

Taoism

Taoism

- Founder: Lao Tzu (the old child)
- The central teachings concerning the nature of the Tao are essentially ineffable.
- Richly colored the Chinese imagination

Important Differences with Confucianism

1. Taoism does not regard man and his ethical relationships as of central importance.
 - a) tries to see man as a part of nature of no special significance;
nothing in the universe is more important than anything else; and
 - b) human value judgements – good, bad, right, wrong are subjective and temporary;

- Confucianism: harmony with the Tao attained through man's conscious ethical conduct;
- Taoism: harmony with the Tao attained through totally unconscious and unintellectual process;

Taoism is a complete abandonment of the idea of social order and a return to a primitive state of nature;

Rules are “artificial.” Artificial rules are!

Important Differences

How does man find permanence in a world of constant change?

2. Confucius urged a return to the way of the **wise kings**, an ideal and **unchanging political order**;

Taoism: assumed something permanent under the constant change which disturbs all mortal men;

The Tao itself **is the permanence** present in all things.

Taoism and Permanence

- All changes in nature that affect man have a permanent pattern which he should **adapt** himself to.

Example: Instead of grieving over loss, see birth and death as mere incidents in this constant pattern of change.

Focus on unity, pattern, cycle; ex. the four seasons

Taoism and Permanence

Do not be disturbed by transitory phenomena;
seek enlightenment about the essence of the Tao;
adapt to ever-recurring pattern as one adapts to
seasons;

The Taoist is content to let himself **float freely on
the current of change**, which no man can dominate
but can adapt to;

Even death of a beloved should not bring grief;
Chuang Tzu sung when wife died; if I weep or wail, I
would be behaving as if I did not understand
destiny;

Mystical, Ineffable Nature of the Tao

- The Tao is not apprehended by reason, but ultimately arrived at by **mystical experience**;
- **Cannot be explained in words**; words can serve only as pointers; ordinary speech and knowledge are not adequate tools;
- “A Tao that can be told of is not the permanent Tao”;
- Tao is the name for what is nameless, the principle of the universe, the way of living;

Example: a swimmer cannot really describe what he does to keep afloat;

The Taoist seeks a return to spontaneous action;

Knowledge

- The only effective knowledge is **intuitive**, not rational;
- Intuitive awareness of right action;
- Taoism condemns knowledge concerned with moral action;
- No right or wrong, no usefulness or harmfulness;
- Such concepts do not exist in Nature which has no concern with man's moral principles;

Values

- Things do not have nobility or baseness; value judgements are purely relative;
- Heaven and earth are a tiny grain; tip of hair a mountain;
- Refuse to make qualitative judgements; the natural equality of all things;
- Everything has its proper place and function;
- Taoists despised what world held dear;
- Stayed aloof from public life;

Main Rule of Conduct

“without doing”

Absence of action; absence of purposive activity;

Naturalness and spontaneity; the special appreciation of a kind of skill unknowingly applied;

Swimmer, butcher

Injury is the result of assertiveness, aggressiveness, rather than adaptability;

- “Nothing in world is softer or weaker than water, yet nothing can surpass it for overcoming the hard and the strong”;
- Total rejection of conventional standards of value;
- Ideal state is a primitive, blissful world, unspoilt by value judgements;
- Infinity and Immortality of Nature
- Riding on the wind
- The journey is a journey of the mind; the destination is to be free of everything;
- Life itself may be a dream;

Expression of Taoism

- Confucianism expressed in moralizing;
- Taoism expressed in poetry;

Taoism contributed to landscape painting; focus on nature;

- to the enrichment of the human personality in China; imaginative, poetic, mystical;
- Arts and letters –

Problems: disorganized, ambiguous; no clear teachings