

Thoughts and Beliefs 思想与信仰

Thought of Hundred Schools

The majority of traditional Chinese philosophy originates in the era of Spring and Autumn and Warring States era, during a period known as the "Hundred Schools of Thought", which is characterized by significant intellectual and cultural developments. Although much of Chinese philosophy began in the Warring States period, elements of Chinese philosophy have existed for several thousand years; some of which can be found in the Yi Jing (the Book of Changes), an ancient compendium of divination, which dates back to at least 672 BC. It was during the Warring States era that the major philosophies of China, Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, and Taoism arose, along with philosophies that later fell into obscurity, like Agriculturalism, Chinese Naturalism, and the Logicians.

Questions

1. What is the basic philosophic question that Chinese philosophers pursue?
2. What are the core ideas of Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, and Taoism?
3. Sun Wu and his descendant, Sun Bin, wrote two treatises on the art of war. What were their attitudes towards war?

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism constitute the essence of the traditional Chinese culture. The interrelationship among the three has been marked by both contention and complementation in history, with Confucianism playing a more dominant role. Confucius stresses "ren" (benevolence, love), and "li" (rites, referring to respect for the system of social hierarchy.) Taoism was created by Laozi, who believes the dialectical philosophy of inaction. Taoism weighs as much as Confucianism in Chinese culture, while Confucianism plays a more role in Chinese politics. The profoundness of Taoism theory provides a headspring for almost all the other Chinese philosophy traditions. Buddhism was created by Sakyamuni in India and was introduced into China through Central Asia around the time Christ was born. After a few centuries of assimilation, Buddhism evolved into many sects and became localized.

Questions

1. How did Taoism influence Chinese art, painting, literature, and carving?
2. Chinese intellectuals either believed in Confucianism or in Taoism. Why?
3. How was Buddhism localized in Chinese history?

Harmony of Man with Nature

As early as in 2,500 B.C. Chinese began astronomical observation and geographical survey, and gradually formed a world outlook of an "integration of the universe and humanity." (Harmony of Man with Nature) Chinese philosophy, by contrast with Western thinking, has from the start emphasized immanence and unity. Where Western dualism led to an opposition between man and nature, Chinese monism led to a harmony between the two. Most of Chinese philosophers share this unique view no matter how different their views may be. The theory, as a basic notion in Chinese philosophy, insists that the politics and ethics of human beings are a direct reflection of nature. The concept of "天人合一" influence Chinese art in almost all aspects.

Questions

1. The proposition of harmony between the heaven and human 天人合一 (Tiān rén hé yī) is a Chinese idiom. What does it mean?
2. And how is the idea harmony between the heaven and human presented in Chinese painting and architecture?

Feng Shui

Feng Shui (风水) is an ancient art relating to the law and order of the universe, and the power of nature. It's a system based on the elements of astronomy, astrology, geology, physics, mathematics, philosophy, psychology and intuition. Feng Shui has its roots in the Chinese reverence for nature and belief in the oneness of all things. The assumption is that the key to living a harmonious life is to reflect the balance of nature in their daily lives. This is most easily understood by the following concepts: Yin and Yang, qi, and the Five Elements.

All capital cities of China followed rules of Feng Shui for their design and layout. Mausoleums and tombs also followed rules of Feng Shui. Actually, in China, Feng Shui is also a special and important element in architecture and it usually links the whole process from site selection, design, construction and inner and outer decorating.

Questions

1. The site of the Ming Dynasty Imperial Tombs was carefully chosen according to Feng Shui principles. How was the site selected for Ming Tombs in suburban area of Beijing?
2. Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong was designed by architect I. M. Pei. Its distinctive look makes it one of Hong Kong's most identifiable landmarks today. However, there are some controversies of its design in terms of Feng Shui criteria. What is the argument?

Reading

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Ebrey Patricia Buckley, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2nd Ed, 1993