

# Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism *(cont.)*

## Historical Background Information

Confucianism and Taoism began around 500 BCE in China. Together, they have shaped almost all of Chinese culture. Both Confucianism and Taoism are different philosophies. But the two philosophies do not conflict with each other. Confucianism is a philosophy focusing more on the moral, social, and political part of living. Taoism is a philosophy that believes human nature, living a long life, and being spontaneous are important. Confucianism and Taoism overlap in some beliefs, too. People can follow both philosophies at the same time.

K'ung fu-tzu, also known as Confucius, was born in China in about 551 BCE. China was being torn apart by wars. People seemed to be forgetting how to treat others with kindness. Confucius reminded people what the ancient wise men had believed. He taught a system of respect and courtesy. People in higher positions deserved respect from those in lower positions. Those in higher positions should be kind to those in lower positions.

Confucius' wise sayings were written down by his followers. One of his teachings is what we call the Golden Rule: "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you."

Taoism was started by a man named Laozi. He was an old man when Confucius was young. While the teachings of Confucius were practical, Laozi's teachings were more spiritual. His philosophy is known as the *Tao*. The word *Tao* means "way" or "path." Tao is like a stream that is constantly moving and changing. It is the flow of life. People should strive for harmony with the Tao. A life in harmony with the Tao is usually simple and quiet, marked by humility and compassion. Laozi's beliefs are written in a book called *Tao Te Ching*.

Taoism also taught about yin and yang. These are two opposite forces in the universe. The yin is cold, dark, and mysterious, like the moon. The yang is bright, warm, and clear, like the sun. It is the balance between these two forces that brings changes and harmony in the world and within people.

Legalism was another philosophy taught in China. Legalism taught that people were bad and selfish. The only way to have order was to enforce strict laws. These laws came from the ruler. The ruler disciplined anyone who broke the laws. While Confucius taught that the government should serve the people, legalism taught that the people should serve the government. Rulers from the Qin Dynasty adopted legalism. In 213 BCE, Qin leaders burned any book that did not agree with their philosophy. When Confucian followers tried to save their books, the Qin put them to death.

A philosophy is different from a religion. A philosophy is a person's search for wisdom. A religion is an organized system of beliefs and rituals centering on a supernatural being or beings. Neither Confucianism nor Taoism began as a religion. They were philosophies, or belief systems. Later, people started building temples and shrines to honor these ideas as if they were religions.