

Evaluate the changes and continuities in the role of religion in chinese society ...

[Religion](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

China has been the home to various religions. At different times different dynasties endorsed certain religions while repressing others. While Buddhism flourished during the Sui and Tang dynasty, it faced opposition from the government during the Song dynasty. Confucianism lost government endorsement during the Sui and Tang but gained momentum during the Song as Neo-Confucianism. Yuan dynasty promoted Islam and Tibet Buddhism but ignored Confucianism. Different rulers sponsored and protected different religions but Confucianism and some form of Buddhism have always been alive in Chinese society from 600 to 1450.

After much political disunity and chaos China was finally united under the Sui dynasty (589-618) and Sui emperors allowed Buddhism to thrive in their land. In China Buddhism was widespread by the 6th century and emperors like Yang Jian protected and sponsored Buddhism to gain the support of the masses. However, Confucianism had long been part of Chinese culture before the arrival of the Sui. Emperors like Wen Di supported Buddhism by building temples but kept Confucianism alive by the examination system.

Wen Di created schools that were learning centers of the Confucian classics and examinations based on these classics screened men for government positions. Thus the government was still run by Confucian scholars. Daoism, also a popular religion before the arrival of the Sui, had consistent followers but did not prosper like Buddhism due to lack of government endorsement. During the Tang dynasty (618- 906) the revival of the Silk Road brought many new religions into China but Daoism and Buddhism continued to prosper.

Arab merchants brought Islam to China via the Silk Road. In 635 Christians arrived in Xian, the capital of the Tang dynasty and were given permission to create places of worship. However these two religions did not get a mass following. Instead Daoism received the endorsement it failed to receive during the Sui dynasty. Many emperors of the Tang dynasty supported Daoism because the surname of the Daoist philosopher-god Laozi was Li, like the surname of the Tang emperors. Empress Wu, the only female to ever rule China, was a devout Daoist.

Also, as the Tang Empire expanded eastward, contact with India increased and Buddhist influence reached its height. Many people traveled to India. Monks like Xuanzang went to India, brought back many sutras, literary compositions based on the teachings of Buddha, and translated them into Chinese. Seeing the rise of Daoism and Buddhism and the fading of Confucianism, Tang scholars set out to defend Confucianism. Han Yu, an essayist, vehemently argued against Buddhism and asked the Chinese to go back to their roots by studying and interpreting the Confucian Classics.

His main argument against Buddhism was that the foreign religion preached equality among all and didn't place proper importance between the five relationships (ruler vs. the ruled, father vs. son, husband vs. wife, older brother vs. younger brother, and older friend vs. younger friend) necessary for social tranquility. He urged that this was destroying social order.

Nonetheless Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism all coexisted as the "three teachings" under the Tang. Under the Song (960-1279) dynasty

Buddhism started to lose popularity and endorsement while Confucianism was revived.

Near the end of the Tang dynasty Emperor Wuzong issued the Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution. This persecution had economic and social reasons. First, war with Uyghur tribes in 843 left the country in dire need for money. Monks did not have to pay taxes and had collected much wealth over the years. Ennin, a Japanese monk who was visiting China during the Tang, records in his diary how Wuzong closed monasteries and confiscated their land and wealth. Monks were not only exempt from paying taxes but were also exempt from military duty.

During the Tang dynasty certificates were sold to monks so they could prove that they were exempted from tax and other services. Many of the elite began to buy these certificates. This decreased the quality of the monasterial community and ruined the Buddhist moral reputation. For centuries afterwards Buddhism was a tolerated religion instead the official religion of China. Wuzong also destroyed the Zoroastrian minority and his persecution of Christians led to a fatal decrease in Christians in China. Furthermore, the scholarly elite began to favor native things to foreign things.

This led to the rise of Neo-Confucianism, new interpretations of traditional Confucian teachings. Zhu Xi, an influential philosopher, contributed to Neo-Confucian philosophy by explaining many Buddhist ideas and rituals through Confucian lenses. Furthermore, passing civil service examinations, which tested knowledge of Confucian classics, became the main way for anyone to

<https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-changes-and-continuities-in-the-role-of-religion-in-chinese-society-from-600-to-1450/>

land a governmental position. During the Yuan (1279-1368) dynasty, the new foreign Mongolian emperors were tolerant of almost all religions.

Many religious debates occurred at the court of the Great Genghis Khan in front of live audiences. However certain religious beliefs lost momentum. Confucianism declined as civil service examinations were eliminated. Instead, Muslims, allies of the Mongols, enjoyed high positions that were prohibited to the Chinese. The state encouraged Muslim immigration and many Chinese converted to Islam. Muslims ended up administering the empire. Mongols originally practiced shamanism, belief in the existence of spirits, and totemism. However, Lamaism, aka Tibet Buddhism, came to be protected by Mongol rulers.

Its idea of a militant universal ruler bringing the entire world under the rule of the Buddha and thus pushing it closer to salvation mirrored their belief of universal conquest and authority. The Mongols however, despite being Buddhist, continued the persecution of Buddhists. The Mongols kept on conquering land via battles and thus needed many soldiers. They decided that too many able Buddhist men were being exempt from military services. Thus they tested Buddhists on Buddhist scriptures. Those who couldn't demonstrate literacy in the scriptures were enrolled into the army.

The Mongolians were sympathetic to Christians as their court was filled with Nestorian Christians, Christians belonging to the Church of the East. However since there was never a government sponsored campaign of Christianity, Christians remained a minority in China. Different rulers promoted different religions and repressed others but Buddhism and Confucianism always

coexisted in Chinese society from 600 to 1450. China's emphasis on filial piety, social hierarchy and respect for authority has always kept Confucianism alive. And although not always supported by the government, one form of Buddhism or another has always enjoyed popularity.