Confucianism

- Widely practiced throughout China from around 400 BCE onward.
- Confucius had a strong-will and ideas that were often at odds with state policy so his ambitions for a government position were never achieved. Instead he served as an educator and political advisor.
- His thoughts and sayings were collected in the *Analects* and would have a profound influence on Chinese thinking, both politically and culturally.
- It is a political and social philosophy - not a religion!
  - Moral and ethical in character, but also thoroughly practical, dealing almost solely with the question of how to restore political and social order
  - Does not deal with philosophical or religious issues such as salvation or an afterlife.
Confucianism

- Five fundamental relationships: ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. When each person in these relationships lives up to his or her obligations of those relationships, society is orderly and predictable.

- Concentrates on the formation of junzi – individuals considered superior because they are educated, conscientious, and able to put aside personal ambition for the good of the state. They would lead by example and would exercise enlightened leadership.

- Key values:
  - Ren - a sense of humanity, kindness, and benevolence
  - Li - a sense of propriety, courtesy, respect, and deference to elders
  - Xiao - filial piety, which means a respect for family obligation, including to the extended family

- Women were considered of secondary status, although children were taught to honor their mothers as well as their fathers.
Confucianism

- **Broader Impact**
  - It was compatible with other religions meaning a person could, for example, practice both Buddhism and Confucianism simultaneously. This flexibility enabled it to flourish.
  - Government leaders embraced it because it was intended to create an orderly society.
  - It led to a distinctive Chinese culture in which communities became extremely tight-knit; members had duties and responsibilities to many others in the community from birth to death.
  - It did not have similar impact on the rest of the world as it evolved only within the context of the Chinese culture.
Daoism

- Some Chinese practiced Daoism, from around 500 BCE onward.
- The *Dao* (also spelled *Tao*) is defined as the way of nature, the way of the cosmos.
- Founded by Lao-tzu, a legendary Chinese philosopher.
- The Dao is passive and yielding; it accomplishes everything yet does nothing. Daoists sometimes use the image of water, soft and yielding, yet capable of wearing away stone. From this comes the idea that humans should tailor their behavior to the passive and yielding nature of the *Dao*.
  - Ambition and activism only bring chaos in the world.
  - *Wuwei* = disengagement from worldly affairs leads to a simple life in harmony with nature
- Not completely passive. Daoist priests often used magic intended to influence the spirits.
Daoism

- Broader Impact
  - Daoists advocated the formation of small, self-sufficient communities and served as a counter-balance to Confucian activism.
  - Daoism promoted scientific discoveries and led to great astronomers, chemists, and botanists.
  - Daoism is notable because it coexisted with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Legalism in China.
    - It added to the complexity of China, which in turn added to the uniqueness of China and other Eastern civilizations as separate and distinct from the Western world.
Comparison: Daoism and Confucianism

- Both shared a core belief in the Dao, or “the Way”, they diverged in how each understood how the Dao manifested itself in the world.
- While Confucianism is concerned with creating an orderly society, Daoism is concerned with helping people live in harmony with nature and find internal peace.
- Confucianism encouraged relationships and a very active government as a fundamentally good force in the world; Daoism encourages a simple, passive existence, and little government interference with this pursuit.
- Despite these differences, many Chinese found them compatible, hence practiced both simultaneously - they used Confucianism to guide them in their relationships and Daoism to guide them in their private meditations.
Legalism

- Practiced almost entirely in China, specifically during the Qin dynasty.
- Developed at around the same time as Confucianism and Daoism.
- It maintained that peace and order were achievable only through a centralized, tightly governed state.
- Legalists didn’t trust human nature, and therefore, advocated the need for tough laws.
  - Believed that people would be made to obey through harsh punishment, strong central government, and unquestioned authority.
  - Focused only on things that were practical or that sustained society.
  - Believed that two of the most worthy professions were farming and the military.
Legalism

- **Broader Impact**
  - By adopting Legalism, the Qin Dynasty was able to accomplish the unification of China swiftly, and the completion of massive projects like the building of the Great Wall.
  - Because Legalism also caused widespread resentment among the common people, who suffered under it, Legalism inadvertently led to wider acceptance of Confucianism and Daoism.
Comparison: Legalism and Confucianism

- Both are social belief systems, and not religions.
- Although both are intended to lead to an orderly society, their approaches are directly opposed.
- Confucianism relies on the fundamental goodness of human beings, whereas Legalism presupposes that people are fundamentally evil.
- Confucianism casts everything in terms of corresponding responsibilities while Legalism casts everything in terms of strict laws and harsh punishment.
- The Han successfully blended the best of both philosophies to organize their dynasty.