

# China's Major Philosophical Traditions

## Confucianism 儒家

social, political ethical doctrine

Confucius 孔夫子 (551-479 bce) and *The Analects* 论语  
seen as a teacher, not a saint

key ideas

objective: social order; legitimates ruler through Mandate of Heaven concept

optimism: belief in innate goodness of humans and the perfectibility of humans

key virtue: benevolence *ren* 仁

key to perfection: study the golden age

key subject to study: *li* 礼 propriety, decorum, ritual

emphasis on sincerity, reciprocal relations within hierarchical framework

long lasting influence thanks to state promotion, appeal to Chinese traditions

## Mohism 墨家

Mozi (Mo Tzu 墨子, 470-391 bce)

human nature can't be changed, must make self-interest serve general

fundamentally opposed to particularism, familialism

stressed action, frugality

key idea: universal love

threefold test and fourfold standard for policies

## Daoism 道家

reaction to Confucian focus on ritual, study, intervention

key ideas

naturalist philosophy

troubles stem from pursuit of "civilization"

dramatic action needed to eliminate teachings which promote rituals, etc.

once such threats are eliminated, a minimalist rule is to prevail

spun off popular religious communities, alchemy

## Legalism 法家

central concern: getting, enhancing, and holding power

new situations require innovative solutions

emphasis on efficiency

human nature is basically selfish

therefore can be manipulated with a set of rewards and punishments

laws to apply to all

corruption stemmed through surveillance

exterminate competing systems of thought

**Imperial Confucianism:** Confucian face on Legalist state

## **Buddhism 佛教**

Gautama Siddhartha (the Buddha), Indian prince, achieved enlightenment, devoted to teaching  
Four Noble Truths: life is suffering, suffering comes from craving, to end craving end desire,  
to end desire follow the eightfold path

Eightfold Path: right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right  
effort, right mindfulness, right concentration

every action yields karma, karmic score determines rebirth

to escape the cycle of rebirth and achieve nirvana, follow the eightfold path

## **Hundred Schools Debate**

When we cover the “hundred schools of thought” era, we usually have seminar participants join a particular school of thought and then participate in a four sided debate. In the debate, the moderator asks questions of each school and permits participants to ask questions of each other. In general, we encourage speakers to accent the positive in their doctrines, though we recognize that it is sometimes essential to draw contrasts with the way other schools deal with particular issues. Complete details, background readings, and student handouts are available in Dube, *Early Chinese History: The Hundred Schools Period. China's Golden Age of Philosophy*. Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1999. (A pdf version is available in the seminar forum, to order a print version, go to: <http://nchs.ucla.edu/World-Era3.html>.)

Among the questions we discuss are:

### **EDUCATION:**

Is education necessary? Define a "well-educated" person. What would such a person know and be able to do? Who should provide this training?

### **LOYALTY:**

To which people/institutions should a person owe his/her loyalty? What is the nature and what are the limits (if any) of these obligations?

### **SOCIETY/GOVERNMENT:**

Describe the ideal society and government's role (if any) in that society. Be sure to address issues such as stratification, relations between people, and qualifications/responsibilities of leaders.