

Northeast Asia

History & Religion of Korea, China
and Japan

China

- Xia Dynasty (c. 2200 - c. 1750 BC) - not much is known about this first Chinese dynasty, until recently, most historians thought that it was a myth.
- Based on animism and shamanism, the belief system will influence later rulers until the establishment of the Spring & Autumn Period (722 - 481 BC).
- This period saw a proliferation of new ideas and philosophies.

- The three most important ideas were Taoism, Confucianism, and Legalism.
- Tao, literally translated, "the Way", gets its name from the oldest great book of Taoism, the Tao te Jing.
- The founder of Taoism is believed by many to be Lao-Tse (604-531 BC), a contemporary of Confucius.
- Tao refers to a power which envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe.

- Confucianism was founded by K'ung Fu Tzu, aka Confucius.
- He was born in 551 BC in the state of Lu, during the Chou dynasty, an era known for its moral laxity.
- He believed that moral men make good rulers and that virtue is one of the most important properties that an official can have.
- The social ethics and moral teachings of Confucius are blended with the Taoists communion with nature and Buddhists concepts of the afterlife, to form a set of complementary, peacefully co-existent and ecumenical religions.

- Legalism, derived from the teachings of one of Confucius' disciples, Xun-zi.
- Xun-zi believed that man would look out for himself first and was therefore basically evil.
- The Legalists designed a series of draconian laws that would make a nation easier to control.
- The fundamental aim of both Confucianism and Legalism was the re-unification of a then divided China, but they took difference approaches.
- Confucianism depended on virtue and natural order; Legalism used a iron fist.

- Buddhism was introduced into China around the middle of the first century AD.
- Buddhism will compete with Confucianism, and will eclipsed it as a major cultural force.
- For various political and social reasons, it spread very quickly throughout China, Tibet, Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan.
- Taoism, Confucianism, Legalism and Buddhism all will infiltrate the Chinese government to become an integral part of daily life.

Japan

- The divine couple, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto, who gave birth to the Japanese islands.
- Jomon Period (13,000 BC to 300 BC), was the first period of occupation. These people were hunter – gatherers and fishermen.
- Yayoi Period (300 BC to 300 AD), the rice culture was imported into Japan around 100 BC & social classes started to evolve, as well as a hierarchy.

- The Japanese were animists until the development of Shinto around 500 BC.
- Shinto is a mixture of animism, shamanism, and hero/ancestor worship.
- The name was derived from the Chinese words "*shin tao*" ("*The Way of the Gods*") in the 8th Century AD.
- Shinto will become the primary religion of Japan, until the arrival of Buddhism during the Yamato period.
- Due to the Chinese influence, Buddhism and Shintoism began to merge.

- Shinto can be very difficult to understand, almost like Taoism. In fact, the two are rather similar.
- The belief that all things have, or are part of, the divine spirit.
- No fully developed theology or moral code. Just "be good".
- All humans are seen as "children of the Kami".
- Morality is based upon that which is of benefit to the group, not the individual.

- Shinto and Buddhism will remain virtually unchanged until the latter part of the Heian period.
- Buddhism will begin to split into sects, the first of which is the "Pure Land" sect or Jodo sect in 1175 AD.
- Its followers came from all different social classes since its theories were simple and based on the principle that everybody can achieve salvation by strongly believing in the Buddha.

- Next, and probably the more famous, was the Zen sect in 1191 AD.
- Its complicated theories were popular among the members of the military class, i.e. samurai and shoguns.
- According to Zen teachings, one can achieve self enlightenment through meditation and discipline.
- There will not be another major religion coming to Japan until the 1500's when the Portuguese bring in Christianity.

Korea

- In Korean mythology, the birth of the nation begins when the god, Hwanung, comes from heaven and transforms a bear into a woman.
- He marries her and she gives birth to a son, Tangun.
- Tangun establishes the first capital of the Korean nation in 2333 – 1122 B.C. and calls it Joseon - Land of the Morning Calm.

- KoJoseon/GoJoseon (Old Joseon) is the debated city of the Tangun Dynasty.
- Many historians & scholars think it is only mythical.
- Until this point, the religions of Korea were animistic & shamanistic.
- Based on the belief of spirits and forces that interacted with everyday life and that shamans could communicate with the spirits.

- By 108 B.C., the Han Dynasty of China had pushed into North Korea, spreading the Chinese influence.
- Korea will adopted a centralized government beaurocracy & Confucianism.
- By 372 AD , Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced into Korea.
- The Silla Dynasty adopted Confucianism, merging it with the Korean Monarchy theory.

- High positions in administration were determined by a mix of family connections and Confusion principles.
- The Central Administration, was composed of high ranking civilian and military officials.
- Both Confucianism and Buddhism flourished in the relatively stable atmosphere of the Unified Silla.
- By the end of the Silla Dynasty, Buddhism was adopted as the official religion, and monks and priests entered government ranks.

- In 1392, the Yi dynasty was formed and moved its capital to Seoul, where re-established ties with Ming Dynasty China.
- Neoconfusionism was became the official religion, and Buddhism was severely persecuted.
- Chundoism, the "Heavenly Way", evolved from the Tonghak Revolution in 1812.
- Tonghak, "Eastern Learning", was developed by Choe Che-U in the 1860's to help ease the farmers suffering from poverty and unrest, as well as to restore political and social stability.

- Choe was alarmed by the intrusion of Christianity and the occupation of Beijing by westerners and their influence in Korea.
- He believed that the best way to counter this was to introduce pro-democracy, establish human rights and create a paradise on earth.
- All Koreans working together and on their own without foreign help.
- Choe set his themes to music so that illiterate farmers could understand and accept them more readily.

- Choe's songs were a mixture of traditional elements from Confucianism and Buddhism, then he added modern humanistic ideas.
- Exclusionism was another characteristic of his religion, which incorporated an early form of nationalism and rejected alien thought.
- Solely Korean Nationalism!
