

CHAPTER 5

India's Classical Age: What Were Buddhist Values?

As India passed through the age of the Vedas, in which brahmins controlled society's religious and much of its political life, some individuals began to criticize the values espoused by Brahmanism. In the sixth century B.C. a dissenter emerged who is considered one of the greatest thinkers and religious prophets of world history: Siddhārtha Gautama (ca. 568–488 B.C.).

Rejecting Brahmanism, Gautama sought many paths to understand reality before he succeeded, thereby becoming the Buddha—the “Enlightened One.” As the Buddha, he urged people to find a way to avoid suffering and pain. His goal was not to found a religion, but this in fact is what happened as his teaching developed. The selections in this chapter all focus on the Buddhist “way” and the values that it bequeathed to India. As you read, try to identify distinctively Buddhist beliefs and look for ways in which they influenced Indian society.

a young man named Svetaketu who, returning from his studies convinced that he knows it all, meets his father. His father questions what he thinks his education has taught him.

“Fetch me from thence a fruit of the Nyagrodha tree.”
 “Here is one, Sir.”
 “Break it.”
 “It is broken, Sir.”
 “What do you see there?”
 “These seeds, almost infinitesimal.”
 “Break one of them.”
 “It is broken, Sir.”
 “What do you see there?”
 “Not anything, Sir.”
 The father said: “My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists.”
 “Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and That Thou Art, O Svetaketu.”
 “Place this salt in water, and then wait on me in the morning.”
 The son did as he was commanded.
 The father said to him: “Bring me the salt, which you placed in the water last night.”

The son having looked for it, found it not, for, of course, it was melted.
 The father said: “Taste it from the surface of the water. How is it?”
 The son replied: “It is salt.”
 “Taste it from the middle. How is it?”
 The son replied: “It is salt.”
 “Taste it from the bottom. How is it?”
 The son replied: “It is salt.”
 The father said: “Throw it away and then wait on me.”
 He did so; but salt exists for ever.
 Then the father said: “Here also, in this body, forsooth, you do not perceive the True, my son; but there indeed it is there.”
 “That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and That Thou Art.”

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. How does this conversation relate to the passage between Lord Krishna and Arjuna (chapter 4, selection 5)?
2. What does this selection tell you about the brahman view of reality?
3. How do you think this attitude toward reality might affect Indian society?

F. Max Müller, trans., *Upanishads: The Sacred Books of the East* (1879), quoted in Allie M. Frazier, ed., *Hinduism*, vol. 1 of *Readings in Eastern Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 135–36.

SELECTION 1:

The Buddha Explains His Teachings

In this selection, Siddhārtha himself explains his teachings. Certain features should be noted. The first is the belief that the atman, the innermost essence of every human being, experiences constant reincarnation. (Thus Buddhism accepts the older idea of reincarnation; compare the Bhagavad-Gita in chapter 4 selection 5.) A second tenet is that eventually, if a person acquires sufficient karma, he or she may at last reach a state known as nirvana, in which reincarnation ceases and the soul blissfully dissolves into nothingness, freed from pain and suffering.*

Known as the Buddha, Gautama began teaching his doctrine throughout India. His teaching did not endorse Brahman sacrifices and said nothing about caste; thus, it proved very popular among those at the bottom of the social ladder. What the Buddha taught was open to all, men and women alike, regardless of caste, once one understood the Four Noble Truths and followed the path to enlightenment. In selection 1, in which Gautama speaks of the asavas, he refers to desires—for sexual pleasure and for physical existence—and to our willingness to tolerate ignorance.

Thus with mind concentrated, purified, cleansed, spotless, with the defilements gone, supple, dexterous, firm, and impassable, I directed my mind to the knowledge of the remembrance of my former existences. I remembered many former existences, such as, one birth, two births, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand births; many cycles of dissolution of the universe, many cycles of its evolution, many of its dissolution and evolution; there I was of such and such a name, clan, color, livelihood, such pleasure and pain did I suffer, and such was the end of my life.

Passing away thence I was born elsewhere. There too I was of such and such a name, clan, color, livelihood, such pleasure and pain did I suffer, and such was the end of my life. Passing

away thence I was reborn here. Thus do I remember my many former existences with their special modes and details. This was the first knowledge that I gained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose. Darkness was dispelled, light arose. So is it with him who abides vigilant, strenuous and resolute.

Thus with mind concentrated, purified, cleansed, spotless, with the defilements gone, supple, dexterous, firm and impassable, I directed my mind to the passing away and rebirth of beings. With divine, purified, superhuman vision I saw beings passing away and being reborn, low and high, of good and bad color, in happy or miserable existences according to their karma. Those beings

*Karma is a subtle and important concept in Buddhist thought but is difficult to define in a few words. Essentially, it refers to the sum total of the consequences of one's actions, thoughts, and attitudes, which accumulate during a lifetime but also through an endless series of reincarnations. Karma is the life force that sustains and directs our physical existence.

who lead evil lives in deed, word, or thought, who speak evil of the noble ones, of false views, who acquire karma through their false views, at the dissolution of the body after death are reborn in a state of misery and suffering in hell. But those beings who lead good lives in deed, word, and thought, who speak no evil of the noble ones, of right views, who acquire karma through their right views, at the dissolution of the body after death are reborn in a happy state in the world of heaven. . . . This was the second knowledge that I gained in the second watch of the night. . . .

Thus with mind concentrated, purified, cleansed, spotless, with the defilements gone, supple, dexterous, firm, and impassable, I directed my mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the āsavas. I duly realized (the truth) ‘this is pain,’ I duly realized (the truth) ‘this is the cause of pain,’ and I duly realized (the truth) ‘this is the way that leads to the destruction of pain.’ I duly realized ‘these are the āsavas’. . . ‘this is the cause of the āsavas’. . . ‘this is the destruction of the āsavas.’ As I thus knew and thus perceived, my

mind was emancipated from the āsava of sensual desire, from the āsava of desire for existence, and from the āsava of ignorance.

And in me emancipated arose the knowledge of my emancipation. I realized that destroyed is rebirth, the religious life has been led, done is what was to be done, there is nought (for me) beyond this world. This was the third knowledge that I gained in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose. Darkness was dispelled, light arose. So is it with him who abides vigilant, strenuous, and resolute.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. What are the teachings of the Buddha about present life?
2. What does Buddhism say about karma?
3. What is the purpose of life for a disciple of the Buddha? How does this differ from the prevailing modern American point of view?

SELECTION 2:

The Role of Buddhism

Although Buddhism soon developed into a religion, a present-day American Buddhist publication argues that that is not what the Buddha himself intended.

Buddhism is not a religion because, first, the Buddha is not a “supernatural being power.” The Buddha is simply a person who has reached Complete Understanding of the reality of life and the universe. Life refers to us and universe refers to our living environment. The Buddha taught that all beings possess the same ability within to

reach Complete Understanding of themselves and their environment and to free themselves from all sufferings, thus attaining utmost happiness. All beings can become Buddhas and all beings and the Buddha are equal in nature. The Buddha is not a God, but a teacher, who teaches us the way to restore Wisdom and Understanding by conquering the greed, anger and ignorance which blind us at the present moment. Buddha is a Sanskrit word meaning, “Wisdom, Awareness/Understanding.” We call the founder of

Chin Kung, *A Path to True Happiness*, Triratnani Disciples, trans. (Richardson, TX: Dallas Buddhist Association, 1994), pp. 2–5.

Buddhism, Buddha Shakyamuni, the “Original Teacher.” He has attained Complete Understanding and Wisdom of life and the universe. Buddhism is his education to us; it is his teaching that shines the way to Buddhahood.

Second, Buddhism is not a religion because “belief” in the Buddha’s teachings is not blind belief, blind faith and far from superstition. Buddha Shakyamuni taught us not to blindly believe what he told us, he wants us to try the teachings and prove them for ourselves. The Buddha wants us to know not merely believe. The Buddha’s teachings flow from his own experience of the way to understand the true reality of life and the universe, and show us a path of our own to experience the truth for ourselves. This is much like a good friend telling us of his trip to Europe, the sights he has seen, and the way to go there to see for ourselves. The Buddha uses a perfectly scien-

tific way of showing us reality in its true form.

Third, Buddhism is not a religion because all the “rites and celebrations” are not centered on a supernatural being, but rather on the people attending the assemblies. The ceremonies and celebrations in Buddhism all serve an educational purpose, a reminder of the Buddha’s teachings and encouragement to all students who practice them.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. According to the authors, why is Buddhism not a religion?
2. What do the authors contend that Buddhism wants its followers to know?
3. What function does Buddhist worship serve?

SELECTION 3:

A Story from Ancient India

In the classical Indian world a major form of entertainment was storytelling. An accomplished narrator was highly honored in the Indian village. In his or her stories, heroes and heroines fighting the forces of evil abounded.

The storyteller also had an opportunity to reinforce society’s values. As you read the following selection, keep in mind what these values were for the men, women, and children of India twenty-five-hundred years ago. This passage comes from a collection of Indian tales known as the Panchatantra. The story takes place in southern India, in the kingdom of Madras.

Ashvapati, the virtuous king of Madras, grew old without offspring to continue his royal family. Desiring a son, Ashvapati took rigid vows and observed long fasts to accumulate merit. It is said

that he offered 10,000 oblations to the goddess Savatri in hopes of having a son. After eighteen years of constant devotion, Ashvapati was granted his wish for an offspring even though the baby born was a girl.

The king rejoiced at his good fortune and named the child Savatri in honor of the goddess who gave him this joy to brighten his elder years.

Savatri was both a beautiful and an intelligent

Roy C. Amore and Larry D. Shinn, *Lustful Maidens and Ascetic Kings: Buddhist and Hindu Stories of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 28–30, 32–33.

child. She was her father's delight and grew in wisdom and beauty as the years passed. As the age approached for Savatri to be given in marriage as custom demanded, no suitor came forward to ask her father for her hand—so awed were all the princes by the beauty and intellect of this unusual maiden. Her father became concerned lest he not fulfill his duty as a father and incur disgrace for his failure to provide a suitable husband for his daughter. At last, he instructed Savatri herself to lead a procession throughout the surrounding kingdoms and handpick a man suitable for her.

Savatri returned from her search and told her father that she had found the perfect man. Though he was poor and an ascetic of the woods, he was handsome, well educated, and of kind temperament. His name was Satyavan and he was actually a prince whose blind father had been displaced by an evil king. Ashvapati asked the venerable sage Narada whether Satyavan would be a suitable spouse for Savatri. Narada responded that there was no one in the world more worthy than Satyavan. However, Narada continued, Satyavan had one unavoidable flaw. He was fated to live a short life and would die exactly one year from that very day. Ashvapati then tried to dissuade Savatri from marrying Satyavan by telling her of the impending death of her loved one. Savatri held firm to her choice, and the king and Narada both gave their blessings to this seemingly ill-fated bond.

After the marriage procession had retreated from the forest hermitage of Savatri's new father-in-law, Dyumatsena, the bride removed her wedding sari and donned the ocher robe and bark garments of her ascetic family. As the days and weeks passed, Savatri busied herself by waiting upon the every need of her new family. She served her husband, Satyavan, cheerfully and skillfully. Satyavan responded with an even-tempered love which enhanced the bond of devotion between Savatri and himself. Yet the dark cloud of Narada's prophecy cast a shadow over this otherwise blissful life.

When the fateful time approached, Savatri began a fast to strengthen her wifely resolve as she kept nightly vigils while her husband slept.

The day marked for the death of Satyavan began as any other day at the hermitage. Satyavan shouldered his axe and was about to set off to cut wood for the day's fires when Savatri stopped him to ask if she could go along saying, "I cannot bear to be separated from you today." Satyavan responded, "You've never come into the forest before and the paths are rough and the way very difficult. Besides, you've been fasting and are surely weak." Savatri persisted, and Satyavan finally agreed to take her along. Savatri went to her parents-in-law to get their permission saying she wanted to see the spring blossoms which now covered the forest. They too expressed concern over her health but finally relented out of consideration for her long period of gracious service to them.

Together Satyavan and Savatri entered the tangled woods enjoying the beauty of the flowers and animals which betoken spring in the forest. Coming to a fallen tree, Satyavan began chopping firewood. As he worked, he began to perspire heavily and to grow weak. Finally, he had to stop and lie down telling Savatri to wake him after a short nap. With dread in her heart, Savatri took Satyavan's head in her lap and kept a vigil knowing Satyavan's condition to be more serious than rest could assuage. In a short time, Savatri saw approaching a huge figure clad in red and carrying a small noose. Placing Satyavan's head upon the ground, Savatri arose and asked the stranger of his mission. The lord of death replied, "I am Yama and your husband's days are finished. I speak to you, a mortal, only because of your extreme merit. I have come personally instead of sending my emissaries because of your husband's righteous life."

Without a further word, Yama then pulled Satyavan's soul out of his body with the small noose he was carrying. The lord of death then set off immediately for the realm of the dead in the south. Grief stricken and yet filled with wifely devotion, Savatri followed Yama at a distance. Hours passed yet hunger and weariness could not slow Savatri's footsteps. She persisted through thorny paths and rocky slopes to follow Yama and his precious burden. As Yama walked south he thought he heard a woman's anklets tinkling on the path behind him. He turned around to see Sa-

vatri in the distance following without pause. He called out to her to return to Satyavan's body and to perform her wifely duties of cremating the dead. Savatri approached Yama and responded, "It is said that those who walk seven steps together are friends. Certainly we have traveled farther than that together. Why should I return to a dead body when you possess the soul of my husband?"

Yama was impressed by the courage and wisdom of this beautiful young woman. He replied, "Please stop following me. Your wise words and persistent devotion for your husband deserve a boon. Ask of me anything except that your husband's life be restored, and I will grant it." Savatri asked that her blind father-in-law be granted new sight. Yama said that her wish would be granted, and then he turned to leave only to find that Savatri was about to continue following. Yama again praised her devotion and offered a second, and then a third boon. Savatri told Yama of the misfortune of her father-in-law's lost kingdom and asked that Yama assist in ousting the evil king from Dyumatsena's throne. Yama agreed. Then Savatri utilized her third boon to ask that her own father be given one hundred sons to protect his royal line, and that too was granted by Yama.

Yama then set off in a southerly direction only to discover after a short while that Savatri still relentlessly followed him. Yama was amazed at the thoroughly self-giving attitude displayed by Savatri and agreed to grant one last boon if Savatri

would promise to return home. Yama again stipulated that the bereaved wife could not ask for her husband's soul. Savatri agreed to the two conditions and said, "I only ask for myself one thing, and that is that I may be granted one hundred sons to continue Satyavan's royal family." Yama agreed only to realize, upon prompting from Savatri, that the only way Satyavan's line could be continued would be for him to be restored to life. Although he had been tricked by the wise and thoughtful Savatri, Yama laughed heartily and said, "So be it! Auspicious and chaste lady, your husband's soul is freed by me." Loosening his noose Yama permitted the soul of Satyavan to return to its earthly abode and Savatri ran without stopping back to the place where Satyavan had fallen asleep. Just as Savatri arrived at the place where her husband lay, he awoke saying, "Oh, I have slept into the night, why did you not waken me?"

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. How does the storyteller point out the virtues of Savatri? What are these virtues?
2. How does the god of death capture the soul of Satyavan?
3. How might the audience listening to this story have reacted to Savatri's quest to have her husband brought back to life?

SELECTION 4:

The Religion of Asoka

Buddhism scored a great success when it won over Asoka (ca. 274–ca. 236 B.C.), an emperor of the Mauryan dynasty. In the fourth century B.C. the Mauryans formed the first great empire of India, with its capital at Pataliputra, now Patna. Asoka, after conquering many neighboring peoples, had a change in heart that can only be understood as a conversion

to Buddhism. In this selection, a modern historian assesses Asoka's understanding of Buddhism and his attempt to apply it to the governance of an empire.

Although Asoka unquestionably was familiar with a body of sacred Buddhist literature . . . the teaching of the edicts gives the impression of being different from that of most Buddhist works. We find no distinct reference to the doctrine of *karma*, or transmitted merit and demerit, nor is any allusion made to *nirvâna*, as the goal to be obtained by the good man. No doubt the emperor believed in *karma*, although he does not plainly say so, and very probably he may have looked forward to *nirvâna*, although he does not express the hope. His precepts . . . are purely practical and intended to lead men into the right way of living, not into correct philosophical positions.

Many passages in the edicts indicate that he believed firmly in the "other world" or "future life." He tells us . . . that all his exertions were directed to the end that he might discharge his debt to animate beings, make some of them happy in this world, and also enable them in the other world to gain heaven. . . .

Still more emphatic is the declaration . . . that only the things concerning the other world are re-

garded by His Majesty as bearing much fruit, and he concludes by adjuring his descendants to place all their joy in efforts which avail for both this world and the next. . . .

While Asoka took infinite pains to issue and enforce "pious regulations," he put his trust in the "superior effect of reflection" as the chief agent in the promotion of "the growth of piety among men and the more complete abstention from killing animate beings, and from sacrificial slaughter of living creatures." Nor did he rely solely upon the combined effect of reflection and pious regulations for the success of his propaganda. He continually extolled the merit of almsgiving, and attached much importance to practical works of benevolence, in the execution of which he set a good example.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. Why does the author think that Asoka did not have access to all Buddhist teaching?
2. Does Asoka's idea of Buddhism conform to orthodox Buddhism?
3. Asoka placed great emphasis on generosity. Why is this such a high value for Buddhists?

Vincent A. Smith, *Asoka* (3rd rev. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 63-65.

SELECTION 5:

Edict XIII of Asoka

All over the Mauryan empire Asoka erected pillars with his edicts carved upon them. The document that forms this selection, Rock Edict XIII, is the most emphatic in showing his conversion to Buddhist principles. In this ancient text his coronation name, *Devanampiya Piyadasi*, is used.

Eight years after his coronation King Devanampiya Piyadasi conquered the Kalingas. In that (conquest) one hundred and fifty thousand people were deported (as prisoners), one hundred thousand were killed (or maimed) and many times that number died. Thereafter, with the conquest of Kalinga, King Devanampiya Piyadasi (adopted) the practice of morality, love of morality and inculcation of morality. For there arose in King Devanampiya Piyadasi remorse for the conquest of Kalinga. For when an unsubdued country is conquered there occur such things as slaughter, death and deportation of people and these are regarded as very painful and serious by King Devanampiya Piyadasi.

Brahmans and ascetics live everywhere, as well as votaries of other sects and householders who practice such virtues as support of mother and father, service of elders, proper treatment of friends, relatives, acquaintances and kinsmen and slaves and servants and steadfastness in devotion to duties. They too suffer injury (separation from loved ones), slaughter and deportation of loved ones. And for those whose love is undiminished, their friends, acquaintances, relatives and kinsmen suffer calamity. And that is injury to them. This plight of men is regarded as serious by King Devanampiya Piyadasi. Outside of the territory of the Greeks there is no land where communities such as those of Brahmans and ascetics are not to

be found. Nor is there any land where men do not have faith (religion) of one sect or another.

Hence, whatever the number of men then killed (or wounded) and died and were deported at the annexation of Kalinga, a hundredth or a thousandth part (thereof) even is regarded as serious by King Devanampiya Piyadasi. Furthermore, if anyone does wrong (to him) the person should be suffered or pardoned. To the forest folk, who live in the royal dominions of King Devanampiya Piyadasi, it may be pointed out that the king, remorseful as he is, has the strength to punish the wrongdoers who do not repent. For King Devanampiya desires that all beings should be safe, self-restrained, tranquil in thought and gentle. . . .

Whatever has been gained by this victory of morality, that has been pleasant. This happiness has been secured through victory of morality but even that is not as great for the King Devanampiya as the gain of the next world. For this purpose this rescript on morality has been written that my sons and great grandsons should cease to think of new conquests and in all the victories they may gain they should be content with forbearance and slight punishment. For them the true conquest should be that of morality; all their delight should be delight in morality for benefit in this world and the next.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. Why does Asoka regret his conquests?
2. What does Asoka think of the Greeks?
3. Why would Asoka have his edicts carved on stone pillars?

B.G. Gokhale, *Asoka Maurya in Twayne's Rulers and Statesmen of the World Series* (New York: Twayne, 1966), pp. 157–58.

SELECTION 6:

The Taming of Elephants

*S*trabo (ca. 60 B.C.–ca. A.D. 21), a famous ancient Greek geographer, traveled widely and gathered lore from those who had gone even farther afield. The taming of elephants was a subject of great interest to Greeks

and Romans, a few of whom visited India. Strabo borrowed his information from an earlier Greek historian, Megasthenes.

The passage in this selection shows that contact between India and the Mediterranean world was abundant. Each found things to admire and things to avoid. Mediterranean people's knowledge of elephants was limited to a few spectacular instances of the use of imported animals in war (especially the Carthaginian general Hannibal's invasion of Italy in the second century B.C.) or in great public shows of exotic wonders. Since Europeans, in their colder climate, had no opportunity to learn how elephants were tamed, they would have found this selection very entertaining.

The manner of hunting the elephant is as follows. Round a bare piece of ground is dug a deep ditch about five or six stadia in extent, and over this a very narrow bridge is thrown at the place of entrance. Into the enclosure three or four of the tamest female elephants are then driven. The men themselves lie in wait in concealed huts. The wild elephants do not approach this trap by day, but they enter it by night in single file. When all have passed the entrance, the men secretly close it. They then introduce the strongest of the tame combatants, the drivers of which fight with the wild animals, and also subdue them by hunger. When the latter are at length overcome with fatigue, the boldest of the drivers dismount unobserved, and each of them creeps under his own elephant, and from this position creeps under the belly of the wild elephant and ties his legs together. When this has been done they incite the tame elephants to beat those which are tied by the legs till they fall to the ground. Thereupon they bind the wild and tame elephants together by the neck with thongs of raw ox-hide, and to prevent them shaking themselves in order to shake off those who attempt to mount them, they make cuts round their neck, and then put thongs of leather into the incisions, so that the animals are forced by pain to submit to their bonds and remain quiet.

From the number taken, such as are too old or too young to be serviceable are rejected and the rest are led away to the stables. Here they tie their feet one to another, and their necks to a pillar firmly fixed in the ground, and tame them by hunger. Their strength they restore afterwards with green reeds and grass. In the next place they teach them to obey, effecting this by soothing them, some by words, and others by song and the music of the drum. Few of them are difficult to be tamed, for they are naturally of a mild and gentle disposition, so as to approximate to rational beings. Some of them have taken up their drivers who have fallen in battle and carried them off in safety from the field. Others have fought in defence of their masters who had sought refuge by creeping between their forelegs, and have thus saved their lives. If in a fit of anger they kill either the man who feeds them or the man who trains them, they are so overpowered with regret that they refuse food, and sometimes die of hunger.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. What methods did Indian elephant trainers use to entice wild elephants into their enclosure?
2. Why do you suppose Mediterranean people would have been interested in elephants?
3. The taming of wild elephants in this passage sounds cruel. What does this tell us about ancient values?

CHAPTER 6

Ancient China: What Shaped Its Outlook?

Chinese civilization begins in the second millennium B.C. with the expansion of agricultural villages in the Yellow River valley in the northern part of the country. Geographically isolated by distance from the other early centers of civilization (Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley), Chinese society developed a distinctive style. Millet, the grain that became the staple of early Chinese life, grew so easily in the Yellow River valley's rich soil that it did not need additional fertilizer. Population thus spurted upward, and toward the end of the second millennium those characteristics emerged that signify civilization: the creation of governments, the development of a religious tradition, the use of metals, and the erection of public buildings. Because wood rather than stone or mud brick was the preferred building material, far fewer architectural monuments of early China survive than in India or the Near East. The first Chinese dynasty, the Xia, appeared about 2200 B.C., but historians have little reliable information about it. Likewise, the Shang dynasty (1780–1050 B.C.), which followed the Xia, is understood more on the basis of archaeological finds than of written documentation.

Yet it was during the Shang period that many Chinese inventions first appeared. During this period, rulers called themselves Sons of Heaven—a rank above that of mere mortals—thus establishing one of the enduring traditions of Chinese government. Equally significant was the development during the Shang period of the distinctive Chinese system of writing, which was originally used by shamans (healers claiming magical powers) to record inscriptions on bones that they used to predict the future.

China knew no peace after the Shang dynasty collapsed. During the centuries of turmoil that followed, China was engulfed in almost constant warfare. By the time of the powerless Eastern Zhou emperors, who nominally ruled after 771 B.C. but could not settle internal disputes, warlords used iron weapons in battles over land and prestige. During this Warring States period the great Chinese thinker Confucius (551–479 B.C.) lived, whose teaching is the subject of selections 1 and 2. It was also during this time that another classic of Chinese thought, the *Dao De Qing* (selections 3 and 4) was com-

piled. In many ways the doctrines of Confucius and of the *Dao De Qing* oppose one another, but together they have become fundamental to the Chinese way of thinking. One way of understanding how seemingly contradictory views about life can be reconciled in Chinese thought is to grasp the concept of yin and yang—the perpetual interaction of opposites. Although the yin/yang concept comes from the most ancient period of Chinese history, it received its classical statement about two thousand years ago (selection 5).

The Warring States period ended in 221 B.C. with the reestablishment of a strong central government under the Qin dynasty, which conquered all its rivals (selection 6). The Qin did not last long, but under the Han dynasty that succeeded it—and which is the subject of chapter 7—a balance of Confucian and Daoist philosophies was achieved that ever after shaped Chinese public and private life. As you read the selections in chapter 6, ask yourself why the Chinese of the Warring States period longed for order and consider the different ways in which they hoped to overcome chaos and fear. Remember, too, that for many Chinese, Confucianism is a philosophy that regulates public and family life, whereas Daoism is a philosophy of the individual's inner life.

SELECTION 1:

The Legacy of Confucius

In the following selection, an eminent American historian of China, the late John K. Fairbank, assesses the unsettling world in which Confucius lived—a world of petty states constantly fighting among themselves and looking for ways to strengthen their grip on the territory and people they ruled.

The early Chinese philosophers, in any case, were first of all practical politicians. They were part of the new class of bureaucrats, produced by the spread of literacy and the needs of an increasingly complex political system. Such men often wandered from state to state, offering their services where they would be most appreciated. Great thinkers among them, whether successful or not as practical politicians, attracted followers

and thus became teachers. Their disciples gradually formed into schools of philosophy, and from these schools the sayings of the original masters, as reworked and supplemented by many later hands, eventually emerged as the philosophical books of Zhou times.

Although the philosophers were often daring innovators, many of them looked to supposedly golden ages of the past for their inspiration, as have many other thinkers elsewhere in the world. In a civilization particularly concerned with the problems of society, it was natural that history, as

the repository of human experience, should become the special focus of attention. This interest in the past, together with the peculiar Chinese respect for the written word, produced a tremendous veneration for the writings of earlier times. This, of course, has been a common trait throughout the world, but it seems to have been particularly strong among the Chinese. Confucius and other ancient Chinese philosophers looked upon the writings of earlier ages as classics from which they drew their own teachings, and this idea persisted in East Asia until recent times. For over two thousand years Chinese scholars, when faced with new problems, tried to wring the answers from reinterpretations of the classics.

To the Chinese, with their love of order and classification, "the Classics" is not just a vague term for ancient literature in general but means a clearly specified set of books associated with the dominant Confucian tradition. These works, together with the vast body of commentaries that has grown up around them, constitute the first of the traditional four divisions of Chinese literature. . . .

Confucius was a native of the tradition-bound central state of Lu. He aspired to high political office and wandered in vain from state to state in search of appointment. Thus, in his chosen role as a practical politician, he was a failure; in his incidental occupation as a teacher, however, time proved him an unparalleled success. At first glance the concepts Confucius taught seem unexciting and flat. He showed the bias of his day in his paramount interest in political problems. While he fully recognized the spirits and Heaven (Tien), sometimes showing a sense of mission derived from the latter, he was obviously not much interested in the suprahuman realm. To an inquiry about death, he replied, "Not yet understanding life, how can you understand death?" Even in the political sphere, he merely claimed to be a devoted student of antiquity and transmitter of the wisdom of the past. The disorder of his

own day, he felt, could be corrected if men would return to the political and social order supposedly created by the founders of the Zhou dynasty, King Wen and the Duke of Zhou.

To return to the ancient Way, Confucius felt, men must play their assigned roles in a fixed society of authority. The idea is succinctly expressed in the statement: "Let the ruler be a ruler and the subject a subject; let the father be a father and the son a son." Later this concept was expressed by the term "the rectification of names" (*jeng ming*), by which Confucians really meant that society should be made to conform with theory.

All this sounds ultraconservative, but Confucius was in fact a great, though probably unconscious, innovator in his basic concept that good government was fundamentally a matter of ethics. He did not question the hereditary right of the lords to rule, but he insisted that their first duty was to set a proper example of sound ethical conduct. In a day when might was right, he argued that the ruler's virtue and the contentment of the people, rather than power, should be the true measures of political success. Chinese thought before Confucius might be characterized as premoral; it centered on auguries and sacrifices. Confucius was China's first great moralist, the founder of a great ethical tradition in a civilization which above all others came to concentrate on ethical values.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. Why did Chinese philosophers find a golden past attractive?
2. What gave the teaching of Confucius so much influence over Chinese society?
3. Does your idea of good government agree with the views of Confucius? Why or why not?

SELECTION 2:

Confucian Wisdom

Confucius never achieved the political leadership that he sought, but instead made his mark as a teacher of young men who wanted to make careers in public life. This selection, which consists of extracts from his *Analects*, gives some idea of how and what he taught.

The Master said, 'The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of injuring their virtue. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their virtue complete.'

Tsze-kung asked about the practice of virtue. The Master said, 'The mechanic, who wishes to do his work well, must first sharpen his tools. When you are living in any state, take service with the most worthy among its great officers, and make friends of the most virtuous among its scholars.' . . .

The Master said, 'If a man take no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand.'

The Master said, 'It is all over! I have not seen one who loves virtue as he loves beauty.'

The Master said, 'He who requires much from himself and little from others, will keep himself from *being the object of* resentment.'

The Master said, 'When a man is not *in the habit of saying*—"What shall I think of this? What shall I think of this?" I can indeed do nothing with him!'

The Master said, 'When a number of people are together, for a whole day, without their conversation turning on righteousness, and when they are fond of carrying out *the suggestions of* a small shrewdness;—theirs is indeed a hard case.'

The Master said, 'The superior man *in everything* considers righteousness to be essential. He

performs it according to the rules of propriety. He brings it forth in humility. He completes it with sincerity. This is indeed a superior man.'

The Master said, 'The superior man is distressed by his want of ability. He is not distressed by men's not knowing him.'

The Master said, 'What the superior man seeks, is in himself. What the mean man seeks, is in others.'

The Master said, 'The superior man is dignified, but does not wrangle. He is sociable, but not a partisan.'

The Master said, 'The superior man does not promote a man *simply* on account of his words, nor does he put aside *good* words because of the man.'

Tsze-kung asked, saying, 'Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?' The Master said, 'Is not RECIPROCITY such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.'

The Master said, 'In my dealings with men, whose evil do I blame, whose goodness do I praise, beyond what is proper? If I do sometimes exceed in praise, there must be ground for it in my examination *of the individual*.'

The Master said, 'The object of the superior man is truth. Food is not his object. . . . So with learning;—emolument may be found in it. The superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth; he is not anxious lest poverty should come upon him.'

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. In what area does Confucius find virtue for the individual?
2. What instruction does Confucius give for human relationships?
3. Which of the maxims of Confucius do you still find valid for people in the modern world?

SELECTION 3:

Searching for the Dao

While Confucius and his followers were formulating their strong beliefs in active participation in government, a countertrend arose among many young men who favored an attitude of withdrawal and contentment within a self-contained world. Taking nature as a guide, those who subscribed to this philosophy became known as Daoists. The Dao is a subtle concept best translated as "the Way," and it implied conforming to the natural course of things rather than fighting for change. This means avoiding the life of stress that a political career so frequently brought.

Historian C.P. Fitzgerald here takes a careful look at Daoism. (Fitzgerald, and several other writers excerpted in this book, uses the older Wade-Giles system of transcribing Chinese words into English, according to which Dao and Daoism are romanized as Tao and Taoism, and the Dao De Qing is romanized as Tao Te Ching.)

The Taoists denied the value of any active participation in the affairs of mankind. Non-action was preferable to benevolent activity, which was itself a sign of the corruption of the times. With many pointed illustrations the *Tao Tê Ching* emphasized the principle of non-activity. The value of a bowl is not the utensil itself, but in the empty space it encloses. Again, the utility of a wheel depends, not on the rim or the spokes, but on the empty spaces within the hub. This theory of government advocated simplicity and denied the value of instruction for the mass of the people. . . .

Taoism was thus a mystical creed, of which the appeal was necessarily limited to men of philosophical temperament free from the pressing cares of the world. The scholar or the noble-

man might renounce the cares of state or family and retire to a mountain, but the mass of the Chinese people, incessantly occupied with the need to earn their livelihood, could not find much guidance in a rule of life which denied the value of any earthly activity. No state could be organized on Taoist lines, for Taoism condemned the organization of society as a folly. Inevitably Taoism was rejected by the statesmen and the rulers who were recasting the destiny of the Chinese people.

Yet Taoism, for all its unpractical idealism, or perhaps on that account, continued to find a certain support, for its roots were in one of the outstanding qualities of the Chinese character, the capacity for patient endurance. It has always appealed to the Chinese dislike of meticulous regulation, and to the attitude of contemplative detachment with which the Chinese are wont to regard affairs which do not immediately concern

C.P. Fitzgerald, *China: A Short Cultural History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 84, 87–88.

them. If there is truth in the view that a nation emphasizes the importance of those moral qualities which are not naturally strong in the national character, then the appeal of Taoism lies in the reaction from the Confucian insistence on virtues and qualities which are antipathetic to the genius of the race.

The desire for a system of morality which denied the value of family ties and public duties, and which emphasized contemplation and non-participation persisted after Taoism had long ceased to be a school of philosophy and had sunk to the level of a popular religion. Buddhism owed

much of its success to the fact that the doctrine of renunciation of the world was already established in China, and met an abiding need of the Chinese mind.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. Contrast Confucianism and Daoism.
2. Why was the appeal of Daoism limited to a part of the population?
3. What qualities of Daoism caused it to become a religious belief?

SELECTION 4:

Advice from the Dao De Qing

The following selection is extracted from the Dao De Qing (The Classic of the Way of Virtue), illustrates the philosophical foundation of Daoism. Traditionally, the author of the Dao De Qing was considered to be Laozi (or, to use the older English spelling, Lao Tsu), a contemporary of Confucius, but there is no certainty that such a person ever existed. More likely the Dao De Qing is an ancient anthology of the writings of many thinkers.

The meaning of the Dao De Qing has been discussed ever since its brief, cryptic words were first written thousands of years ago. Many scholars today believe that it, like Confucius's Analects, was addressed to rulers and to the men who advised them. It is helpful to remember that Dao was an ancient Chinese concept meaning "the Way" the universe is ordered, to which rulers ought to conform.

Do you think you can take over the universe and improve it?

I do not believe it can be done.

The universe is sacred.

You cannot improve it.

If you try to change it, you will ruin it.

If you try to hold it, you will lose it.

So sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind;

Sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily;

Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness;

Sometimes one is up and sometimes down.

Therefore the sage avoids extremes, excesses, and complacency.

Whenever you advise a ruler in the way of Tao,

Counsel him not to use force to conquer the universe.
 For this would only cause resistance.
 Thorn bushes spring up wherever the army has passed.
 Lean years follow in the wake of a great war.
 Just do what needs to be done.
 Never take advantage of power.
 Achieve results,
 But never glory in them.

Achieve results,
 But never boast.
 Achieve results,
 But never be proud.
 Achieve results,

Because this is the natural way.
 Achieve results,
 But not through violence.

Force is followed by loss of strength.
 This is not the way of Tao.
 That which goes against the Tao
 comes to an early end.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. Why is passivity a feature of Daoism?
2. How might Daoism relate to the movement to protect the environment?
3. What advice does Daoism have for rulers? Is it valid?

SELECTION 5:

Yin and Yang

Traditional Chinese culture cannot be understood without appreciating the concept of yin and yang. The following selection is a document written by an unknown author in the Han period (second century B.C.–second century A.D.). In this ancient writing a mythical figure, the Yellow Emperor, explains the perpetual interaction of the two opposing natural forces, yin and yang, throughout the universe as well as in the human body. In our bodies, according to this concept, the balance of yin and yang determines our moods and explains the diseases that afflict us. The yin/yang concept also helps Chinese thinkers to reconcile seemingly opposing philosophies, such as Confucianism and Daoism.

The Yellow Emperor said: “The principle of Yin and Yang is the foundation of the entire universe. It underlies everything in creation. It brings about the development of parenthood; it is the root and source of life and death; it is found within the temples of the gods. In order to treat and cure diseases one must search for their origins.

“The Interaction of Yin and Yang,” Mark Coyle, trans., in Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed., *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Source Book* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 36–37.

“Heaven was created by the concentration of Yang, the force of light; Earth was created by the concentration of Yin, the force of darkness. Yang stands for peace and serenity; Yin stands for confusion and turmoil. Yang stands for destruction; Yin stands for conservation. Yang brings about disintegration; Yin gives shape to things. . . .

“The pure and lucid element of light is manifested in the upper orifices, and the turbid element of darkness is manifested in the lower orifices. Yang, the element of light, originates in the

pores. Yin, the element of darkness, moves within the five viscera. Yang, the lucid force of light, truly is represented by the four extremities; and Yin, the turbid force of darkness, stores the power of the six treasures of nature.

“Water is an embodiment of Yin, as fire is an embodiment of Yang. Yang creates the air, while Yin creates the senses, which belong to the physical body. When the physical body dies, the spirit is restored to the air, its natural environment. The spirit receives its nourishment through the air, and the body receives its nourishment through the senses. . . .

“If Yang is overly powerful, then Yin may be too weak. If Yin is particularly strong, then Yang is apt to be defective. If the male force is overwhelming, then there will be excessive heat. If the female force is overwhelming, then there will be excessive cold. Exposure to repeated and severe cold will lead to fever. Exposure to repeated and severe heat will induce chills. Cold injures the body while heat injures the spirit. When the spirit is hurt, severe pain will ensue. When the body is hurt, there will be swelling. Thus, when severe pain occurs first and swelling comes on later, one may infer that a disharmony in the spirit has done harm to the body. Likewise, when swelling appears first and severe pain is felt later on, one can say that a dysfunction in the body has injured the spirit. . . .

“Nature has four seasons and five elements. To grant long life, these seasons and elements must store up the power of creation in cold, heat, dryness, moisture, and wind. Man has five viscera in which these five climates are transformed into joy, anger, sympathy, grief, and fear. The emo-

tions of joy and anger are injurious to the spirit just as cold and heat are injurious to the body. Violent anger depletes Yin; violent joy depletes Yang. When rebellious emotions rise to Heaven, the pulse expires and leaves the body. When joy and anger are without moderation, then cold and heat exceed all measure, and life is no longer secure. Yin and Yang should be respected to an equal extent.” . . .

The Yellow Emperor asked, “Is there any alternative to the law of Yin and Yang?”

Ch’i Po answered: “When Yang is the stronger, the body is hot, the pores are closed, and people begin to pant; they become boisterous and coarse and do not perspire. They become feverish, their mouths are dry and sore, their stomachs feel tight, and they die of constipation. When Yang is the stronger, people can endure winter but not summer. When Yin is the stronger, the body is cold and covered with perspiration. People realize they are ill; they tremble and feel chilly. When they feel chilled, their spirits become rebellious. Their stomachs can no longer digest food and they die. When Yin is the stronger, people can endure summer but not winter. Thus Yin and Yang alternate. Their ebbs and surges vary, and so does the character of their diseases.”

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. What can you learn from the concepts of yin and yang?
2. What does this selection say about the Chinese approach to illness?
3. How does a search for balance explain much about life?

SELECTION 6:

China's First Emperor

In 221 B.C. a ruler named Qin Shi Huangdi conquered all the petty states of China and established a centralized empire. Determined to uproot the

old political order; he ordered the destruction of most philosophical books, including those of Confucius—all of which he associated with the chaos of the Warring States period. In 1974 Shi Huangdi's tomb was discovered, and archaeologists were astonished to discover in it more than seventy-five hundred life-size clay soldiers that had been buried with him.

What kind of ruler was this mighty despot, the "First Emperor"? In this selection, two modern historians comment on his reign. They use the Wade-Giles system of romanizing his names, Prince Cheng and Shih Huang-ti. They also refer to his dynasty as the Ch'in rather than the modern, or pinyin, Qin.

By 221 BC all resistance had ended and Prince Cheng was able to proclaim himself Shih Huang-ti, 'the First Emperor'. Although the Ch'in dynasty was of short duration, such was the energy and determination of its founder that this period represents a turning point in the history of Chinese civilization. In place of the old feudal system of government belonging to the Classical Age a centralized monarchy was established. The bureaucratic type of government that had developed in Ch'in became the model for future Chinese political organization, lasting until the twentieth century. The significance of the revolutionary change that Ch'in Shih Huang-ti began and Liu Pang, the founder of the following purely Chinese dynasty, the Han, completed cannot be underestimated. The early civilization of China was the working out of the possibilities offered by imperial unification.

The ruthless determination that had directed the 'Tiger of Ch'in' in his defeat of the Warring States soon became evident in the organization of the Ch'in Empire. In order to unify China he was obliged to become one of the great destroyers of history. Lacking any degree of economic integration, the Ch'in Empire was insecure in two main directions—the east and the north. The deposed aristocracy of the old feudal states posed an internal political threat, especially in the lower valley of the Yellow River, whilst in the north there was danger from the Hsiung Nu nomads, probably the Huns who invaded the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Military control seemed the

quickest and most efficient way of bringing stability. Therefore, Ch'in Shih Huang-ti abolished feudal holdings; compelled the nobles to reside at the capital, Hsienyang, where isolated from their supporters they remained without influence; awarded the *nung* greater rights over their land, but made them liable for taxes; and divided the Empire into new administrative areas under the control of military governors and civil administrators. Everything was reduced 'in a uniform manner': there was standardization of weights and measures, written language, and even vehicle axles, which ended the transfer and reweighing of goods at borders because of differences in ruts made by cartwheels from one state to another. The freer interchange of people and commodities fostered a wider national consciousness, though Ch'in Shih Huang-ti was careful to restrict the benefits that the *shang* derived from the growth of commerce.

The location of the imperial capital in the Wei valley was militarily sound. From Hsienyang, protected on three sides by mountain or desert, Ch'in Shih Huang-ti could sweep down the valley of the Yellow River into the lowlands and retire into an almost impregnable stronghold whenever the forces of the eastern provinces were organized. A network of tree-lined roads radiating from the capital was begun so that imperial orders and troops could be rapidly conveyed to the farthest outposts. Resentment was felt over the geographical location of the imperial capital, tucked away in the north-western corner of the Empire, but the same strategic and economic reasons were to prejudice the Former Han rulers in favour of the Wei valley. The refusal of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti to countenance any survival of

Yong Yap and Arthur Cotterell, *The Early Civilization of China* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), pp. 74, 77.

feudalism—he would not grant fiefs to his own sons or relatives, lest the old rivalries of the Warring States period return—alienated the more traditional *shih* and caused Li Ssu, the chief minister, to recommend the ‘Burning of the Books’. What this statesman feared was an alliance between the old aristocracy and Confucian scholars. Although Confucius had not condemned the Empire, he was unaware of such a possibility, so that his followers during the Ch’in dynasty were opposed to the end of feudalism. By imperial edict all schools of philosophy were required to close, with the exception of the Legalists, and all books were to be destroyed, except the imperial archives and works on medicine, divination and agriculture. This sweeping measure effectively destroyed feudalism; it caused a definite break in consciousness. When, in Han times, the ancient texts were painfully reconstructed from memory and the badly tattered copies that had been hid-

den at great personal risk, the feudal world seemed historically remote. Education rather than birth appeared as the important social qualification. If Li Ssu broke the power of the nobles, he had weakened the Ch’in dynasty too. The *shih* were united in hatred against the imperial house; the official class of Ch’in alone remained loyal.

After reading this selection, consider these questions:

1. Why did Qin Shi Huangdi (Ch’in Shih Huang-ti) feel compelled to destroy so much of ancient Chinese culture? Do you think he was justified?
2. In what ways were Qin Shi Huangdi’s policies dictated by China’s geography?
3. Why was the location of the capital important for Qin Shi Huangdi?