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## **Virtuous Life, Honored Afterlife and the Evolution of Confucianism**

By Jasmyn Murrell

*Abstract: Confucius states that we must not focus on the afterlife, because we know so little of it, and we must focus on everyday life. However, Confucianism holds a philosophy of afterlife, even if it is not outright said or depicted. This paper will aim to prove just that. First, through Confucian ideals of being a dutiful person, to grant yourself an honored afterlife, and second, through how Confucianism influenced other religions such as Buddhism and Daoism, which will show a clear depiction of afterlife by considering death rituals, festivals, commune with ancestors, prayers, tomb decor, and the ideology of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism – you will begin to see the depiction of afterlife within Confucianism. But also, you will get to see how Confucianism has evolved and took on traits of both Daoism and Buddhism, which in turn is called Neo-Confucianism. Furthermore, the paper also taps into the history of Confucianism within Modern China. When communism took power, it obliterated Confucianism within society, culture, and government. This left the Chinese people without an identity and there was a revival of Confucianism within China.*

Confucius stated the following when asked about death, “While you do not know life, how can you know death?”<sup>1</sup> Today, many believe that Confucianism does not hold a clear depiction of the afterlife. However, this impression is not true. Confucius envisioned the afterlife as one in which an individual reached sagehood and was worshiped by their descendants and families. Confucianism, contrary to popular belief, does in fact have a clear depiction of the afterlife. This is evident through Confucius' tentative portrayal of an afterlife in his explicit teachings on what

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<sup>1</sup> Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Simon Leys (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

type of person one should strive to be and what actions one should take to earn an honored afterlife. Furthermore, Confucianism has grown alongside, and influenced or been influenced by, other major religions. Specifically, Buddhism and Daoism share a similar appreciation of an ultimate afterlife, though their instructions on how to earn an honored afterlife vary. Due to these religious and philosophical influences, Confucianism itself demonstrates the continued presence of a clear depiction of an afterlife in Confucian thought.

### **Confucius and the Afterlife**

Confucius was born in 551 BCE, during the reign of the Zhou Dynasty. The Zhou dynasty emerged before Confucius' birth, in 1045-1040 BCE, after the fall and overthrow of the Shang Dynasty. It has been said that the Zhou were able to overthrow the Shang because the Shang had lost the Mandate of Heaven, which refers to the right to rule by way of the Heavens and by way of virtue. Confucius grew up in poverty, raised by his mother in the Lu state, under the teaching of the Mandate of Heaven. The philosopher Mencius, who would become a student of Confucianism a century after Confucius's death, held "that heaven oversees a kind of overwhelming moral order in which it is given to rulers to rule for the sake of the common people."<sup>2</sup> In ancient China, Mencius highlighted how a ruler was tasked with upholding a certain stature amongst the people he governed to keep the Mandate of Heaven. Otherwise, a state or dynasty in distress served as an absolute measure indicating that a ruler no longer had the right to rule. Thus, such events as natural disasters, illness, famine, poverty, etc., were treated as signs that the Heavens no longer approved the leader as fit to rule. The consequences of this were clear and expansive as the people lost faith in their dishonored leaders.

Confucius was also raised amongst teachings on the ways to ensure stability in one's leadership and within a kingdom. One way was by being a dutiful person. Leaders of Zhou lineage

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<sup>2</sup> Irene Bloom, "The Evolution of the Confucian Tradition In Antiquity," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, composer William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 115.

believed “heaven...charged certain good men with rulership over the lineage of the world, and the heir of these men might continue to exercise the Heaven-sanctioned power for as long as they carried out their religious and administrative duties with piety, rightness, and wisdom.”<sup>3</sup> In Confucianism, and during the Zhou Dynasty, everyday manner and ritual are vital to interpersonal relationships and the affairs of society. These manners and rituals can be as simple as bowing, shaking hands, or motioning for others to go first. “Confucius attributed great power to ritual, once stating that “The whole world would respond to the true goodness of [a ruler] who could for one day restrain himself and return to ritual.”<sup>4</sup>

A second way to ensure the Mandate of Heaven was through *Li*, or ritual, Confucius explained in the *Analects*, “When practicing the ritual, what matters most is harmony.”<sup>5</sup> In ancient China, *Li* was believed to be necessary for the happiness, harmony, and prosperity of the state, the land, and the people. Professor Yao Xinzong, Dean of the School of Philosophy at Renmin University of China in Beijing, wrote *An Introduction to Confucianism*, which highlights the importance of sacrifices by individuals that are needed for a person to remain observant of ritual, and thus bring about its products such as harmony. Yao wrote, “Li is a character portraying a sacred ritual vessel... Hence serving gods and praying for good fortune.”<sup>6</sup> There were three characters or elements to be used in sacrifice. First, was *ji*, the holding of a piece of meat and offering of it to spirits at the altar; second was *si*, a combination of a sacred altar and a human embryo; and the third was *xiang*, which included the spirits of ancestors. All three of these elements are needed in the observance of *Li*. Such ideas of ritual and sacrifice were crucial to the prosperity of an individual. According to the institution of the sage kings, sacrifices should be performed by a man who governed fairly, discharged his duties to his utmost potential, strengthened his state in times of turmoil, and who successfully prevented great calamities and warded off evil. In the Zhou period:

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<sup>3</sup> Bloom, “The Evolution of the Confucian Tradition In Antiquity,” 27.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed., *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> Xinzong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chapter 4.

A belief in supreme deity or moral force ruled the world and took interest in the affairs of mankind; a belief in the existence and power of ancestral spirits who had to be served and placated with sacrifice; and a belief in the celestial sanction of the political order and the grave responsibility of the ruler to fulfil his moral duties to Heaven and to his people.<sup>7</sup>

One who did not uphold these concepts was said to lose the mandate, which was manifested in the troubles that were inflicted on the land and the people.

The concept of how to govern by way of Heaven was problematic to many Chinese thinkers of the time, including Confucius. For that reason, Confucius began to redefine how an individual could become a virtuous person, and, through dutiful behavior, bring honor to themselves and their family. This virtuous living was doubly rewarding because the achievement of such conduct and personal honor extended to the ancestors and the Heavens. Confucius's understanding of honor led to an important concept in his philosophy, which was the deep appreciation of filial piety (*Xiao*) on the path to being a virtuous person. Filial piety encapsulated the appreciation and act of family reverence, or one's respect for parents, elders, and ancestors. In this way, *Xiao* was the base of moral conduct and social harmony. *Xiao* involved tasks such as taking care of one's parents, burying them properly after they died, bringing honor to family based on one's actions, and having a male heir to carry out the family name. Internally, individuals also strived to never offend their parents, to never speak badly of their parents alive or dead, to never travel far away without purpose, to be conscious of their age and aging, and to protect them whenever necessary, in order to be a filial child and attain virtue. It is important to note that such conduct of a filial pious child continued to be extended to the parents after they died. In the *Analects*, Confucius stated, "When a father is alive, watch the son's aspirations. When a father is dead, watch the son's actions. If three years later, the son has not veered from the father's way, he may be called a dutiful son indeed."<sup>8</sup> Filial piety was driven by the fundamental human bond of parent and child; and this remains the number one relationship that Confucianism holds

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<sup>7</sup> Watson, Nivision, and Bloom, "Classical Sources," 28.

<sup>8</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 5.

sacred. For example, a popular instruction under Confucian beliefs was that a child should mourn their parents for three years. The underlying principle being that parents gave you life, fed you, clothed you, bathed you, and much more in your first three year of living; in turn, the child has an eternal obligation to the parents. Ultimately, one's virtue was nonexistent without filial piety.



Ma Hezhi, *Illustrations of the Classic of Filial Piety*. A son kneeling to his parents.<sup>9</sup>

Filial piety is a value based on the strict principles of hierarchy, obligation, and obedience. To perform it properly, individuals of ancient China were instructed to put their parents above themselves. In the *Book of Odes*, it is stated, “When early dawn unseals my eyes, before my mind, my parents rise.”<sup>10</sup> After one's parent dies, one must take necessary and proper steps to honor them and their journey to the afterlife. Proper burial is one aspect of this. Burning one with items of significant meaning, such

<sup>9</sup> Ma Hezhi, *Illustrations of the Classic of Filial Piety*, 1995, accessed March 2016, <http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/painting/4courpo.htm>. This image depicts filial piety: a boy is kneeling to his parents, and by doing so he helps ensure his future as an honorable man and honors them as a son.

<sup>10</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (University of California Press, 1991), 89.

as jewelry, silk, etc. is needed. Also, the offering of food and gifts to one's deceased parents should be on-going. The one who died should be added to the family inscription that is kept at a home altar. In addition, during the burial process, a child should be in a state of mourning for their parents, and the child should not stray off the path of mourning for three years. For instance, taking a job or being in a relationship can be considered going off the path of mourning one's parents. During a period of three years after a parent's death, one must honor them in the afterlife, as they were honored while living. Furthermore, through filial piety one gains virtue, and by having this virtue, one is able to mourn their parent in the correct way. Ancestor veneration is another important aspect of the afterlife depicted by Confucius in both culture and statecraft.

Ancestor veneration is a ritual practice in honor of deceased family members in accordance with the belief of continued existence after death. The goal of ancestral worship is to ensure their continued well-being in the afterlife, which is used for assistance and advisement of the living. The ritual for ancestral worship includes offerings to ensure welfare in the afterlife. At the funeral of the deceased, items are placed in the coffin or burned as a sacrifice to the dead. These items can range from a toothbrush to a computer, or any household or personal item of the deceased. This ensures a smooth transition to the afterlife, and offerings to the dead should be made on a daily basis. After the funeral, a home altar should be set for worship. On this altar, one should have a portrait of the deceased and a commemorative plaque for offering. "The Master said: If I do not sacrifice with my whole heart I might as well not sacrifice."<sup>11</sup>

The altar of the deceased should contain food (mainly vegetables and fruits because meat symbolizes killing), wine, and sums of money (known as spirit money) to be burned or placed in bowls.

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<sup>11</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 12.



Vmenkov, Burning of Spirit Money at a funeral.<sup>12</sup>

After the deceased's name is added to the ancestral tablet alongside the rest of the ancestors, which should have the names of all ancestors and the dates of death, it should be kept at a small shrine in the home. Incense should be lit before them and offerings of food and prostration should be presented twice a month. "The first month after death, mourning, and ritual is considered important because it is believed that in the first forty-nine days after death, the deceased's journey for judgement in the afterlife is completed. One could then take down the home altar of the individual, but not the ancestral shrine."<sup>13</sup> However, Confucianism is not the only philosophy to tie in afterlife and human action into way of culture and state harmony.

## Daoism

Both Daoism and Confucianism emerged during the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE). They developed from the same source of

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<sup>12</sup> Vmenkov, 2008, accessed March 2016, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burning-money-and-yuanbao-at-the-cemetery-3249.JPG>. This image depicts the burning of spirit money on a public altar to honor a loved one in death and to flourish in afterlife. This is one of many ritual carried out by love ones after death.

<sup>13</sup> Myron L. Cohen and Stephanie F. Teiser, "Settling the Dead: Funerals, Memorials, and Beliefs Concerning the Afterlife," *Living in the Chinese Cosmos: Understanding Religion in Late Imperial China (1647-1911)*. 2007, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/index.html>.



Shang-Zhou culture, and yet had their own foci. Confucius focuses on how to present oneself individually and societally to others, and “viewed education as central to achieving proper conduct both within Society and in Government.”<sup>14</sup> Daoism focuses on mysterious and spiritual dimensions, known as the ways of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Both were established as schools during the Spring and Autumn period (771 to 476 BCE) and during the Warring States period (475-221 BCE), and focus on the unity of heaven and humanity. Daoism teaches one to obtain unity through natural law while Confucianism achieves unity by self-cultivation and instruction of the sages. Both doctrines also oppose and complement each other.

“The Way” is the Daoist belief that people can relate to cosmic forces that form part of a metaphysical world. Consequently, one who becomes attuned with “The Way” has the chance to manifest in body, mind, society, nature, and the universe. A poem depicts this idea. Irene Bloom, Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures at Columbia University, writes in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*;

The way is empty, It may be used without ever  
being exhausted.  
Fathomless, it seems to be the ancestor of all things.  
Blunting the sharpness, untying the tangles,  
subduing the light.  
Merging with the dust. Profound, it appears to exist  
forever.  
Whose child is it I do not know. It seems to have  
existed before the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

In achieving this, one will achieve health and immortality.

In the Han Dynasty (221-206 BCE) Daoist religion developed two aspect: long life and immortality. Both are important to Chinese thought and hold a vital position in Daoism. To achieve these, one consumed a plant based diet, conducted breathing exercises and meditation, and communed with

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<sup>14</sup> “Teachings of Confucius,” October 10, 2010, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.confucius-1.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> Laozi, “Daodejing,” translated by Irene Bloom, in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. WM. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 81.

nature. One's ability to succeed in gymnastics with grace were known as *Fangshi*, or “masters of techniques.” Many people who practiced Daoism were herbalists, dream interpreters, or fortune tellers by profession. “They did so believing their body would become, “light and feathery, their mind clear, and that they could ascend to the paradises of the immortals,” states Livia Kohn, author of *Long Life and Immortality: The Beginnings of Religious Daoism*. Kohn continues to say, “immortality meant the belief that there were beings made from pure breath and light.”<sup>16</sup> It was believed that these beings were outside of the normal human form and need and had the ability to appear as they pleased. In turn, immortality soon became an important goal of the Daoist religion, the paradises became major celestial palaces, and the methods to achieve immortality became highly elaborate techniques for Daoist.



Chen Ruyan, *Mountain of Immortals*<sup>17</sup>

But immortality was also seen in other ways. For instance, in Daoist religion and philosophy the afterlife is another form of life. It is believed that by living a good life, one will flourish in the afterlife. Daoist get to this point by different means than Confucians with filial piety. “In the human sphere, *Laozi* describes the perfect individual, the sage, who comprehended the *Dao* and whose life and actions are ordered in accordance with it.”<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Livia Kohn, *Health and Long Life the Chinese Way*. (Cambridge: Three Pines Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Chen Ruyan, *Mountain of Immortals*, 2013. <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat3/sub10/item91.html>. This image depicts of idea of an immortal paradise by Chen Ruyan a landscape artist from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

<sup>18</sup> Irene Bloom, “The Way of Laozi and Zhuangzi,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. WM. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 78.

sages are ideal rulers, and the *Laozi* gives instructions on how a sage should act. In *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, it is stated that, “the sage is to refrain from meddling in the lives of the people, give up welfare and luxurious living, and guide the people back to a state of innocence, simplicity, and harmony with the Dao,”<sup>19</sup> Meaning “the Way” is how one becomes a sage. Furthermore, there are certain funerary rituals that are practiced in Daoism, to ensure a successful afterlife. First, the one being buried shall be in their finest clothes and jewelry as if they were dressing for a formal event. By dressing the body in this manner is meant to ensure riches and wealth in the afterlife. Second, it is common for families to leave food offering for their deceased. Since it is believed that the afterlife and living are one, the food is offered for consumption.

An important concept in Daoism is *Yin* and *Yang*, which are defined by Daoist as “two halves that together complete wholeness,”<sup>20</sup> and are also the starting point for change. When something is whole, by definition, it is unchanging and complete. *Yin* and *Yang* helps when one is trying to reach “The Way” because it is a system that understands and accept all circumstances of life.

## **Buddhism and the Coming of Neo-Confucianism**

Buddhism has a principle called *Karma*, the belief that suffering in one’s life is evidence of one’s previous life, and it is one’s action in this life that indicates what will happen in the next life. This concept will help you understand the order of Buddhism. The goal of a Buddhist is to reach *Nirvana*, which means to extinguish the three fires - passion (*raga*), ignorance (*moha*), and aversion (*dvesha*). Once all three fires are out, one can be released of *Samsara*, i.e. the uninterrupted cycle of life and death, or reincarnation.

The way to achieve *Nirvana* is through the Eightfold Path, which is categorized in three main ideals: wisdom, virtue, and mind-mastery. Sub-categories of wisdom are *Sammaditthi* (right

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<sup>19</sup> Bloom, “The Way of Laozi and Zhuangzi,”78.

<sup>20</sup> Casey Kochmer and Jewelie, “What is Yin Yang?, Personal Tao.” 2005-2016, accessed March 23, 2016. <http://personaltao.com/teachings/questions/what-is-yin-yang/>.

view), which means knowledge about suffering and how it comes to be; *Sammasankappo* (right thought), which means thoughts of goodwill and absence of violence; *Sammavaca* (right speech), meaning refraining from harmful speech such as lying, arguing, etc.; *Samma kammanto* (right action), meaning refrain from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; *Samma-Ajivo* (right livelihood), meaning giving up dishonest life and the earning of the right one; *Sammavagam* (right endeavor), meaning the elimination of unwholesome thoughts and the cultivation of wholesome ones; *Sammasati* (right mindfulness), meaning contemplating the nature of body, feeling, mind, and things after the removal of sorrow regarding the world; *Sammasamadhi* (right concentration), or an intensification of a mental factors that are present in every state of consciousness. Nevertheless, there are also other ways to have the afterlife you want. Wei Shou, chinese author of *Book of Wei*, stated the following:

By gradually accumulating good deeds, purifying vulgarities, passing through many forms, and refining the spirit, one can arrive at a level at which rebirth will not recur and thus attain buddhahood. [To do so,] there are many steps and mental activities to take, all proceeding from the simple to the profound, the imperceptible to the manifest. Through building up one's goodness and obedience, eliminating desires, and practicing serenity, one can break through. [In addition,] the first step in cultivation of the mind is to take refuge in the buddha, the dharma [Buddhist teachings], and the sangha [the community of Buddhist]. These are called the three refuges...There are also five prohibitions: one must not kill, rob, commit adultery, lie, or drink wine. The meaning is much like the Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness...Those who submit to these teachings shave their beards and hair, free themselves from obligation, and take leave of their homes. They attach themselves to a teacher, observe rules and regulations, and live together to

bring their minds under control and cultivate tranquility.<sup>21</sup>

These ideas are the basis of Buddhism in India. According to Patricia Ebrey, professor at the University of Washington, “Buddhism was introduced into China in the late Han and flourished during the Age of Division and the Tang and Song Dynasty.”<sup>22</sup> When Buddhism first came to China, it “was an event of far-reaching importance in the development of Chinese thought and culture and of Buddhism itself.”<sup>23</sup> Though Buddhism was not greatly accepted in its beginning stage in China, “The Chinese were particularly desirous of knowing whether Buddhism could add to their knowledge of elixirs and practices that would contribute to longevity, levitation, and other superhuman achievements.”<sup>24</sup>

The dislike of Buddhism within China came from the idea of going against Confucian teachings, which now had been one of the leading religions and philosophies in China for hundreds of years. Buddhism taught life was suffering and to rid oneself of suffering, one must get rid of desire. Desires can include family and social relations, and since Confucianism was designed to build oneself for family and social harmony, Buddhism was considered controversial thus not accepted. Confucianism was about self-cultivation by way of family and social setting, while Buddhism was about self-cultivation by way of elimination and alienation.

Buddhism “was radically transformed in Tang China when institutionally it became an arm of the state.”<sup>25</sup> The Tang even created schools in accordance with Buddhism, called Pure Land School, Meditation School, and Buddhist Rituals and Devotional

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<sup>21</sup> Wei Shou, “Wei Shou’s Summary of Buddhist Doctrine,” in “Buddhist Doctrines and Practice,” trans. and ed. Patricia Ebrey, of *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 98.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Ebrey, “Buddhist Doctrines and Practices,” in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. (New York: Free Press, 1993), 97.

<sup>23</sup> WM. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. WM. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 415.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>25</sup> C. Orzech, “Buddhism’s Assimilation to Tang Political Culture,” in “Schools of Buddhist Doctrine,” comps. Leon Hurvitz, Burton Watson, Daniel Stevenson, George Tanabe, and Wing-Tsit Chan, in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. WM. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 476.

Practices, each school illustrated the comparisons of a Buddhist monk (*Bhikkhus*), to that of a king and a sage king. A Buddhist monk “should manifest and reflect the peaceful and joyous qualities of the *Bhikkhus* way of life.”<sup>26</sup> The Buddhist monk's discipline should be helpful to the arising of mindfulness and wisdom. The code of conduct which the monks follow is *Vinaya*, which defines a monk's status as being that of a vagabond:

no personal means of support is a very practical means of understanding the instinct to seek security; furthermore, the need to seek alms gives a monk a source of contemplation on what things are really necessary. The four requisites, food, clothing, shelter and medicines, are what lay people can offer as a practical way of expressing generosity and appreciation of their faith in belonging to the Buddhist Community. Rather than giving requisites to particular monks whom one likes and knows the practicing Buddhist learns to offer to the Sangha as an act of faith and respect for the Sangha as a whole. Monks respond by sharing merit, spreading good will and the teachings of the Buddha to all those who wish to hear, irrespective of personal feelings.<sup>27</sup>

When it comes to food, a monk is only allowed to eat between dawn and midday and allowed to consume only what is offered, except for water, which can be consumed whether it's offered to the monk or not. They are not allowed to eat fruit and vegetables with a fertile seed and they are not allowed to cook or cure food. As far as clothing, monks make their own robes of either brown or white cloth that is offered. For shelter, the ideal living quarters should be solitary, silent, and simple – and they must never share the same quarters with a woman. When it comes to medicine, it can be consumed if it is offered to the monk, or it can be asked for if the monk is ill. The *Vinaya* states that all offerings should be done in a good manner, “making the act of offering a mindful and

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<sup>26</sup> Lays Guide to the Monks' Rule, Buddhist Studies: Buddha Dharma Education Association & BuddhaNet, 2008, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/layguide.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

reflective one.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, monks could use things such as needles and razors. However, they must refrain from television and the handling of money. Monks also lead lives of total celibacy, in which any kind of sexual behavior is forbidden.

Nonetheless, with the rise of Buddhist monks and the assimilation of Buddhist education into China, “the evolution of distinctive Chinese forms of Buddhism”<sup>29</sup> took place. Confucianism still played a small part in the affairs of the state, mainly in aspects of government and education, but many people did not consider themselves Confucian anymore. Seeing as both Buddhism and Daoism fulfilled their spiritual needs, Confucianism lost much of its allure.



Hogarth, Buddhist cave shrine at Longmen caves, made in China during Tang Dynasty, Luoyang, Henan Province, China.<sup>30</sup>

Han Yu was a receiver and transmitter of early tradition, and he contributed to the revival of Confucianism during the Tang

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Buddhist Studies: Buddha Dharma Education Association & BuddhaNet.

<sup>29</sup> W.M. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. W.M. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 539.

<sup>30</sup> M. Teng Hogarth, <http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/buddhism-tang-618%E2%80%9393906-and-song-960%E2%80%93931279-dynasties>. This image depicts a Buddhist shrine cave made in China during the Tang because of the increase of Buddhism within china. Made to honor Buddhism.

Dynasty. He sought to “restore a Confucian social and political order to a society long acclimated to Buddhist and Daoist teachings,”<sup>31</sup> Yet he still saw the Buddhist aspect of master and disciple as vital to society. He even “adapts the terminology of Neo-Daoist Buddhist philosophy to the exposition of the traditional Confucian Way, and suggests a way Confucian thought would be enriched and deepened in the process of encountering Buddhism and Daoism.”<sup>32</sup> The first Neo-Confucian philosopher, Zhou Dunyi, lived under the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE). He used a Daoist basis of metaphysics, “The Way,” as a framework for his ethical philosophy. Here is where we begin to see the development of Neo-Confucianism. Physical strength and good health were the main outcomes wanted from the Confucian revival during the Song period. Neo-Confucianism is an effort to integrate and harmonize several different religious and philosophical traditions which had developed in China over thousands of years, helping make sense of the several diverse and sometimes competing philosophies. A mixture of Confucian emphasis on principles such as humaneness, filial piety, and ritual, became integrated with more abstract Daoist notions of “the Way” governing all existence, in addition to numerous Buddhist principles.

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Hartman, “Han Yu and the Confucian Way,” comps. Charles Hartman, in “The Confucian Revival and Neo-Confucianism” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. W.M. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 568.

<sup>32</sup> W.M. Theodore De Bary, “The Confucian Revival in the Song,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. W.M. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 589.





*The Three Vinegar Tasters. Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Tzu.*<sup>33</sup>

Neo-Confucianism has two ultimate goals: to reach inner sage-hood and outer kingliness. Sage-hood represents a supreme human of virtue. To reach inner sage-hood meant being a perfect moral paragon, but at the same time being learned and wise. From this, one attained outer kingliness, and to achieve this was a lifelong undertaking. A Neo-Confucian must intertwine herself into human affairs by way of leadership, and not be a hermit or a recluse. She must have an impact on others and on society. The Neo-Confucian movement's goal was to create a social order which benefited people, present and future, and allow them to have a means of livelihood.

Neo-Confucianism assimilated into Chinese culture and society, through education. William Theodore De Bary, an American sinologist and scholar of East Asian literature, states in *Sources of Chinese Tradition* that

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<sup>33</sup> The Three Vinegar Tasters, 1880, accessed March 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vinegar\\_tasters.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vinegar_tasters.jpg). The painting is an allegorical depiction of the three faces of major religions Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Each taste the vinegar but for on its sour, another bitter, and last sweet. Showing how each of the different religions though trying to achieve same thing go about it a different way.

Until this time Confucianism had focused on the Way of the sage kings or Way of the noble person as a social or political leader. Now, aiming at education for all through universal schooling and a neoclassical curriculum-- an aim furthered by the spread of printing and literacy-- the Neo-Confucians aspired to a spiritual ideal of sagehood for everyone achievable by methods of cultivation.<sup>34</sup>

A Confucian by the name of Zhu Xi, who was a leading figure in the School of Principle, created a new curriculum for Neo-Confucianism based on teachings from *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *The Mencius*, which became “a basic pattern of schooling in late Imperial China developed in response to needs and challenges in the Song period.”<sup>35</sup> Zhu Xi’s curriculum showed one how to reach sage-hood and social harmony. *The Great Learning*, “teaches one to be a dutiful person and the way of great learning consists in manifesting one’s bright virtue, consists in loving the people, consists in stopping in perfect goodness.”<sup>36</sup> *The Mean* dealt with the Message of the Mind-and-Heart (*xinfa*), which “focused on the conflict of the human mind precariously balanced between selfish and unselfish tendencies, [and] became the basis of Neo-Confucian mind cultivation.”<sup>37</sup> In this manner, Neo-Confucianism taught “that the human sense of order and value does not leave one alienated from the universe but is precisely what unites one to it,” thus ending the dislike of Buddhism by Confucians, because instead of eliminating one’s desire (the aspect of Buddhism that was not supported when it first came to China because it went directly against Confucian teaching of self-cultivation and social harmony), it entwined Buddhist beliefs of self-cultivation (the four

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<sup>34</sup> W.M. Theodore De Bary, “Neo-Confucianism: The Philosophy of Human Nature,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. W.M. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 668.

<sup>35</sup> W.M. Theodore De Bary, “Self and Society in the Ming,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, comps. W.M. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 841.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Muller, “The Great Learning 大學,” July 4, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/greatlearning.html>.

<sup>37</sup> De Bary, “Self and Society in the Ming,” 7.

noble truths and the eightfold path) with Confucian teachings of self-cultivation (filial piety and virtue).<sup>38</sup>

### **The Revival of Confucianism in Modern China**

After China was defeated by the British in the Opium War (1840-1842), which set in action a humiliating chain of events. Soon thereafter, China caught the eye of Westerners with hopes to gain control of China's ports and access to its markets in 1911, the Qing was overthrown, and soon thereafter the Republic of China was established in 1912. "It was referred to as the Republican Period, because monarchy was now repudiated and the Western theory of constitutional republican government was honored, if seldom actually practiced."<sup>39</sup> In this time China and Japan were engaged in a full-scale war. Furthermore, we see significant social and economic changes in China, and "the old order based on Confucian ideas was torn apart."<sup>40</sup> This led to what is known as the May Fourth Movement.

The May Fourth Movement achieved many of its goals, despite continued Japanese possession of Shandong, the movement set forth a mind set to put the fate of the people in their own hands and not wait for the Westerners to intervene. China exerted its will to take charge of her own political destiny, without returning to old ways (of Confucianism). In this period, we see the rise of Communism in China.

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<sup>38</sup> De Bary, "Neo-Confucianism," 669.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Ebrey, "The Early Twentieth Century," in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 331.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.



The May Fourth Movement, Beijing student protesting, 2014, Courtesy of University of St. Andrews History Society, <http://standreshistorysociety.co.uk/2014/11/the-origins-of-the-tiananmen-protests-a-comparison-of-the-may-fourth-and-june-fourth-movements-in-china/>.<sup>41</sup>

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. Initiating a “Profound social and economic changes,” in 1966, during the last decade of his life, Mao Zedong leader of the People's Republic of China, launched a cultural revolution to gain back his power within the government after his position came under question due to his failed plan, the Great Leap Forward.<sup>42</sup> For the cultural revolution, he shut down the “nation's schools, calling for a massive youth mobilization to take current party leaders to task for their embrace of bourgeois values and lack of revolutionary spirit.”<sup>43</sup> Soon thereafter,

The chaos and violence increased in the autumn and winter of 1966, as schools and universities closed so that students could dedicate themselves to “revolutionary struggle.” They were encouraged to destroy the “Four Olds”—old customs, old habits, old culture, and old thinking—and in the process damaged many of China's temples, valuable works of art, and buildings. They also began to verbally and

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<sup>41</sup> This image depicts Beijing student protesting on May 4, 1919 due to the decision made for China at the Versailles Peace Conference in Germany.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Ebrey, “The People's Republic,” in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 407.

<sup>43</sup> “The May Fourth Movement,” *Alpha History*, 2015, accessed March 2016, <http://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/may-fourth-movement/>.

physically attack authority figures in society, including their teachers, school administrators, Communist Party members, neighbors, and even their friends, relatives, and parents. At the same time, purges were carried out in the high ranks of the Communist Party.<sup>44</sup>

Due to the actions of protesters, the Communist Party leaders felt things were getting out of control and the country was in complete disarray. Tactics changed and leaders encouraged people to gain knowledge of Mao's works over physical and verbal violence. However, this did not stop the violence. Mao called in troops to end an uprising at Qinghua University in Beijing during the summer of 1968. This military action by Mao resulted in the death of five people and injuries of 149 others. The victims consisted of both workers and students. This, in turn, sparked serious government action, and a "Revolutionary Committee consisting of representatives from the People's Liberation Army, 'the masses', and 'correct' Communist Party cadres were established,"<sup>45</sup> in hopes to end violence and restore order in China. This move backfired on Mao, and in the long run it caused Chinese people to lose faith in their government. After Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping became the Premier of China, with the goal of modernization focused on improving agriculture, technology, national defense, and industry. At the end of his reign, another May Fourth movement rose at Tiananmen Square as protesters demanded an end to corruption and the government's resignation. Thereafter, the Chinese people became increasingly engaged in international trade.

Beginning in 2007, a revival of Confucianism rose due to government interest and a lack of Chinese cultural identity. Many see the revival of Confucianism as a political agenda by the government. As Daniel Bell, a prolific and controversial political theorist who has been teaching at Tsinghua University in Beijing since 2004 suggests, "the government is trying to use Confucianism to fill in the 'ideology vacuum' of the country." He

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<sup>44</sup> Stefanie Lamb, "Introduction to the Cultural Revolution," *Stanford/SPICE, Stanford Programs of International and Cross-Cultural Education*, December 2005, accessed March 20, 2016, [http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/introduction\\_to\\_the\\_cultural\\_revolution](http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/introduction_to_the_cultural_revolution).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

believes this is so because the Beijing government thinks extreme nationalism and religious sects are too radical, and Marxism is no longer working as a leading ideology. Therefore, “promoting Confucianism is the best way to protect ‘social stability’ and a ‘harmonic society.’” Outside of the government venture, we see that “new groups are formed in response to the quest of traditional culture and there is a process of reinventing the new meaning of Confucianism in contemporary era.”<sup>46</sup>

Confucian teachings give emphasis on how to live a proper life, and how to meet a good afterlife, which suggests that a life properly lived can pay off with an honored afterlife. Though Confucius never talked about an afterlife, after looking at his teachings of filial piety, service to parents, and ancestral veneration, we can conclude that Confucius did indeed have a clear depiction of the afterlife, which is (1) to reach sage-hood, and (2) to be worshiped by one’s descendants and their families. Furthermore, we see how the metaphysical world of Daoism grew alongside Confucianism, allowing Chinese culture to find ways in which people can become attuned with themselves and the spiritual world. In addition, we see the problems with Buddhism’s venture to China, because of its direct opposition of Confucian teachings. These differences created a new form of Confucianism, offering the Chinese culture Neo-Confucianism, which intertwines Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, bringing the physical and metaphysical worlds together; and assimilation of their teachings by way of education, instead of through sage kings, showing how outside influence created change in the mind of society and government alike. Although we see Confucianism leave China’s grasp for a while due to foreign influences and the Chinese government repetitively seeking other venues in which to govern China, Confucianism has found its way back into Chinese culture and governance. We see this with the May Fourth Movements and the current revival of Confucianism that seeks to find a cultural identity, and to stabilize society by creating harmony.

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<sup>46</sup> Joy Lam, “China’s Revival of Confucianism,” *University of Southern California U.S.-China Institute*, 2008, accessed March 2016, <http://china.usc.edu/chinas-revival-confucianism>.

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## **Author Bio**

Jasmyn Murrell is a California State University, San Bernardino, graduate, with a Bachelor of Arts in history, concentrated in Public and Oral History. Currently, she is working on applying to graduate school for a combination program of historical preservation and museum studies in hopes of becoming an Architectural Conservator and a Collections Manager. As a student, she participated in the student History Club for three years – one year as a member and two years as secretary of the club. With the club, she helped bring awareness to the CSUSB history program, fundraising for Upward bound students, and volunteering for projects that benefited CSUSB and the San Bernardino community. Additionally, the club created the Chicano Lecture Series, where they brought in expert speakers and advocates of the Chicano movement. Furthermore, she interned with the March Field Air Museum working in collections, archives, database building, coding, and maintenance, as well as storage, library, and loan operations. She also participated in the Manzanar Public Archeology Project in 2015 and 2016, by helping preserve and rebuild the historical World War II internment camp.



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