

How does confucianism and daoism view women?

Religion



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To begin with, Confucianism is a religion that is named after the philosopher, Confucius. He was an almost deified and impossibly wise man. He believed that to regain social order, people must act the role that society gave them. The father was to act the father, the son was to act the son, etc. The process of becoming that of which one is supposed to be is called "Rectification of Names." The society should be founded on five relationships: 1) The ruler and subject; 2) The father and son; 3) The husband and wife; 4) The elder and younger brother; 5) The friend and friend.

This proper behavior was required to create a calm, enduring, and beneficial society. In terms of the third relationship, husband and wife, the concept of the Yang and Yin come into play. The Yang is the male, dominating, structures. The Yin is the female, calm, passive structures. This balance, if maintained, is supposed to keep everything in perfect accord. This concept, in my opinion, is what gave women the submissive role in the Confucius society.

Unlike the women in Daoism, under Confucian ideals women were to play their roles in society by being submissive to men and were limited in their participation in society, but were respected and necessary. Their lives were centered in the family as "inside members" which meant that they were to stay indoors and not associate with the "outside" more than necessary. Actually, in upper-class homes, inside chambers were built for the women while the men had their own chamber outside.

Women were also supposed to remain under the dominion of men and follow the "three obediences": Woman follows man, youth follows father or eldest

brother, after marriage, wife follows husband, and if her husband dies, she is to follow her eldest son. As children, young girls were not apart of the ancestral line. After marriage they gained their husband's line and became apart of a family making this the single most important event in a young girl's life. However, many girls never made it to marriage because their mothers killed them after they were born.

Giving birth to a baby girl was not at all joyous. For those that did make it, their objective was to become a wife. A wife was the lowest link in the social hierarchy and was there to serve the mother-in-law. Once married, both the husband and wife's main focus was to take care of the husband's parents. Women were expected to be completely devoted to their husbands and would often choose to commit suicide than violate their womanly virtues. Mothers with lost of sons were much higher up socially than those with fewer. Women who did not marry were not accepted in the Confucian society.

Divorce was also not accepted and was allowed only under strict circumstances by the husband. These circumstances include incurable sickness, no male heir, talking too much, stealing, disobedience, promiscuity, and jealousy. The husband could have several concubines of which the wife was supposed to be kind and courteous to. On the same level, women could talk to other women about their husbands if they drank too much alcohol, neglected their duties as a husband, or became abusive. The other women would then tell their husbands who would act accordingly.

This all seems rather harsh, but the fact that women are the only ones that could give life; they were respected and considered necessary. On the contrary, women in the Daoist society were treated a whole lot better. Daoism puts an emphasis on nature and the feminine qualities of nature. Seeing as how women create life and Daoism is "that which creativity flows from," women hold the up most respect. As a matter of fact, Dao means "Great Mother." Unlike in Confucianism, the role of women being passive and flexible comes natural and unforced.

Because of this natural passiveness, women are naturally good Daoists; simply because of this "naturalness." In the Daoist Society women are reared as especially receptive to divine inspiration which provides a spiritual outlet for them. Women are also allowed to participate in all levels of Daoism and were thought to be the only ones who could reach the highest levels of Dao lineage, all except that of the Divine Lord. However, this did not move women out of their subordinate roles nor did it raise their social status, and the sexual practices in Daoism for prolonged life may have led to the exploitation of women.

Another tradition performed by the Chinese women in the Confucian society was foot-binding. Originally it was done as a kind of ballet toe dancing performed for royalty. It eventually worked its way down the entire social strata and became a tradition linked to marriage. It was performed on young girls from the ages of five to seven, as early as two and as late as thirteen. The foot was to be shaped into what looked like the Golden Lotus bud. The perfect shaped foot was three inches long looked like it naturally extended from the foot, not like the 90° angle normal feet make.

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The foot was bound to break the arch and toes. The toes were broken to curl under the foot. The big toe was left to look like the point of the bud. Girls were told to walk on pieces of sharp metal and broken glass to cut the bottom of the foot so that when it healed, the toes would fuse to the foot. Every so often the feet were unbound to clean and tighten. This was an extremely painful process that took more than two years to complete. The binding shoes were worn the rest of the girl's life.

Perfectly bound feet meant that the girl was marriageable, she was obedient, submissive, and could endure great amounts of pain. This also controlled her sexuality because it was hard for the girl to " get around. " The tiny feet also became an erotic fetish for some men. The girl's shoes were sent to her mother-in-law-to-be for inspection. The Girls' new mother would inspect for size, shape, and craftsmanship. Since the girl made the shoes herself, the explicit details gave a clue to what type of worker she was. This creativity was often the only creative outlet for the young girls.

So to conclude, there are many differences in the ways women were dealt with in Confucianism and Daoism. In both religions, however, women were not very high up on the social scales, they were supposed to be the calm, passive and obedient counterpart of men, and were ultimately inferior beings. Foot binding became a Confucian tradition in marriage, while in Daoism, women held nearly the heights levels I the religion. I am just glad to say that I am a woman living in America today, and not in the classical Confucian society of China.