

Unit Two: The Classical Era in World History - 500 B.C.E. - 500 C.E.
Unit 2.1: Eurasian Culture Traditions
Unit Guide

Resources:

- Readings on religions: Handout
- World History Database (<http://ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/>)
 - Username & password: lions
- Textbook: World History: Connections to Today
 - Chapter 4: Empires of India & China

A. INDIA

1. Indo-Aryan Beliefs.... <http://bit.ly/pd5aryan>

Identification:

1. Caste system
2. Castes
3. Brahmans
4. Kshatriyas
5. Vaisyas
6. Untouchables

2. Hinduism..... <http://bit.ly/pd5hindu>

Identification:

1. Reincarnation
2. Karma
3. Dharma
4. Yoga

3. Buddhism..... <http://bit.ly/pd5buddhism> &
<http://bit.ly/pd5erabuddhism>

Identification:

1. Siddhartha Gautama
2. Ascetics
3. Meditation
4. Nirvana
5. Four Noble Truths
6. Eightfold Path

CHINA:

4. Confucianism..... <http://bit.ly/pd5confuc>

Identification:

1. Confucius
2. Analects
3. Philosophy
4. Dao (Way)
5. Concept of duty
6. Humanity
7. Five Constant Relationships

5. Daoism (Taoism)..... <http://bit.ly/pd5taoism>

Identifications:

1. Laozi
2. Tao Te Ching (The Way of the Dao)
3. Concept of inaction

6. Legalism..... <http://bit.ly/pd5legalism>

Enduring Understandings:

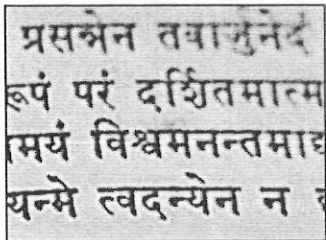
1. How did Legalism differ from Confucianism and Daoism?
2. Under Legalism, how did one follow the correct path?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a society based on Legalism?
4. In what ways did Legalism contradict this quote?
“Lead the people by virtue and restrain them by the rules of good taste, and the people will have a sense of shame, and moreover will become good.”

Indo-Aryan Belief Systems (Overview)

Hinduism, the dominant religion in India, has provided a belief system and social order to a large part of the world's population for at least 3,000 years. While the exact origins of Hinduism are rooted in an era before recorded history, most scholars believe that Hinduism began to emerge in India in around 1500 BC through a combination of the beliefs and practices of the indigenous Indian population (sometimes referred to as "Dravidian," although that more accurately refers to a language family) and a group of newcomers known as the Aryans. The Aryans were a group of Indo-European nomadic tribes who either invaded northern India or migrated there in the mid-second millennium BC. It appears that the Aryans soon achieved a form of cultural dominance over the indigenous populations. The resulting "Indo-Aryan" population developed a belief system that had tremendous influence on the culture and practices of the region, some of which have continued through the present day. That system included a social order divided into distinct social classes, which expanded into the Indian caste system; a belief in multiple gods with a small number of dominant deities; and ritual practices involving sacrifices, veneration of sacred animals, and consumption of sacred food or drink.



The Vedic Texts



It is difficult to determine what the Indo-Aryan people of the late Bronze Age believed because they left no written records, but archaeologists and historians have been able to make some strong guesses about their belief systems. Those scholars base their conclusions on a combination of archaeological evidence, comparisons with other Indo-European populations from the same period, inferences from modern and historical societies in India, and close examination of sacred texts from the Vedic cultures that emerged out of Indo-Aryan culture in the

first millennium BC. Those sacred texts, which include the Vedas and the Upanishads, were composed orally over a period of hundreds or even thousands of years and were put into writing in the ancient Sanskrit language beginning in around 600 BC. Those documents, in particular the Rigveda, are immensely important sources for historians because they present the earliest written records of the cultural knowledge and beliefs of the Indo-Aryan people. The historical interpretation of the texts remains controversial, however, because there is disagreement among scholars about who composed the texts (Indo-Europeans vs. the indigenous Harappan civilization), the region in which they were composed (Central Asia vs. northern India), and during what time period (ca. 4000-2000 BC vs. ca. 1800-1500 BC).

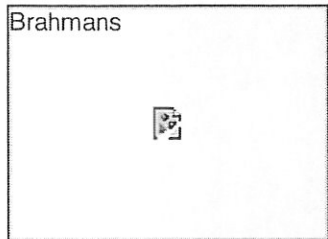
Polytheism and Caste

The primary picture that has emerged of the Indo-Aryans of the second millennium BC is of a polytheist culture with hereditary social divisions. They worshipped multiple gods—numbering 33 according to the Rigveda—with a single dominant god or divine force known as Brahma. The names of the Indo-Aryan gods bear some intriguing similarities to the gods worshipped in other Indo-European societies: the sky god Varuna, for example, appears to be cognate with the Greek god Uranus,

Carvings on Madurai temple



while the thunder god Indra is cognate with the Scandinavian god Thor. The [redacted] linguistic and mythological similarities between those gods does not mean that they were the same god, or that they performed the same function in different religious traditions, but it does suggest that some of the basic elements of Vedic tradition arose from the same cultural roots that influenced the polytheistic religions of Europe and the Near East. The Hindu pantheon of gods expanded considerably in later years and in different places—one Hindu tradition reveres an estimated 300 million gods—but it seems that many of the most important Hindu gods and religious concepts were already present in the Indo-Aryan culture of the second millennium BC.

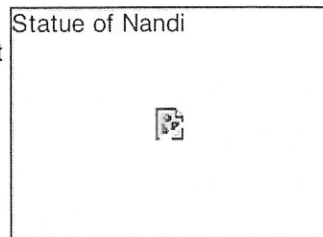


One of the most significant aspects of Aryan culture for later Indian life was the existence of strong divisions among social classes. Scholars, most notably Georges Dumézil, have hypothesized that early Indo-European societies were divided into three classes: warriors/kings, who protected and ruled their societies; priests, who looked after the spiritual life of their communities and may have acted as teachers and keepers of cultural knowledge; and peasants, who attended to the farming, animal husbandry, and other tasks that supported the upper two classes.

Some historians have argued that this threefold division of society among the Indo-European Aryans gave rise to the later Hindu system of *varna*, the most basic division of the Hindu caste system. The theory suggests that when the Aryans asserted their dominance over the indigenous populations, they placed themselves in the three highest classes: Kshatriya for the warriors/kings, Brahman for the priests, and Vaishya for merchants and skilled craftsmen, while placing the subjugated into the Sudra caste of laborers. The fifth caste of Hindu society, the untouchables, may have been incorporated into the *varna* system as the Indo-Aryans brought newly conquered populations under their control. The Indo-European-influenced *varna* system may then have been combined with a preexisting system of hereditary professions, known as *jati*, that gradually expanded and became codified into the caste system known in India today.

The Indo-Aryan Legacy

Many aspects of the Indo-Aryan belief system did not continue into later Hindu practices, while many modern aspects of Hinduism do not appear to have been part of Indo-Aryan beliefs. For example, the Rigveda describes a society in which a great deal of religious ritual centers on the consumption of soma, a stimulating beverage that is simultaneously a god and an offering to the gods. While ritualistic consumption and sacrificial offerings of sacred food and drink is still a part of some Hindu religious practices, soma and its ritual centrality are no longer evident.



Another significant area of difference is in the treatment of cows; modern Hinduism supports vegetarianism and views cows as sacred animals, whereas the ancient Aryans came from a pastoral tradition in which beef and other types of meat were a substantial part of the diet.

While there is still much to be learned about Indo-Aryan belief systems, it is clear that this ancient culture played a major role in the development of religion and society in India. Further archaeological and linguistic research may shed light on this pivotal component of Indian history.

Select Citation Style:

MLA

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Hinduism

Hinduism had its origins in the religious beliefs of the Aryan peoples who settled in India after 1500 B.C. Evidence about the religious beliefs of the Aryan peoples comes from the Vedas, collections of hymns and religious ceremonies that were passed down orally through the centuries by Aryan priests and then eventually written down.

Early Hindus believed in the existence of a single force in the universe, a form of ultimate reality or God, called *Brahman*. It was the duty of the individual self—called the *atman*—to seek to know this ultimate reality. By doing so, the self would merge with Brahman after death.

By the sixth century B.C., the idea of reincarnation had appeared in Hinduism. Reincarnation is the belief that the individual soul is reborn in a different form after death. As one of the Vedas says, "Worn-out garments are shed by the body/Worn-out bodies are shed by the dweller [the soul]." After a number of existences in the earthly world, the soul reaches its final goal in a union with Brahman. According to Hinduism, all living beings seek to achieve this goal.

Important to this process is the idea of karma, the force generated by a person's actions that determines how the person will be reborn in the next life. According to this idea, what people do in their current lives determines what they will be in their next lives. In the same way, a person's current status is not simply an accident. It is a result of the person's actions in a past existence.

The concept of karma is ruled by the dharma, or the divine law. The law requires all people to do their duty. However, people's duties vary, depending on their status in society. More is expected of those high on the social scale, such as the Brahmins, than of the lower castes.

The system of reincarnation provided a

religious basis for the rigid class divisions in Indian society. It justified the privileges of those on the higher end of the scale. After all, they would not have these privileges if they were not deserving. At the same time, the concept of reincarnation gave hope to those lower on the ladder of life. The poor, for example, could hope that if they behaved properly in this life, they would improve their condition in the next.

How does one achieve oneness with God? Hindus developed the practice of yoga, a method of training designed to lead to such union. (In fact, *yoga* means "union.") The final goal of yoga was to leave behind the cycle of earthly life and achieve union with Brahman, seen as a kind of dreamless sleep. As one Hindu writing states, "When all the senses are stilled, when the mind is at rest, that, say the wise, is the highest state."

Most ordinary Indians, however, could not easily relate to this ideal and needed a more concrete form of heavenly salvation. It was probably for this reason that the Hindu religion came to have a number of human-like gods and goddesses.

There are hundreds of deities in the Hindu religion, including three chief ones: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva (SIH•vuh) the Destroyer. Many Hindus regard the multitude of gods as simply different expressions of the one ultimate reality, Brahman. However, the various gods and goddesses give ordinary Indians a way to express their religious feelings. Through devotion at a Hindu temple, they seek not only salvation but also a means of gaining the ordinary things they need in life. Today, Hinduism is still the religion of the vast majority of the Indian people.



Picturing History

Siva is the god of destruction, transformation, and change. Siva creates with the right hand and destroys with the left hand. Compassion and healing are offered with the lower hands. How does this bronze statue illustrate Siva's role in Hinduism?

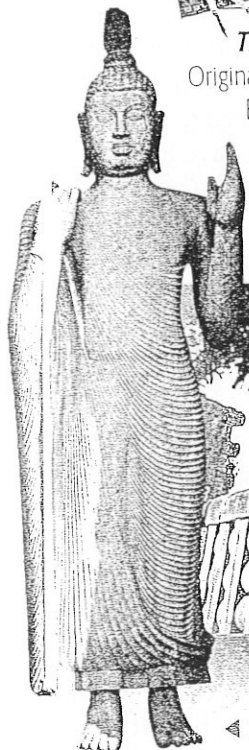
✓ Reading Check

Comparing How do karma, dharma, and yoga relate to reincarnation?

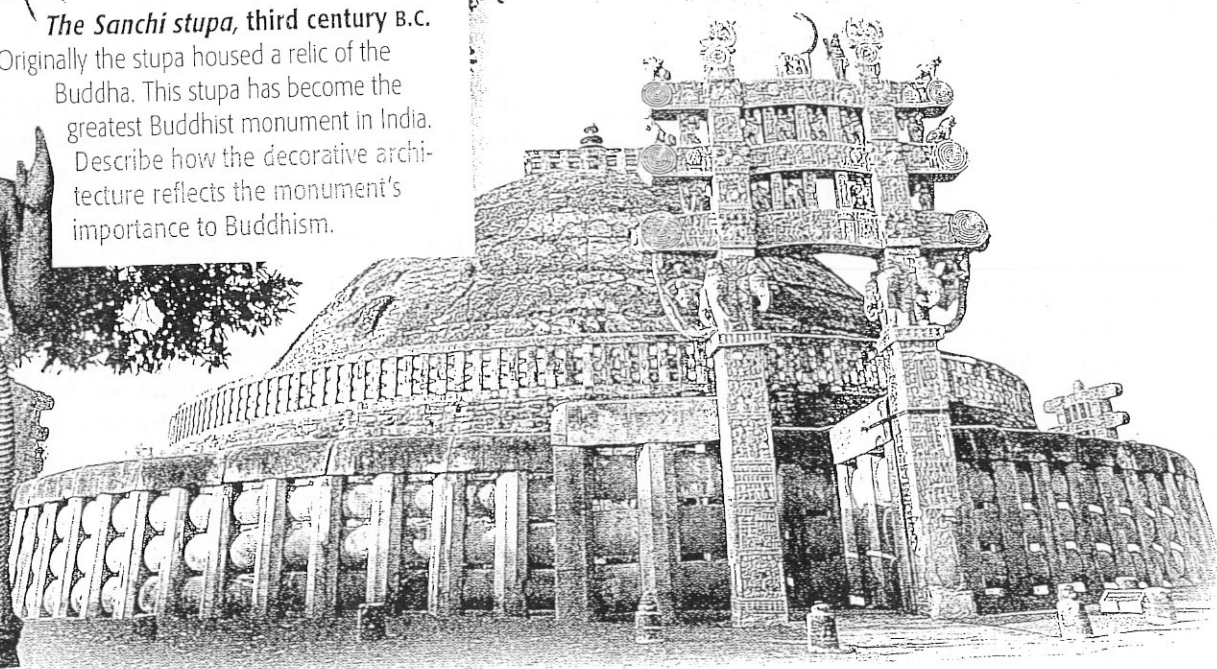
History through Architecture

The Sanchi stupa, third century B.C.

Originally the stupa housed a relic of the Buddha. This stupa has become the greatest Buddhist monument in India. Describe how the decorative architecture reflects the monument's importance to Buddhism.



◀ The Buddha



Buddhism

In the sixth century B.C., a new doctrine, called Buddhism, appeared in northern India and soon became a rival of Hinduism. The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama (suh •DAHR •tuh• GOW• tuh•muh), known as the Buddha, or "Enlightened One."

The Story of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama came from a small kingdom in the foothills of the Himalaya (in what is today southern Nepal). Born around 563 B.C., he was the son of a ruling family. The young and very handsome Siddhartha was raised in the lap of luxury and lived a sheltered life. At the age of 16, he married a neighboring princess and began to raise a family.

Siddhartha appeared to have everything: wealth, a good appearance, a model wife, a child, and a throne that he would someday inherit. In his late twenties, however, Siddhartha became aware of the pain of illness, the sorrow of death, and the effects of old age on ordinary people. He exclaimed, "Would that sickness, age, and death might be forever bound!" He decided to spend his life seeking the cure for human suffering. He gave up his royal clothes, shaved his head, abandoned his family, and set off to find the true meaning of life.

At first he followed the example of the ascetics, people who practiced self-denial to achieve an understanding of ultimate reality. The abuse of his

physical body, however, only led to a close brush with death from not eating. He abandoned asceticism and turned instead to an intense period of meditation. (In Hinduism, this was a way to find oneness with God.) One evening, while sitting in meditation under a tree, Siddhartha reached enlightenment as to the meaning of life. He spent the rest of his life preaching what he had discovered. His teachings became the basic principles of Buddhism.

The Basic Principles of Buddhism Siddhartha denied the reality of the material world. The physical surroundings of humans, he believed, were simply illusions. The pain, poverty, and sorrow that afflict human beings are caused by their attachment to things of this world. Once people let go of their worldly cares, pain and sorrow can be forgotten. Then comes *bodhi*, or wisdom. (The word *bodhi* is the root of the word *Buddhism* and of Siddhartha's usual name—Gautama Buddha.) Achieving wisdom is a key step to achieving nirvana, or ultimate reality—the end of the self and a reunion with the Great World Soul.

Siddhartha preached this message in a sermon to his followers in the Deer Park at Sarnath (outside India's holy city of Banaras). It is a simple message based on the Four Noble Truths:

1. Ordinary life is full of suffering.
2. This suffering is caused by our desire to satisfy ourselves.

3. The way to end suffering is to end desire for selfish goals and to see others as extensions of ourselves.
4. The way to end desire is to follow the Middle Path.

This Middle Path is also known as the Eightfold Path, because it consists of eight steps:

1. *Right view* We need to know the Four Noble Truths.
2. *Right intention* We need to decide what we really want.
3. *Right speech* We must seek to speak truth and to speak well of others.
4. *Right action* The Buddha gave five precepts: "Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not be unchaste. Do not take drugs or drink alcohol."
5. *Right livelihood* We must do work that uplifts our being.
6. *Right effort* The Buddha said, "Those who follow the Way might well follow the example of an ox that arches through the deep mud carrying a heavy load. He is tired, but his steady, forward-looking gaze will not relax until he comes out of the mud."
7. *Right mindfulness* We must keep our minds in control of our senses: "All we are is the result of what we have thought."
8. *Right concentration* We must meditate to see the world in a new way.

Siddhartha accepted the idea of reincarnation, but he rejected the Hindu division of human beings into rigidly defined castes based on previous reincarnations. He taught instead that all human beings could reach nirvana as a result of their behavior in this life. This made Buddhism appealing to the downtrodden peoples at the lower end of the social scale.

Buddhism also differed from Hinduism in its simplicity. Siddhartha rejected the multitude of gods that had become identified with Hinduism. He forbade his followers to worship either his person or his image after his death. For that reason, many Buddhists see Buddhism as a philosophy rather than as a religion.

Siddhartha Gautama died in 480 B.C. at the age of 80 in what is today Nepal. After his death, his followers traveled throughout India, spreading his message. Temples sprang up throughout the countryside. Buddhist monasteries were also established to promote his teaching and provide housing and training for monks dedicated to the simple life and the pursuit of wisdom.

✓ Reading Check **Contrasting** How does Buddhism differ from Hinduism?

HISTORY
Online 

Web Activity Visit the *Glencoe World History* Web site at wh.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 3—Student Web Activity** to learn more about Buddhism.

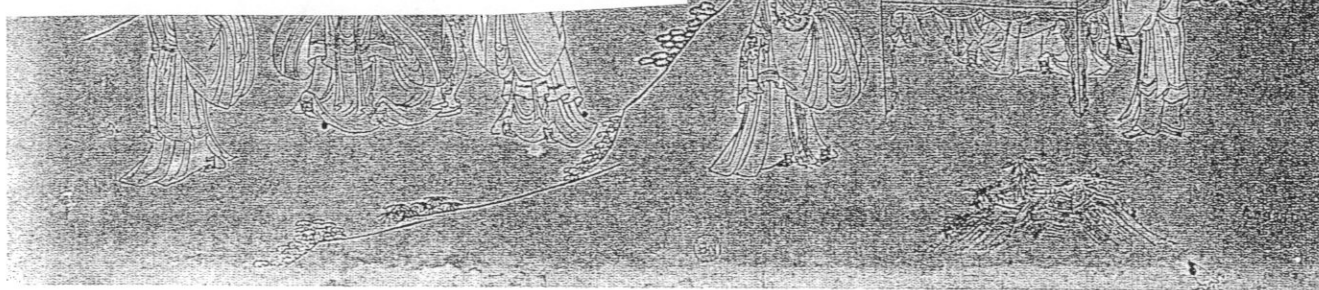
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The Chinese Philosophies

TURNING POINT

Confucius believed that the government should be open to all men of superior talent. This concept became a crucial part of Chinese history after his death.

Between 500 and 200 B.C., toward the end of the Zhou dynasty, three major schools of thought about the nature of human beings and the universe emerged in China—Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. While Hindus and Buddhists focused on freeing the human soul from the cycle of rebirth, Chinese philosophers were more concerned about the immediate world in which people lived and how to create a stable order in that world.



This early nineteenth-century painting illustrates scenes from the life of Confucius, who is shown here with his followers.

Confucianism Confucius was known to the Chinese as the First Teacher. (*Confucius* is the western form of the name Kongfuzi [KOONG•FOO•DZUH], meaning “Master Kung,” as he was called by his followers.) Confucius was born in 551 B.C. He hoped to get a job as a political adviser, but he had little success in finding a patron.

Upset by the violence and moral decay of his age, Confucius traveled around China in an attempt to persuade political leaders to follow his ideas. Few listened at the time, but a faithful band of followers revered him as a great teacher, recorded his sayings in the *Analects*, and spread his message. Until the twentieth century, almost every Chinese pupil studied his sayings. This made Confucianism, or the system of Confucian ideas, an important part of Chinese history.

Confucius lived at a time of great confusion in China. The chaos in China was largely caused by unceasing warfare among numerous Chinese armies, which did not hesitate to slaughter opposing soldiers and their families. Men, women, and children were beheaded in mass executions. China was faced with one basic question: How do we restore order to this society? Confucius provided a basic set of ideas that eventually came to be widely accepted.

Confucius’s interest in philosophy was political and ethical, not spiritual. He believed that it was useless to speculate on spiritual questions. It was better

by far to assume that there was an order in the universe and then focus on ordering the affairs of this world. The universe was made in such a way that, if humans would act in harmony with its purposes, their own affairs would prosper. Much of his concern was with human behavior. The key to proper behavior was to behave in accordance with the Dao (Way).

Two elements stand out in the Confucian view of the Dao: duty and humanity. The concept of duty meant that all people had to subordinate their own interests to the broader needs of the family and the community. Everyone should be governed by the Five Constant Relationships: parent and child, husband and wife, older sibling and younger sibling, older friend and younger friend, and ruler and subject. Each person in the relationship had a duty to the other. Parents should be loving, and children should revere their parents. Husbands should fulfill their duties, and wives should be obedient. The elder sibling should be kind, and the younger sibling respectful. The older friend should be considerate, and the younger friend deferential. Rulers should be benevolent, and subjects loyal. Three of these five relationships concern the family, which shows the family’s importance to Confucius: “The duty of children to their parents is the foundation from which all virtues spring.”

The Confucian concept of duty is often expressed in the form of a “work ethic.” If each individual



Picturing History

This sketch portrays Laozi, the founder of Daoism. What is the artist trying to convey about Laozi or Daoism?

worked hard to fulfill his or her duties, then the affairs of society as a whole would prosper as well. As Confucius stated,

☞☞ If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.☞☞

Above all, the ruler must set a good example. If the king followed the path of goodness and the common good, then subjects would respect him, and society would prosper.

The second key element in the Confucian view of the Dao is the idea of humanity. This consists of a sense of compassion and empathy for others. It is

similar in some ways to Christian ideas but with a twist. Christians are taught, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Confucius would say, "Do not do unto others what you would not wish done to yourself." To many Chinese, this meant that others should be tolerated. Confucius urged people to "measure the feelings of others by one's own," for "within the four seas all men are brothers." The ideas of Confucius had a strong appeal to his contemporaries. After his death in 479 B.C., his message spread widely throughout China. Confucius was a harsh critic of his own times. He seemed to stress the need to return to the values of an earlier age—the Golden Age of the early Zhou dynasty. He saw it as an age of perfection that no longer existed. In referring to that age, he is quoted as saying the following:

☞☞ When the Great Way was practiced, the world was shared by all alike. The worthy and the able were promoted to office and practiced good faith and lived in affection. The aged found a fitting close to their lives, the robust their proper employment; the young were provided with an upbringing and the widow and widower, the orphaned and the sick, with proper care. Men had their talks and women their hearths. They hated to see goods lying about in waste, yet they did not hoard them for themselves; they disliked the thought that their energies were not fully used, yet they used them not for private ends. Therefore all evil plotting was prevented and thieves and rebels did not arise, so that people could leave their outer gates unbolted. This was the age of Grand Unity.☞☞

Confucius was not just living in the past, however. Many of his key ideas looked forward rather than backward. Perhaps his most striking political idea was that the government should not be limited solely to those of noble birth but should be open to all men of superior talent. This concept of rule by merit was, of course, not popular with the aristocrats who held political offices based on their noble birth. Although Confucius's ideas did not have much effect in his lifetime, they opened the door to a new idea of statecraft that would later be put into widespread use.

Daoism Daoism was a system of ideas based on the teachings of Laozi (LOW•DZUH). According to tradition, Laozi, or the Old Master, was a contemporary of Confucius. Scholars do not know if Laozi actually existed. Nevertheless, the ideas people associate with him became popular in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

The chief ideas of Daoism are discussed in a short work known as *Tao Te Ching (The Way of the Dao)*. Scholars have argued for centuries over its meaning. Nevertheless, the basic ideas of Daoism, as interpreted by followers of the doctrine, are straightforward. Like Confucianism, Daoism does not concern itself with the underlying meaning of the universe. Rather, it tries to set forth proper forms of behavior for human beings on Earth.

Daoism's point of view is quite different from that of Confucianism. Followers of Confucius believe that it is the duty of human beings to work hard to improve life here on Earth. Daoists believe that the true way to follow the will of Heaven is not action but inaction:

☞☞ Without going outside, you may know the whole world.
Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of heaven.
The farther you go, the less you know.
Thus the sage [wise man] knows without traveling;
He sees without looking;
He works without doing.☞☞

The best way to act in harmony with the universal order is to act spontaneously and let nature take its course by not interfering with it:

NOTES

☞☞ The universe is sacred.
You cannot improve it.
If you try to change it, you will ruin it.
If you try to hold it, you will lose it.☞☞

Legalism A third philosophy that became popular in China was Legalism. Unlike Confucianism or Daoism, Legalism proposed that human beings were evil by nature. They could only be brought to follow the correct path by harsh laws and stiff punishments. Legalists were referred to as the "School of Law" because they rejected the Confucian view that government by "superior men" could solve society's problems. Instead, they argued for a system of impersonal laws.

The Legalists believed that a strong ruler was required to create an orderly society. Confucius had said, "Lead the people by virtue and restrain them by the rules of good taste, and the people will have a sense of shame, and moreover will become good." The Legalists did not believe this. To them, people were not capable of being good. Fear of harsh punishment would cause the common people to serve the interests of the ruler. The ruler did not have to show compassion for the needs of the people.

✓ **Reading Check Summarizing** What three philosophies became popular in early China?