

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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### Confucius

Confucius founded Confucianism. This belief system, along with Taoism and Buddhism, has played a major role in China's three-thousand-year history.

Confucius was the most significant philosopher in Chinese history. He was born in 551 B.C. in the city-state of Lu and died in 479 B.C. Confucius is the Latin form of his Chinese name, K'ung-Fu-tzu, or Master Kung. Of aristocratic descent, he tutored sons of the aristocracy. However, he was most highly regarded for his conversion of much of the language of China's primitive religion into a moral system for a society that was making a transition from a concern with good and bad luck to a concern with right and wrong. So revered was Confucius by the Chinese that his followers hailed him as the king they never crowned. In contrast, some historical accounts picture the philosopher as an itinerant traveler who died a disappointed man because his teachings were ignored during his lifetime. Whatever the truth, the teachings did prevail and are contained in twenty volumes entitled the *Analects*, the Confucian Canon. Like Buddha, Confucius outlined the way of life for those who wished to be good at all times, or to achieve the princely ideal. Confucius's life plan reflected the way he believed a prince should live, the way of *jen*. Such qualities as unselfishness, deference toward others (especially parents and family), courtesy, and loyalty were attributes of *jen*.

According to tradition, Confucius had seventy disciples. After his death, they scattered, and from them, several schools of Confucian thought arose. Confucianism dominated China for ages, and it is responsible for generating much of the culture and customs of the vast land.

### Lao Tzu

Chinese tradition explains that several forms of Taoism (sometimes spelled Daoism) developed before the *Tao Te Ching* was written by Lao Tzu sometime in the third century B.C. (though it is not known for sure that Lao Tzu ever existed).

Taoists taught that suffering, pain, bloodshed, and chaos were a result of the unnaturalness of people's lives; when people lived outside the bounds of society, they had none of these problems.

In their view, social conventions, such as ceremonies, were artificial and not part of human nature. Taoists condemned the portions of Confucianism that urged people to harness themselves with such social rules. In their natural state, Taoists preached, people were in harmony with their nature and the Tao. The Tao could not be defined, Taoists said, but it could be suggested as beyond measure, endless, and unceasing. Its shape was without shape; its features were featureless, like an uncarved block. Like nature, it moved unconsciously, without effort or directed motive, just as the sun shines, a cloud drifts, and rain falls without concern for where it shines, drifts, falls. There is no purposefulness to these happenings. And like them, Tao simply is. Tao was described as the essential quality that gives life and all things their special nature. Taoists believed that to harness or whip a horse to get it to work was harmful, for it made the animal act contrary to its nature.

Taoists were imaginative and poetic people who wanted to free human beings from routine thinking. They had sayings that seemed to express impossible ideas, such as "Do nothing and there is nothing you cannot do."

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As Taoism developed, it took on a religious note, with Chinese peasants associating its naturalistic ideas with the mystical world of spirits. Chinese Buddhism also influenced the development of Taoism so that it even came to be associated with ritual ceremony and the priesthood. This was a far cry from the Taoism revealed in the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu, about whom we can say no more, for his history is long in antiquity and he is remembered only as one writer chronicling this unusual philosophy which became a religion.

1. Why is no one individual named as the founder of Hinduism?
2. What is "The Lord's Song"?
3. Who was the Enlightened One? What is basic to his beliefs?
4. What are the three religions that played a major role in Chinese civilization?
5. Explain the two views of the life of Confucius.
6. The Taoists believed in the natural order of things and that the natural order should not be disturbed. What was the name of the book that explained their viewpoint?
7. Which belief system of the East do you find most difficult to explain to someone else? Why?
8. Which Eastern belief system comes closest to what you believe? Why?