Ks continue provide the community with a collective identity, binding together individuals on the basis of a shared belief and practice. In addition, the khanda symbol represents the Sikh faith.

Turbans are an important part of the Sikh identity. Both women and men may wear turbans. Like the articles of faith, Sikhs regard their turbans as gifts given by their beloved gurus, and its meaning is deeply personal. In South Asian culture, wearing a turban typically indicated one's social status – kings and rulers once wore turbans. The Sikh gurus adopted the turban, in part, to remind Sikhs that all humans are ultimately equal. Among Sikhs, the turban has traditionally been worn by men, while women cover their heads with a long scarf called a chunni or dupatta. However, many Sikh women have adopted the turban as their head covering as well.



Figure 14: Sikh turban styles