

vibrant dynasty, they were unable to organize a highly centralized bureaucracy. Unlike Ashoka Maurya, who traveled constantly within the empire to keep close watch over its affairs, the Gupta emperors took a hands-off approach to governing. This led to growing disunity among the far-flung regions of the empire.

Invasions by nomads from the northwest, the *White Huns*, brought the final downfall of the Gupta Dynasty. The Gupta Dynasty had begun to shrink by the end of the fifth century, when the White Huns conquered Northern India. By 500, these Huns had taken over western India, which destroyed the Gupta Empire's trade with Rome. Around 550 C.E., the Gupta Dynasty became the last of the great Eurasian empires of the first century C.E. to collapse. (Test Prep. Create a chart comparing the impact of the nomadic invasions of India with similar invasions of Rome and China. See page 84 for Rome and pages 242–245 for the Mongolian invasion of China.)

Three Great Philosophical Traditions

While India was only rarely united by a centralized government, China often was. However, during the declining centuries of the Zhou, China suffered a period of instability. During this period, most Chinese followed a simple animistic belief in natural objects and forces and veneration of the souls of the dead. This animism was coupled with shamanism, in which a shaman, or spirit guide, mediated the connection between the everyday world and the spirit world. Over time, however, three significant new schools of thought evolved: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

Confucius The philosopher K'ung Fu-tzu, known today as *Confucius*, was born around 551 B.C.E., while the Zhou dynasty was in decline. Historians have sorted through the many stories about his early life and have reached the following conclusions. Confucius was probably born into poverty. He might have had a number of different jobs as part of the Chinese bureaucracy, all the while developing his own thoughts about the individual's relationship to the state. A falling-out with local powers in his home state led Confucius to travel across China, speaking to people and gaining disciples as he went.

The ideas of Confucius became the foundation of the belief system of *Confucianism*. After Confucius died, his disciples compiled his teachings, and probably added some of their own thoughts, in a complex work called the *Analects (Selected Sayings)*. (Test Prep. Write a paragraph comparing the *Analects* with the Christian Bible. See page 82.)

The Teachings of Confucius During this very turbulent time in China's history, the ideas of Confucius appealed to many people because he argued for respecting social hierarchies and traditions. "Good government consists in the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father, and the son being a son." (*Lunyu* 12.11) He focused on behavior in everyday life, not on beliefs about any deity. For example, he taught the importance of family, respect for one's elders, and reverence for one's ancestors. He believed

Confucius also believed in what is called the Golden Rule—"do unto others as you would have them do unto you"—a tenet important in many other moral and philosophical traditions, including Christianity and Judaism. Confucius preached humility and the importance of virtue, which he defined as treating others properly. He even applied this principle to China's government and kings. The teachings of Confucius affected Chinese beliefs and values more than any other philosophy and continue to be important in twenty-first century China.

Confucianism and the Family Largely because of Confucianism, the family became the most important unit in Chinese society. The status of a man's family, not his wealth or accomplishments, determined his place in society. A family typically included the mother and father, their sons and sons' wives, and any unmarried daughters. All family members lived in the same house and shared household duties.

The father was the head of the household. The older he was, the more respect and authority he had. Fathers arranged the marriages of their children and grandchildren. Upper-class fathers also decided on their sons' education and careers. This all fell under the concept of *filial piety*, which can be defined as the duty of family members to subordinate their needs and desires to those of the male head of the family, or its ruler.

Women had few rights and were not usually educated. They were expected to remain subservient to men and boys, regardless of age. Although mothers and mothers-in-law were greatly respected, married daughters tended to be treated like servants in the husband's households.

Daoism *Daoism* (also spelled *Taoism*) dates back to the late 500s B.C.E., at the time of the Zhou Dynasty. The origins of Daoism are shrouded in mystery, but its founder is usually said to be *Laozi*, also called the Old Master. As happened with Confucius, Laozi had many disciples who collected his teachings. The followers gathered the Old Master's ideas together in the *Dao De Jing (The Classic Way and the Virtue)*.

In Daoism, followers seek happiness and wisdom by way of the path, or *dao*. To follow the *dao* is to renounce worldly ambitions and society and instead to seek harmony with nature. A key symbol of Daoist philosophy is the Yin and Yang, in which two sides come together in harmony: the Yin, or humanity's submissive and "feminine" side, and the Yang, or humanity's aggressive and "masculine" side. The goal, as understood in Daoism, is to keep the two sides in balance. Daoism appealed to China's peasants because of their connection to natural forces and the land. These ideas had wide influence in China. Medical doctors focused on restoring the natural balance among the forces in a person's body. Poets wrote about nature and human involvement with it. Scholars tried to understand the natural properties of metals and how one might be transformed into another. Architects attempted to create structures that integrated well with their natural surroundings.

Comparing Daoism and Greek Mythology			
Topic	Taoism Only	Both Taoism and Greek Mythology	Greek Mythology Only
Nature of Deities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent abstract ideas • Are benevolent • Are detached from human affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pantheon of separate deities that oversee every aspect of society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have human characteristics • Can be petty, jealous, and vengeful • Can intervene in human affairs
Hierarchy among Deities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Great High God has abstract deities above him 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One head deity who rules over other gods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The head deity, Zeus, has no deities above him
Relationship Between People and Deities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People can become deities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deities can procreate with humans, producing demigods
Common Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner peace • Balance between opposites (yin/yang) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War and love • Heroic action
Afterlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A state of non-being 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tangible place, Hades

Legalism Creating a sharp contrast to Confucianism and Daoism was the third philosophical tradition of China's Classical period, Legalism. As the name suggests, the philosophy of Legalism was less concerned with questions of the meaning of life, and more with how people behaved. Since human nature was understood to be essentially bad, Legalists believed that society needed a system of strict laws and punishments to control people. Because most citizens, according to Legalism, should live their lives as either farmers or soldiers, education was not considered to be especially necessary. Legalists argued that society should discourage people from becoming teachers, merchants, poets, or artists. Another tenet of legalism was collective responsibility of a family or community for every member. One should observe one's relatives and neighbors and turn them into authorities if they break the law.

Legalism was led by two philosophers, *Han Fei Zu* and *Li Si*. Their ideas struck a chord with many people during the often-violent Qin Dynasty (see below). However, after that dynasty ended and the following dynasty brought greater stability, Legalism faded. It failed to have the long-term impact of either Confucianism or Daoism.

The Qin Dynasty in China

The instability of the Zhou ended when, in 221 B.C.E., an ambitious leader named Qin Shihuangdi raised his own army and defeated what remained of the Zhou leaders. One by one, he also conquered the neighboring states.

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