

Religion in China

Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism are the three main religions which form the basis of Chinese religious practices and beliefs. Chinese religion is a fusion of several kinds of beliefs; it is rare to find a pure Confucianist, Buddhist or Daoist, as all three religions has become inextricably interwoven.

Confucianism (*rujiao* 儒教)

Confucianism is based on the teachings of Confucius (Kongzi 孔子, c. 551-479 BC) a philosopher and political theorist whose thoughts were collected by his students and recorded in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语). Confucian writings discuss the role of ruler and subject and propose moral values to direct them both. The harmony of the natural world is seen as responding to the moral conduct of the sovereign and its people. Confucian rituals also embrace all aspects of family life, including ceremonies to show respect to one's ancestors and the proper preparation of burials.

Daoism (*daojiao* 道教)

Daoism is indigenous to China. Its name comes from the Chinese *dao* (道 'path' or 'way') meaning a way to follow. Its origins go back to the *Daode jing* 道德经 (attributed to Laozi 老子) which dates to the 3rd century BC, but probably has earlier roots. One of the concepts of Daoism is 'non-action' (*wuwei* 无为), thereby opposing the busy rounds of official and social rituals and practices by teaching harmony and union with nature. The *Daode jing* emphasizes the need to retire from the world and master the *dao* and achieve a free, happy and independent life by avoiding the constraints of morality, ritual and politics. Both Daoism and Buddhism developed several popular branches and the two faiths share a complex relationship and have a number of ideas and practices in common.

Buddhism (*fojiao* 佛教)

Buddhism was introduced into China in the Han dynasty (206 BC- AD 220) along the trade routes now known as the 'Silk Roads'. It was properly established and patronised by the Northern Wei (AD 386-535) and other non-Chinese dynastic houses who ruled northern China after the 3rd century AD. The religion is based on the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, born in India c. 563 BC. Buddhism is primarily concerned with individual salvation, teaching that the release from suffering comes through conquering worldly desires. Building on ideas from Confucianism, Daoism and folk religions, Buddhism has played an important role in forming the mindset of Chinese people and society.

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