

# Beliefs and practices in china

Religion



The three main religions in China – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism – originated at about the same time and share common beliefs in human goodness and the need to behave kindly and justly. However, they differ in their practices and, more importantly, in how they view deities and the afterlife. Derived from Confucius' teachings around 500 BC, Confucianism emphasizes justice, sincerity, morality, and hierarchy.

It emphasizes conduct and decorum over spirituality, emphasizing self-control and obedience instead of religious doctrine in the Judeo-Christian sense. Its practices include being sincere, just, and deferential to elders, since it embraces a strict view of worldly hierarchy and the need for etiquette rather than one governed by gods or an omnipotent single God. In this sense, it is less a religion than “ a tradition of ritual/propriety” (Yao 191) which upholds sacrifices to heavenly, earthly, and ancestral spirits (generally performed in temples).

It is hard to define as a religion because it does not fit the Western world's criteria and is more a tradition and code of behavior; indeed, it was initially used to govern the actions of China's ancient bureaucrats. (Yao 39) Daoism evolved at about the same time as Confucianism and also embraces virtues like justice, patience, and decency. However, it is more of a religion than Confucianism because it mandates reverence for the Dao (roughly meaning “ the way”), which is “ a cosmic principle, permeating and infusing all aspects of creation with vitality.

” (Oldstone-Moore 23) To become one with the Dao, one must attain enlightenment by practicing good, proper behavior in addition to cultivating a spiritual wisdom and serenity through unity with the Tao. Here, Taoism

differs sharply from Confucianism, which does not place as much importance on cosmic forces or one's spiritual nature. It also embraces a more concrete idea of the afterlife than Confucianism, since the Daoist view has the soul entering Hell, being forced to atone, and being reincarnated.

(Oldstone-Moore 84-87) Originating in India at roughly the same time as Confucianism and Daoism, Buddhism shares with them the principles of harmony and balance, though to a Westerner it seems more like a religion than either of its fellow faiths. Indeed, its doctrines and rituals are more evolved and clearly-defined than those of China's other two main religions. Like them, Buddhism teaches that while human nature is essentially good, the world is corrupt and one must practice pure-mindedness and good, just behavior.

It also shares with Daoism the importance of seeking cosmic enlightenment, though Buddhists attain it through meditation and discipline. (Wangu 8) However, it also mandates a degree of asceticism (like varying degrees of vegetarianism) not required by Confucianism or Daoism, asking its laypeople to refrain from violence, theft, sexual misconduct, using intoxicants, and "incorrect speech" (lying, gossiping, etc. ).

Also, Buddhism's concepts of the soul and afterlife are much more developed than those of either Confucianism or Daoism, and it places more emphasis on its written scriptures (which were committed to print during the first century AD). However, it has no supreme being and does not demand exclusive allegiance, as do Western religions; its appeal "has rested solely on the message of its founder and its flexibility in adapting to different cultures and philosophies." (Wangu 10) China's three chief religions share

common traits and basic outlooks (which they openly exchanged over the centuries).

Confucianism is the most secular and least spiritual, while Daoism has a more evolved sense of the spirit and afterlife and Buddhism the most evolved concepts of these, as well as the most involved code of practices. In all, they represent varying degrees of spirituality and what Westerners would call “ religion. ”

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