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CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Chinese literary sources trace the foundations of China's long, rich and complex philosophical tradition to the mythical Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) who lived earlier than 2,500 B.C. and who laid the framework for Chinese civilization. After him came the reign of the legendary sage-kings, three of whom—Yao, Shun and Yu were idealized in Chinese philosophical writings as model rulers with integrity and upright conduct. As civilization advanced, the obscure Xia (Hsia) dynasty emerged. Not much is known about the Xia dynasty beyond extant literary writings. Some archaeologists would identify the Xia dynasty with the early bronze age civilization excavated at the Erlitou site.

EARLY HISTORY

Shang Dynasty (c.1600–c.1045 B.C.). Chinese philosophical thought took definite shape during the reign of the Shang dynasty in Bronze Age China. During this period, the primeval forms of ancestor veneration in Neolithic Chinese cultures had evolved to relatively sophisticated rituals that the Shang ruling house offered to their ancestors and to *Shangdi*, the supreme deity who was a deified ancestor and progenitor of the Shang ruling family. A class of shamans emerged, tasked with divination and astrology using oracle bones for the benefit of the ruling class. Archaeological excavations have uncovered elaborate bronze sacrificial vessels and other paraphernalia for ancestor veneration rites, which were carried out in temples. The primordial forms of filiality evolved during this period together with the ancestor veneration ceremonies.

Zhou (Chou) Dynasty (c. 1045–221 B.C.). Historically, the Zhou was a semi-nomadic group who conquered their more refined overlords and opted to assimilate themselves into Shang culture and way of life, including ancestor veneration sacrificial ceremonies and their foundations in the concept of filiality. The Zhou ruling house came into power when King Wu, the first Zhou king overthrew Wicked King Jie, the last Shang ruler who would become the paradigmatic figure in Chinese philosophical thought for a tyrannical and incompetent ruler. To justify the overthrow of the last Shang king and to legitimize their rule, the Zhou kings developed the notion of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*) as the basis for the moral-ethical right to rule.

Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*). The Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*) is a moral-ethical imperative that states that the legitimacy of a ruler to govern vests in *Tian* (Heaven), which expresses its views in signs, portents and rebellions. A ruling house retains the Mandate of Heaven insofar as it constantly acted morally and for the good of the people. If it strayed from the path of virtue and benevolence, it would lose the right to rule. Wicked King Jie, the last Shang ruler had lost the Mandate of Heaven to the Zhou King Wu because of his evil ways. The successful rebellion that swept the Zhou to power was interpreted as the ultimate portent from *Tian* of a change in mandate. All Chinese emperors, from the first Zhou king onwards became known as *Tianzi* (T'ien-tzu, ''Son of Heaven''), the earthly representatives of *Tian* vested with *Tianming* (Mandate of Heaven) to look after the well-being of their subjects. As a political philosophy, the *Mandate of Heaven* is a two-edged sword. While it legitimized a dynasty's right to govern, it also imposed a burden on the ruling house to justify the continuance of this right. Dissatisfied rivals would seize power on

grounds that an existing ruling house had lost the Mandate of Heaven by the bad treatment of its subjects.

Itinerant Scholars (*ru*). The Mandate of Heaven would also have another impact on Chinese philosophy—to ensure that they remain in power, rulers began to employ scholars (*ru*) to advise them on good government. Itinerant scholars presented themselves at the court, offering their services. Two of China's most well-known scholars are CONFUCIUS (KONGFUZI) and MENCIUS (MENGZI), who would later become the two pillars of the *Rujiao* (''Traditions of the *Literati*,'' known in the West as CONFUCIANISM. It was from these wandering scholars that the Hundred Schools (*Bai jia*) of Chinese philosophy would later emerge during the period of the Warring States (*Zhanguo*).

Emergence of classical texts. King Wu was succeeded as regent by his brother, the Duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong), a man of great intelligence, energy, and character whose reign was regarded as the golden age of Zhou rule by Confucius (Kongfuzi) and his followers. The classical texts and historical records that gradually emerged during the Zhou dynasty would later become important sources of precedents for the emergence of classical Chinese philosophical thought. Early forms of the classic texts of the Book of Poetry (*Shijing*), the Book of History (*Shujing*) and the Book of Changes (*Yijing*) first emerged during this period. The Spring and Autumn Annals (*Chunqiu*), a historical chronicle of the State of Lu from 722 to 481 B.C. is an important witness to the twilight years of Zhou rule and the emergence of the Hundred Schools (*Bai jia*), a diverse plurality of Chinese philosophical schools competing for socio-political influence.

***Yin-yang* Philosophical worldview.** The Book of Changes (*Yijing*) is significant as evidence for the systematization of an earlier, ancient Chinese philosophical world view of life within a cyclical and complementary framework. As Chinese cosmology developed, this cyclical framework became known as the *yin-yang*—two opposite but complementary energies that manifest and differentiate the myriad things that come into existence from undifferentiated primordiality or *Dao* (*Tao*). Chinese cosmology maps all phenoma in the universe in pairs of bipolar complementary opposites according to the *yin-yang* matrix, e.g., production-destruction, hot-cool, sun-moon, bright-dark, active-passive, odd-even, male-female, etc. The dynamic interaction of *yin* and *yang* gives rise to the production and destruction of diverse forms of things in the cosmos. Proper and harmonious living would be understood as a balance of *yin-yang*, an imbalance of which leads to disorder, disunity, disharmony, chaos and wars. Later philosophers would combine the yin-yang cosmology with the Five Elements (*Wu xing*)—the Chinese metaphysical conceptualization of all things (*wan wu*) in terms of the five ''phases'' (*xing*) of earth, wood, metal, fire, and water.

Decline of the Zhou Dynasty. To control the hostile subjects within their empire, and in the face of difficulties in communication, the Zhou rulers parceled out lands to friends and former foes, thus setting up a feudal system in which the political allies became feudal lords and the commoners were serfs. In theory, all land belonged to the king, who bestowed it on his vassals; they in turn parceled it out to those below them. Arable land was divided into nine well-field units (*tian*), and one out of nine plots was cultivated by the tenants for the feudal lord. Feudal lords were responsible for keeping the peace within their territory, supplying conscripts to the Zhou imperial army and paying an annual tribute to the Zhou king. As the feudal vassals became powerful rulers in their own right, the fiefdoms became *de facto* independent states and the feudal lords gradually arrogated titles and honors that formerly belonged to the Zhou monarch alone.

PERIOD OF THE HUNDRED SCHOOLS (*BAI JIA*)

Major developments took place during the tumultuous period of the Hundred Schools (*Bai jia*), straddling the latter part of the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 B.C.), the twilight years of the Zhou dynasty, and the Warring States period (481–221 B.C.), when Zhou rule collapsed and feudal states vied for power. This was a period of terrible suffering for the ordinary folk caught in the crossfire of marauding armies. The old cultural-religious order had collapsed and created a spiritual vacuum. Philosophers and scholars from rival schools offered competing solutions to the existential questions on human suffering and social disorder. The diversity and vitality of these schools that emerged resulted in this period being known as the period in Chinese history of the Hundred Schools. Promoters of the two emerging traditions of Confucianism and Daoism battled one another and with other rivals such as the Legalists, Moists and Egoists.

Confucius (Kongfuzi). Confucius (551–479 B.C.) lived during the Spring and Autumn period, the twilight years of the Zhou dynasty. A firm believer in education as the *sine qua non* for one's self-cultivation, he achieved fame by establishing China's first school of learning more than a century before Plato had established his academy in Athens. Confucius firmly believed that everyone could benefit from self-cultivation and insisted that everyone could aspire to be leaders by proper training and education. For him education was more than mere acquisition of knowledge or a means of acquiring power. Rather, education is primarily about character building and self-cultivation, and only secondarily about acquiring skills for career advancement. His twofold leg-

acy of proper education as a cornerstone of socio-political transformation, and teaching as the highest and most noble calling continues to animate the East Asian societies that venerate him as teacher and philosopher *par excellence*. The core of Confucius' teachings centers on the self-cultivation of *li, xiao* (*hsiao*), *yi* (*i*) and *ren* (*jen*), commonly translated as propriety, filiality, appropriateness and humanness. The objective of such self-cultivation is to become a *junzi* (*chün-tzu*) or ''superior person.'' While he claimed to be a transmitter rather than an innovator (see Analects 7:1), the originality and vitality of his overarching vision of life, characterized by a threefold principle—the love of tradition, the love of learning, and the love of self-cultivation was to transform China and the other East Asian societies of Korea, Japan and Vietnam indelibly. Although he personally did not found any mass movement, his teachings were disseminated by his admirers among the *ru* (*literati*) and co-opted by them, gradually evolving to become the foundational tenets of the *rujiao* (''Teachings of the *Literati*,'' commonly but inaccurately translated as Confucianism). Confucius himself did not appear to have written anything that can be clearly attributed to him. The only extant collection of his sayings is the *Lun Yu* (Analects), a later compilation by his disciples of sayings attributed to him.

Mencius. The most important contribution that Mencius (372–289 B.C.) made to Chinese philosophy is his assertion on the goodness of the *benxing* (''original human nature''). This assertion would not only undergird his entire philosophy and vision of life, but would eventually become the classical Confucian formulation on human nature (*renxing*). For Mencius, strictly speaking, a human is not a static sort of being, but a dynamic *becoming* striving toward sagehood. In his understanding, an infant is not born as an ''individual,'' but rather, born into a framework of familial and socio-cultural relations that would shape and nurture that infant's *benxing* (original human nature). At birth, the *benxing* comprises the four virtuous tendencies of commiseration, shame, deference and preference that are incipient, underdeveloped and fragile. With proper education and self-cultivation, these tendencies could mature into the four cardinal virtues of ''humanness'' (*ren*), appropriateness (*yi*), propriety (*li*) and wisdom (*zhi*) in a fully developed human nature (*renxing*) (see Mencius 2A:6). What is meant here is a relational, rather than an essential understanding of personhood that understands the progressive maturing of human nature within an interlocking matrix of *reciprocal relations* that, over a lifetime, defines one's character.

Moism (*Mojia*). Mozi (Mo-tzu), a.k.a. Mo Di (circa 479–381 B.C.) had advocated impartial and universal love of all *without* any distinction, and condemned all expressions of human emotions. Mozi was also an austere and disciplined utilitarian, who condemned all forms of extravagance, especially lavish funerals and elaborate musical performances. Mencius' opposition to Mozi was centered on his accusations that Mo-tzu's universal love is too cold, too logical, devoid of human emotion and goes against instinctive human love for one's parents and other members of the family. He argued that it went against the natural order of things to love everyone alike, because it would deny the claim of one's parents to the greatest degree of love through the obligation of filiality. Instead, love for people outside of one's family ought to be an extension of the love for members of one family, and is differentiated according to the type of relationship and the degree of reciprocity (*shu*) within that relationship. Consequently, for Mencius, love and the obligation to love was to be differentiated according to the proximity and distance of such relationship, as stipulated by the principles of propriety (*li*).

Egoism (*wei wo*) of Yang Zhu. Yang Zhu (Yang Chu, circa 440–360 B.C.), an advocate of egoism (*wei wo*) had argued that since everyone, good and bad alike, faces the same death, one might as well live for oneself and enjoy the moment in whatever good that comes one's way. Not surprisingly, his teachings were condemned by Mencius and other scholars as hedonistic, selfish and anti-social. The Mencian critique of Yang Zhu became the classical summary of the School of Egoists: ''The principle of philosopher Yang was 'each for himself' [*wei wo*]. Though he might have benefitted the whole country by plucking out a single hair, he would not have done it.'' (Mencius 7:1). No written works of Yang Zhu are extant, although many scholars think that chapter 7 of the *Liezi* (*Lieh-tzu*) probably contains some of his ideas.

Legalism (*Fajia*). Legalism (*Fajia*) was an important and very attractive political philosophy that arose in the Hundred Schools (*Bai jia*) period, and was adopted as state ideology by the First Emperor *Qin Shi Huangdi* (*Shih Huang-ti*, 259–210 B.C.) of the *Qin* (*Chin*) dynasty. Legalists argued that everyone is inclined to do evil because human nature is basically evil. Therefore, it was necessary for the ruler to rule with an iron fist, promulgating strict laws, and adopting a ''carrot-and-stick'' approach of harsh punishments to enforce the strict laws and attractive inducements that took advantage of the selfishness of human nature to goad people into proper behavior. The ultimate goal of Legalism was the autocratic ruler's ability to sit back, ''do nothing'' (*wuwei*) and enjoy the security and prosperity of a society where the fear of the Law coerced everyone into acquiescence. The two most prominent Legalists of the Hundred Schools pe-

riod were *Han Feizi* (*Han Fei-tzu*, circa 280–233 B.C.) and *Li Si* (*Li Ssu*, circa 280–208 B.C.)

Philosophical Daoism (*Daojia*). Philosophical Daoism (*Daojia*) emerged during the Hundred Schools (*Bai jia*) period as an advocate of a naturalistic philosophy that emphasized the artificiality of human institutions, and promoted the abandonment of worldly pursuits in favor of an accommodation with the natural flow of things in the world. Although its principal goal is the attainment of *wuwei* (''non-action''), which it shared in common with Legalism, Daoist philosophers interpreted *wuwei* as the mode of being and action that seeks to flow with the grain of the *Dao* (*Tao*, ''Way'') in bringing manifest forms into actuality from primordial flux. *Wuwei* ought to be understood not as the total lack of activity, but rather *active inactivity* that would allow the *Dao* (*Tao*) to run its course and unveil all potentialities to their fullest without any human interference. Thus, *wuwei* is the opposite of ''calculated or intentional action'' that limits the fullest range of potentialities. While it is true that some Daoists were attracted to the eremitical lifestyle of permanent contemplation of nature of the type that the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu) had advocated, many Chinese intellectuals found in philosophical Daoism (*Daojia*) a source of spiritual comfort and renewal in the stressful pressures of Confucian officialdom, especially in the midst of socio-political upheavals.

Revival of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty. After the Qin dynasty's disastrous flirtation with Legalism (*Fajia*), which gave rise to the infamous burning of books, the suppression of rival philosophical schools and the execution of rival scholars, the founding of the Han dynasty by Liu Bang in 206 B.C. heralded the beginning of a new imperial era that would last for two millennia until 1911. The Han dynasty became the yardstick by which subsequent Chinese dynasties, intellectual achievements, socio-cultural and philosophical developments, and political institutions would invariably be judged by. At the Imperial Academy (*Taixue*) established in Chang'an in 124 B.C., scholars engaged in a study of both Confucian and Daiost texts as they trained for the Chinese civil service. Under the reign of Emperor Wudi, Confucianism was adopted as the national ideology in 141 B.C. A rudimentary form of the later civil service examination system based on the Five Classics (*Wu jing*, comprising: *Shijing*, the Book of Poetry; *Shujing*, the Book of History; *Liji*, the Book of Rites; *Yijing*, the Book of Changes and the *Chunqiu*, the Spring and Autumn Annals) was instituted to select the best scholars for service as governors and imperial functionaries.

[J. Y. TAN]

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Early History. Buddhism first entered China sometime during the first century A.D., probably with foreign traders who came into China via the Silk Road or from the maritime route along the southeastern seaboard. For the first two centuries or so, it existed primarily among immigrant settlements. With the fall of the Han dynasty in the early third century, interest in Buddhism among the Chinese increased as the unstable political situation inspired people to seek for new answers. The Central Asian monk Kumārajīva arrived in 402 A.D. and opened his translation bureau in the north, producing some of the finest translations from Sanskrit, many of which are still considered the standard. His rendering of Indian Mādhyamika texts led to the foundation of the Sanlun (or ''Three Treatise'') school that specialized in Mādhyamika philosophy. Also, the dissemination of Buddhist texts and teachings among the educated elite led to a prolonged exchange of ideas between Buddhism and Taoism, and Buddhism absorbed and modified many Taoist ideas.

Golden Age of Buddhism. Buddhism flourished during the Tang dynasty, although it also suffered severe setbacks. Increased affluence and patronage enabled many original thinkers and practitioners to establish schools of Buddhism more in keeping with Chinese cultural and intellectual patterns and less dependent upon pre-existing Indian schools of thought. Examples include Zhiyi (538–597), who founded the Tiantai school; Fazang (643–712), who consolidated the Huayan school; and the various meditation masters who established Chan as a separate school that transmitted the Buddha-mind directly from master to disciple ''outside of words and scriptures.'' Daochuo (562–645), Shandao (613–681), and others continued building up the Pure Land movement, extending Tanluan's teaching further. During this time Xuanzang (ca. 596–664) traveled in India for sixteen years and brought back many texts which he translated into Chinese. After Kumārajīva, he is considered the second of the greatest translators in Chinese Buddhist history. He concentrated on Indian Yogacāra thought, and, building on the foundation laid by Paramārtha, founded the Faxiang school.

Rivalry and Conflicts with Confucians and Daoists. Success brought its own difficulties. Ever since Buddhism's inception in China some traditional Confucian scholars had decried it as a foreign religion that violated basic Chinese values, especially the loyalty that all citizens owed to the state and the filial piety that sons and daughters owed their parents. In addition, Daoists sometimes saw in Buddhism an antagonist and competitor rather than a colleague. In the past, the government insti-

tuted ordination examinations and state-issued certificates to control the size of the *sangha*, and twice during the Northern and Southern Kingdoms period the state had suppressed Buddhism (in 446 and 574). In the year 845, the Tang court was incited to suppress Buddhism once again, and for three years it pursued this policy of razing monasteries and temples, forcing clergy back into lay life or even killing them, and burning books, images, and properties. Unlike the previous two persecutions, this suppression happened in a unified China and affected all areas. Scholars are in agreement that this event marked the end of Buddhism's intellectual and cultural dominance, as the *sangha* never recovered its former glory. The Tiantai and Huayan schools experienced some revivals thereafter, but lost most of their vigor. The Pure Land and Chan schools, being much less dependent upon patronage and scholarship, fared better and became the two dominant schools of Buddhism in China thereafter. After the persecution, Chan communities experimented with new teaching methods that circumvented conventional teaching and inculcated a dramatic, instantaneous experience of enlightenment. The leading figures in this movement were Mazu Daoyi (709–788), Baizhang Huaihai (749–814), Huangbo (d. 850), Linji Yixuan (founder of the Linji school, d. 866), Dongshan Liangjie (807–869), and Caoshan Benji (840–901), the two founders of the Caodong school.

Competition. After the Tang, the intellectual vigor of Buddhism was eclipsed by the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty. Nevertheless, there were significant figures and movements during this time. Many figures worked to reconcile the very different outlooks and methods of the Chan and Pure Land schools, notably Yongming Yanshou (904–975) and Yunqi Zhuhong (1532–1612). The latter was also part of a revival of Chan in the latter half of the Ming dynasty that also included Cipo Zhenke (1543–1603), Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623), and Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655). All agreed that Pure Land and Chan, though differing in method, strove toward the same goal, though Hanshan and Cipo still tended to define this goal in Chan terms. Zhixu, however, emphasized Pure Land teaching almost exclusively and came to be regarded as one of the patriarchs (*zu*) of this school.

[C. B. JONES]

NEO-CONFUCIANISM

The term ''Neo-Confucianism'' is often used to refer to the developments in Confucian philosophical thought from the Song dynasty to the collapse of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). It has been similarly criticized for its misleading portrayal of a unified and normative movement, overgeneralizing the reality of a diverse plurality of vibrant, competing schools of thought in China during the period that included *Daoxue* (School of the Way), *Lixue* (School of Principle), and *Xinxue* (School of the Mind), to name a few. These schools regarded Confucius as their inspiration and his teachings as a common cultural-philosophical heritage, but developed his ideas in innovative ways that he would never have recognized. The problem is compounded by the fact that the Chinese themselves never saw fit to coin a single term to describe the diversity of competing schools.

Emergence of Neo-Confucian Schools. After centuries of competing intellectually and spiritually with Daoism (Taoism) and Buddhism, Confucian scholars in the Song Dynasty initiated a process of reinterpreting traditional Confucian classical texts to formulate new answers that responded to the challenges brought by Daoism and Buddhism. This process gave rise to new innovative schools of thought. This revival and revitalization of Confucianism started with the writings of the Northern Song scholars Zhou Dunyi (Chou Tun-i, 1017–1073), Shao Yong (Shao Yung, 1011–1077), Zhang Zai (Chang Tsai, 1020–1077), and the brothers Cheng Hao (Ch'eng Hao, 1032–1085) and Cheng Yi (Ch'eng I, 1033–1077).

Early Neo-Confucian Developments. While overtly condemning Buddhism and Daoism, these scholars were busy combining metaphysical elements borrowed from those two religions with traditional themes from Confucian classics such as the Analects (*Lunyu*), the Mencius (*Mengzi*), the Book of Changes (*Yijing*), and the Book of Rituals (*Liji*). What emerged from the ruminations of these scholars was a novel and innovative metaphysical framework for Confucianism that was designed to counter the attractiveness of rival Daoist (Taoist) and Buddhist metaphysical systems. Zhou Dunyi (Chou Tun-i) and Shao Yong (Shao Yung) had reinterpreted Daoist (Taoist) metaphysical diagrams to offer a nascent metaphysical cosmology for Confucianism. Zhang Zai (Chang Tsai) proposed a materialist understanding of *qi* (*chi*, ''energy'') as the building block of everything (i.e., spirit, matter and energy) in the universe. The two brothers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi formulated the theory of ''principle'' (*li*) as the universal and primordial potentiality from which all living things are ordered.

Zhu Xi and the School of Principle (*Lixue*). It was the great Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (Chu-Hsi, 1130–1200) who synthesized the efforts of these five Neo-Confucian scholars into a coherent metaphysical framework that later became the foundational tenets of his rationalist School of Principle (*Lixue*). The starting point for Zhu Xi is ''principle'' (*li*) as predictable and observable patterns of potentialities in the world upon

which *qi* (energy) crystallizes and forms all living things. There was one universal and primordial *li* (principle) that is *objectively descriptive* (i.e., it describes *why* things are) and *morally prescriptive* (it prescribes *what* can be done to these things). Adapting the Mencian assertion that ''original human nature'' (*benxing*) is wholly good, Zhu Xi claimed that *li* (principle) is wholly good, and evil arises not from *li* (principle) but turgid *qi* (bad energy), which can be clarified through disciplined self-cultivation. The purpose of education is to acquire knowledge of the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of *li* (principle) through the ''investigation of all things'' (*ge wu*).

Wang Yangming and the School of the Mind (*Xinxue*). Wang Yangming (1472–1529), the idealist Neo-Confucian scholar of the Ming dynasty who synthesized the principal teachings of the School of the Mind (*Xinxue*), rejected the rationalist approach of Zhu Xi. He propounded a doctrine of the ''unity of knowledge and action'' (*zhi xing he yi*) based on the notion that principle (*li*) is found wholly within the mind (*xin*), because the mind is the repository of the innate knowledge of all goodness (*liangzhi*). To investigate these moral principles is to ''rectify the mind'' (*chengyi*). Thus, for Wang Yangming, the ''investigation of things for attaining knowledge'' (*ge wu zhi zhi*) is unnecessary, all that is needed is a contemplative and introspective ''rectification of the mind'' (*chengyi*).

See Also: BUDDHISM-CHINA; CHINESE RELIGIONS; CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY; CONFUCIANISM AND NEO-CONFUCIANISM; CONFUCIUS (KONG FUZI); DAOISM (TAOISM); LAOZI (LAO-TZU); MENCIUS (MENGZI); MOZI (MO-TZU); ZHUANGZI (CHUANG-TZU).

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CHINESE RELIGIONS

A generic term often used to indicate the various religious traditions that emerged in China over its long history. There are four basic categories of Chinese religions: (1) CONFUCIANISM, (2) DAOISM, (3) BUDDHISM and (4) Chinese folk religions. Throughout China's history, these religious traditions have interacted with, shaped and transformed each other. The boundaries of these religious traditions have remained fluid, with a significant amount of mutual interaction and sharing of common elements. In their later developed form, Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Daoism resembled each other to the extent that it was difficult to tell where one ended and the other began. The traditional Chinese term *sanjiao* (''Three Ways'') best exemplifies this complex interaction. *Sanjiao* refers to the three Chinese great religious traditions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. A person can practice any one or more, or even all three religious traditions simultaneously, according to the specific needs in the course of one's life. One could be a Confucian in public life, a Daoist adept searching for immortality, and offering sacrifices to local deities for good fortune.

Neolithic Origins. The earliest Chinese settlements emerged during the Neolithic period (circa 5,000 B.C.) and the Bronze Age (circa 3,000 B.C.). No unified Chinese civilization existed during these two periods, merely pockets of Chinese settlements known as Yangshao Culture, Dawenko Culture, Liangche Culture, Hungshan Culture, Longshan Culture and Erligang Culture, named after their achaeological sites. Archaeological excavations have uncovered burial sites with graves arranged hierarchically. Remains of graveside ritual offerings of food and drink and pig skulls were unearthed at some sites, while primitive amulets and statues were found at others. These discoveries point to rudimentary forms of ancestor veneration in ancient Chinese religious practice.

Shang Dynasty (circa 1751–1045 B.C.). The period of the Shang dynasty witnessed the emergence of a distinct class of shamans tasked with oracle bone divination (*jiagu*). These shamans inscribed questions to the spirits on pieces of tortoise or oxen bones using the earliest extant form of the Chinese script. These questions were phrased in a way that could be answered by a ''yes'' (i.e., auspicious) or ''no'' (i.e., inauspicious). The two possible answers were also inscribed, and the bones heated to induce splitting. The split-line nearest the word ''auspicious'' or ''inauspicious'' was taken as the answer. Although some of the questions were addressed to either the supreme deity *Shangdi* (the Most High Lord) or other lesser deities of the wind and grain, celestial bodies, mountains and rivers, the majority of the questions were directed at the ancestors of the Shang ruling family. Other