

A comparison of confucianism, taoism and shintoism

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In religion, there are certain key terms that are crucial to know and to understand. For some, it is about finding their true self, and for others it's about having a god to rely on - to help people and to be a figure of hope. In this case, Confucianism and Taoism in the Chinese religion follow some of the same principles, as well as Shintoism in the Japanese religion. In this paper, we are going to explore the specific views of these three religions and compare to them to modern day. We will explore how these religions ultimately create a harmony with one another, and with the world, and how this is achieved.

Let's start with Confucianism. Confucianism is seen as a religion, but also an ethical choice in China. Some things that go along with Confucianism are honesty and overall humaneness. For example, in one of the teachings of Confucian - Jen - it is quoted, " The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of humanity. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their humanity." What does this mean? Well, simply that humanity is worth fighting for. This is a common teaching in this religion, in which humanity may flourish by only being the best person you can be.

An interesting fact that comes from Confucianism is that of the Yin-Yang. I'm sure this is common to some, but for those who don't know, the Yin-Yang symbol is a symbol of overall togetherness. In Daoist thinking, which is the Taoism religion, according to Ellwood, it can be classified as:

" Yang is what is male, but also day, sky, spring, and all that is bright, clear, hard, assertive, growing, moving out. Its symbol is the dragon. Yang is

female and also night, earth, moisture, autumn and harvest, spirits of the dead, and all that is dark, underneath, recessive, pulling in, connected with the moon, mysterious. Its symbol is the tiger...” (Ellwood 174)

This shows how the two come together and connect with their differences, as religion does with humanity and with the world. People connect through those differences and similarities. That connection is what allows that harmony to be achieved.

Confucianism is also related back to other Chinese religions like Buddhism and Taoism. Buddhism may be familiar, but I’m sure Taoism is a bit foreign. As mentioned before, Taoism and Daoism are the same, but according to an article on Chinese Cultural Studies they are seen in opposition, with a quote stating, “ Although Daoism is often set in opposition to Confucianism, both ways of thinking interacted with each other.” This is important because it shows that no matter how different religions may be, they can still have similarities – which can eventually lead to harmony. “ Daoism forms a unity of experience around a single pole, focusing on the feeling oriented, nonrational side of life,” (Ellwood 179) says Ellwood. Focusing on one single thing is important. In this case, Daoism is focusing on everyday feelings that come with social interactions, inner thoughts, even food being eaten! It is all about that focus which leads to understanding and a better life.

Now, we move on to Japan and their religion of Shintoism, which translates to, “ The Way of the Gods.” (Ellwood, 429) Let me first start off by saying, this is not the only religion that Japanese people are accustomed too. They also practice Confucianism, Buddhism, and Western style democracy – just

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like China. There we go, with the similarities again. Anyway, back to the Shinto religion, where shrines are an extensive and important part of the religion. In a passage from Ellwood, it states,

“ Shinto has a highly distinctive personality of its own, yet it also illustrates several characteristics of the religion of East Asia in general. In Shinto shrines, and also in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist and other temples, one senses a close harmony of the human and natural orders. The deities and guides of humankind dwell in virtual symbiosis with woods, streams, and mountains, suggesting that in a larger sense, society is a part of nature, and that kami, immortals, Buddha’s, and humans are all parts of the greater cosmic unity.” (Ellwood, 163)

And with that, we can reach a harmony between ourselves and the world.

With these three religions, understanding is an important feature. These days, we are really focused on misunderstandings, which are hurting our society. From misunderstandings come disagreements and, eventually, arguments. This, itself, is the exact opposite of harmony. What harmony truly is, is finding a way to fight that ignorance. With all religions come ignorance - it’s inevitable. Every religion is different and everyone’s teachings are different and, therefore, every single person is going to think differently. With so much difference in the world, it’s almost impossible to think that we could ever find common ground. What about through the act of religion itself, though? Wouldn’t that be something we have in common? Believing in a higher power is very common - whether it be in Christianity, Buddhism, Daoism... Anything, really. The point is that there’s commonality

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if you look for it. Commonality is what is going to allow us to find that harmony not only in the world, but also with the world. Think of how incredible it would be if we could come to respect one another regardless of religion. Now, take that one step further. Think of how incredible it would be if we could come to respect one another regardless of religion, gender, race, or sexual orientation. The possibilities are endless.