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, unspoil 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