

## CHAPTER 8 | LESSON 2 China's Ancient Philosophies

**Lesson 2 China's Ancient Philosophies****BEFORE YOU READ**

In this lesson, you will read about three systems of thinking that developed in ancient China.

**AS YOU READ**

Use this diagram to compare the three systems of thinking you learn about in this lesson.

Legalism	Confucianism	Daoism

**TERMS & NAMES**

- **philosophy** A system of thinking
- **Legalism** A Chinese system of thinking that taught that the government must use the legal system to control people's behavior
- **Confucianism** A Chinese philosophy that teaches that society will run well if people behave properly
- **filial piety** Treating parents with respect
- **Daoism** A Chinese philosophy that teaches that a universal force, called the Dao, guides all things.

**Legalism**

(pages 259–260)

*What was the main idea of Legalism?*

The Time of the Warring States made people in China long for peace. Scholars wondered how to stop the fighting. They developed three ways of thinking, or **philosophies**. These were Legalism, Confucianism, and Daoism. People hoped that these philosophies would fix the problems in the land.

**Legalism** was the belief that rulers should use the legal system to force people to behave. People who followed this system thought society was in disorder. They believed that people are naturally wicked and can only be forced to be good. Legalists wanted the government to pass strict laws. They wanted harsh punishments to make people afraid to do wrong.

One legalist was Shang Yang. He wanted to make people report lawbreakers. If they did not, Shang Yang thought they should be cut in two. Other Legalists thought that a thief should be punished by having his foot cut off. Legalists also believed that the government

should reward people who did their duty.

Legalists did not want people to complain about government or question it. They thought people who did that should be arrested. They also taught that the government should burn books that held different ideas.

1. What did Legalists believe government must do?

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**Confucianism**

(pages 260–261)

*What did Confucius think would bring order to China?*

Confucius was an important Chinese thinker. He lived from 551 to 479 B.C. This was a time of conflict and unrest. Confucius developed ideas to end conflict. His ideas are called **Confucianism**.

Confucius wanted to create peace in all *relationships*. His main idea was respect for

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others. He believed if people treated each other well, there would be peace and harmony. Confucius also taught that leaders should set a good example for the people. His students collected his ideas into a book called the *Analects*.

In Confucianism there are five relationships. Each one has its own duties and code of proper conduct, or behavior. The five relationships fall into two main groups: proper conduct in the family and proper conduct in society.

Confucius believed that proper conduct began at home. Family members had to be good to one another. One of Confucius' most important teachings was about **filial piety**. This meant to treat one's parents with respect.

Proper conduct in society was also very important. People needed to be honest with friends. They should respect authority. Rulers must live correctly. They should treat their subjects fairly. A subject had a duty to obey a good, moral ruler. If people lived in these ways, then there would be peace in society.

Confucianism set out clear roles for the family and society. The Chinese people used this philosophy to avoid conflict and live in peace. Many rulers tried to live up to Confucius' ideas. Confucianism also encouraged learning. In this way, it laid the groundwork for fair and skilled government officials.

2. What did Confucius think would lead to peace in society?

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## Daoism

(pages 262–263)

*What was the main idea of Daoism?*

A third major Chinese philosophy is **Daoism**. It may have been created by Laozi. No one knows if he existed. If he did, he lived in the 500s B.C. The book of his teachings is called the *Dao De Jing*. (The Book of the Way of Virtue.) Daoism is very different from Legalism and Confucianism.

Daoists believe in a universal force that guides all things. It is called the Dao, or the Way. All creatures, except people, live in harmony with the Dao. According to Daoism, people need to find their own way, or Dao, to live in peace. They must learn to live in harmony with nature. They must learn to live with their inner feelings, too.

Daoists did not worry about what is good or bad. They did not try to change things. They accepted life the way it is. They did not want to fix the government, either.

Daoists tried to live in harmony with nature and the universe. This included understanding the yin and the yang.

The yin and yang are the two sides of all things. The yin (black) stands for all that is cold, or dark, or mysterious. The yang (white) stands for all that is warm, bright, and light. Neither is bad or good. The yin and yang work together. They *complement* each other. Daoists taught that understanding yin and yang would help people understand their place in the world.

3. What did Daoists believe people should do?

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