Chapter 11: Chinese and Korean Traditions

Chapter Overview

In chapter eleven titled “Chinese and Korean Traditions,” Terry Tak-ling Woo examines the history and ideas of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Indigenous traditions in China and Korea. In doing so, she differentiates China from Korea, and discusses the developments of the traditions in China and Korea respectively. Woo begins by examining the developments of Confucianism and Daoism in relation to Chinese Indigenous traditions. She looks at these developments in terms of their bearing on the political and social worldview of China, and discusses these traditions through the various political dynasties of China. Woo points out that social and political harmony are the ideals of Chinese religious traditions, and notes that the Five Classics—the *Classic of Changes*, the *Classic of Documents*, the *Classic of Odes*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*—were foundational for Chinese religious traditions, and Confucius and Confucianism in particular. She also examines the foundational ideas of Confucianism, including *li*, *wen*, and *junzi*.

Woo continues with Daoism, and discusses the philosophers, Laozi in particular, and the texts, such as the *Daodejing* (*Classic of the Way and Power*), which were significant for the development of Daoism. In terms of Buddhism, Woo explains the various forms that Buddhism took within China, including Huayan and Chan, while also focusing on Buddhist figures such as Guanyin and Milo. Throughout this chapter, Woo constantly reminds us that within China, and later, within Korea, the emphasis of these traditions is on right practice rather than on right belief. Woo thus explains that the various traditions influenced each other and as a result, syncretism of the various traditions was practiced. In the later section on Korean traditions, Woo discusses the foundational myths of Korea, the developments of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism within Korea, and explains the recent developments of these traditions in the light of the separation between North Korea and South Korea.

Learning Objectives are met when the student:

1. Outlines, summarizes and explains the syncretic spirit within and throughout both China and Korea from the ancient times up to the present day.
2. Compares and contrasts Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism and explains how they argued against, influenced, and developed in relation to one another, therein identifying and paraphrasing key terms, persons, practices and texts.
3. Comprehends and summarizes central notions in Confucianism, including the “heart-mind” (*xin*), humaneness (*ren*), filial piety, and ritual propriety or rites (*li*); and in Daoism, including the Dao, “doing nothing” (*wuwei*), and vital energy/force (*qi*),
4. Distinguishes the different branches within Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.
5. Outlines challenges that Chinese and Korean religions encounter in modern times and evaluates their responses including the status of women and the value of the feminine principle.

Study Questions

1. What are the five types of relationships that Confucians believe are crucial for a stable society? What concept (or virtues) guides these relationships? What is the relationship between the senior and junior members of each pair?
2. According to Wei Boyang, how do practitioners of inner alchemy return to the Dao?
3. In the *Analects*, how are the Confucian concepts of *junzi* and *de* both redefined from their earlier meaning?
4. Buddhism was considered to be a variant of Daoism when it was first introduced in China. Identify four to six ostensibly shared concepts between Buddhism and Daoism that contributed to China’s linking of these two traditions?
5. Which religious traditions did King Taejo of Goryeo (modern day Korea) honor and incorporate within his list of Ten Injunctions? Briefly cite a two or three examples from the Ten Injunctions.

Study Questions: Answers

1. The five types of Confucian relationships are as follows: ruler and minister; parent and child; husband and wife; elder and younger siblings; and friends. The relationships must be guided by *ren*, the Confucian term that means goodness, humaneness, benevolence and compassion. Except for in the case of friendship, in these relationships, there is a senior member, who is responsible for the relationship, and a junior member, who is expected to be loyal and upright. (p. 502)
2. The standard meaning of *junzi* was “son of a lord,” thus indicating nobility, whereas in the *Analects*, the *junzi* is described as a person of noble character, who is committed to the development of *de*, which originally referred to this kind of magical charismatic power, but in the *Analects*, *de* is described as moral power that is rooted in ethical behaviour. (p. 506)
3. Inner alchemy is understood by Wei Boyang to be the process whereby practitioners can return to the Dao by reversing the processes of disunion as if they were sculptors “unsculpting” themselves to recover their original unity as uncarved blocks. Through the practice of meditative realization the practitioners sought to move from form to essence, from essence to vital energy, from vital energy to spirit, and from spirit to emptiness of the Void, which though formless, can be visualized as the highest deity: the Great One, Supreme Unity, or Supreme Oneness. (pp. 519–520)
4. Buddhism and Daoism share the following six key concepts (1) the Buddhist idea of emptiness or the “void” recalls the Daoist belief in non-being; (2) the Buddhist monk Zhi Dun’s idea that there is a transcendental absolute (*li)*, an essence and ultimate truth that is expressed in the relative mundane world, found echoes in Daoist philosopher *Wang Bi’s* li *or principle;* (3) just as the buddha is free of attachments, a Daoist sage is free from all desires; (4) all dualities and distinctions disappear in both traditions; (5) Buddhism’s focus on wisdom and compassion resonates with the Chinese concern for security, stability, and harmony; (6) the Buddhist idea of impermanence can be connected to the Chinese assumption that things continually change. (pp. 522–523)
5. King Taejo of Goryeo honored the traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Indigenous traditions within his Ten Injunctions. The first injunction asks for Buddhist monasteries to be built because the dynasty owes its founding to the powers of the Buddhas. The third injunction based its rules for inheritance on Confucian ideals. Taejo honours Indigenous traditions in the fourth injunction, which separates its founding traditions from those of China. (p. 548)

Research Questions

1. Why is Guanyin a popular bodhisattva in China? Explain the rituals that are associated with Guanyin.
2. Explain the concept of the sage in Confucian ideals. How do the texts of Confucianism describe the sage and the ideals that are associated with the sage?
3. Why was Buddhism persecuted in China?
4. In what ways did women contribute to the success of New-Confucianism during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644)?
5. Compare and contrast the development of the Highest Clarity School an Numinous Treasure School in the latter part of the fourth century C.E.?
6. Discuss the relationship between Daoism and popular religion with some focus on the White Lotus Society.
7. Compare and contrast the development of the Hwaeom school of Buddhism in Korea with the Huayan tradition of China. How could the differences and similarities be explained?
8. What does Madame Zheng’s *Classic of Filiality for Women* teach us about the role of women in China during the late seventh century?
9. How did emergence and developments within neo-Confucianism participate in the ongoing reshaping the religious landscape in China?
10. How do the foundational myths help us understand Korean religious traditions?

Reflection Questions

1. How do you understand the nature of syncretism to be like within both the Chinese and Korean religious traditions?
2. What are some of the roles of women in the Chinese and Korean religious traditions?
3. What is the difference between the focus on right practice and on right belief within the Chinese and Korean religious traditions?
4. In what ways did the Cultural Revolution change ideas about religion in China? Citing specific examples, how would you describe the approach of the Chinese government towards religion?
5. What are the varied ways that the religious landscape has changed and proliferated in South Korea from the 20th century onwards to the present day? How might we account for these changes in South Korea?

Additional Resources

1. “The Chinese Classics,” *Internet Sacred Text Archive*.<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/index.htm>

Links to complete Confucian texts, including the Five Classics, the *Analects*, and the *Mencius.*

2. “Taoism,” *Internet Sacred Text Archive*. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/index.htm>

Links to Daoist texts, including the *Tao Te Ching* (*Daodejing*)

3. Religious Life in the Chinese World. <https://religiouslife.hku.hk/> The Religious Life in the Chinse World website contains interviews with scholars, publications and online learning resources. The site is organized in an interdisciplinary way around the following portals: ways of being religious; culture and society; politics and economy; globalization; and stories to tell.

4. Confucianism. *The Pluralism Project*. <http://pluralism.org/religions/confucianism/> This website, which is part of *The Pluralism Project* at Harvard University, provides an overview of Confucianism, religious diversity news, a bibliography and additional links.

5. Daoism. *The Pluralism Project*. <http://pluralism.org/religions/daoism/> This website, which is part of *The Pluralism Project* at Harvard University, provides an overview of Daoism, religious diversity news, a bibliography and additional links.

1. “The Taoist and the Activist,” *Lunch with Bokara*, KCET. 28m 23s. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lunch-with-bokara/episodes/the-taoist-and-the-activist>

In this episode, Bokara, a television host who interview people over lunch, brings together Taoist professor and psychologist Dr. Benjamin Tong and environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill to share their thoughts on subjects ranging from “compassion and attachment, to anger and finally, Nature as a spiritual path.”

1. Confucius. *Biography*. 44m 11s. <https://www.biography.com/video/confucius-full-episode-2073086338>. This extended video, provided by Biography.com, narrates the life and teachings of Confucius.
2. The Center of Traditional Taoist Studies. <https://tao.org/> This is the official website of The Center of Traditional Taoist Studies (founded in 1978), which is “dedicated to the dissemination of Taoist teachings in the USA and throughout the world.” The Center’s website includes “traditional Taoist theology and philosophy, physical wellness (Tai Chi, Chi Quong), Taoist shaman practices and meditation.”
3. Tzu Chi USA. <https://tzuchi.us/>

This is the official website for Tzu Chi USA, which is part of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, an “international humanitarian organization whose mission is to relieve the suffering of those in need while creating a better world for all through compassion, love and hope. This website contains a broad range of well-organized resources on the history, philosophy, engagement and service, events and videos.

1. Asian Historical Architecture. <https://www.orientalarchitecture.com/>

The website of Asian Historical Architecture provides a “photographic survey of Asia’s architectural heritage” with over 32,000 photographs of 1,241 sites in 23 countries across Asia. The website is organized by each country and then by regions in each of them; alternatively, an advanced search could be performed to locate a specific religious site.

Field Work Guidelines

If you are interested in doing fieldwork, you need to plan and organize your fieldwork experience as thoroughly as you can. Generally, you can divide your fieldwork experience into three stages: Planning, during, and after your fieldwork.

Planning Your Fieldwork

*Research:* Begin by researching the individual, group, or place you would like to do work on or with. Visit websites if available, and read any available scholarship.

*Make Contact:* Contact the person, group, or administrators of the place you would like to research. Give as much information as possible about your project so that your contact can guide. Often your contact will be able to help you understand the rules for conduct that will be needed during your fieldwork. Remember to be polite and courteous.

*Questions:* Based on your research and interests, create a set of questions you would like to answer during the course of your fieldwork.

*Ethics Approval:* Some projects need to have ethics approval, especially if your research involves people. The guidelines for applications for ethics approval may differ depending on the organization or university you work with; thus, please contact your organization or university to find out more about this process.

During Your Fieldwork

Often, there are specific rules for conduct when you visit sacred spaces and/or interview people, and usually, these rules can be seen before you enter a site, or spoken about before you interview people. It is best to find out about these rules before you begin your fieldwork. There are some general rules that should be followed at all times: Always be polite and courteous, dress modestly, and participate where appropriate.

*Be polite and courteous:*

1. Introduce yourself. If you are visiting a sacred site or a worship centre, you will be able to find people who are either there to meet you specifically, or would like to help you during your visit.
2. Leave your camera, phone, notebook, or laptop in a bag or even at home unless you have received prior permission to use these items.
3. Be aware of signs. Signs have important information about the place you are in, thus, look for the signs and the information they give.
4. Be respectful of the people and your surroundings. Do not disturb the rites or the privacy of the people. While there are times when you may be invited to participate, please remember that if you are not invited, you should keep a respectful silence and distance from the rite. Also, people may be curious about why you are visiting or conducting your research. Try to answer their questions as best you can. They may be able to provide you with additional information and further help.

*Dress modestly:*

1. Rules for appropriate dress are often important when visiting a place or a group. Please follow these rules if you have been given them.
2. There are various types of sacred sites in China and Korea, and dress will depend on the type of site you are visiting. Try to contact the site before visiting to find out these rules. Often, if you are not dressed appropriately, you may be given appropriate attire, or you may not be allowed into a site.

*Participate Where Appropriate:*

1. If you have been invited to participate, please do so!
2. Generally, follow the guidelines that have been given to you, or the people around you. The best tip: Stand when people stand, and sit when people sit.
3. Ask questions. If you are not sure what to do, ask the people around you. Most people will be happy to help you out.
4. If you are interviewing a particular person or people, make notes on the questions that you ask, and answer any questions that you are asked as well.

After Your Fieldwork

1. Make a comprehensive set of notes on your experience as soon as you are able. The better your notes are, the more you will be able to draw on later.
2. Thank anyone who has helped you with your experience, and acknowledge their help in the written version of your work.
3. Follow up with the people or the place that you have visited. If you have used information from any interviews, offer to send a copy your work to the place or the people you have met.