

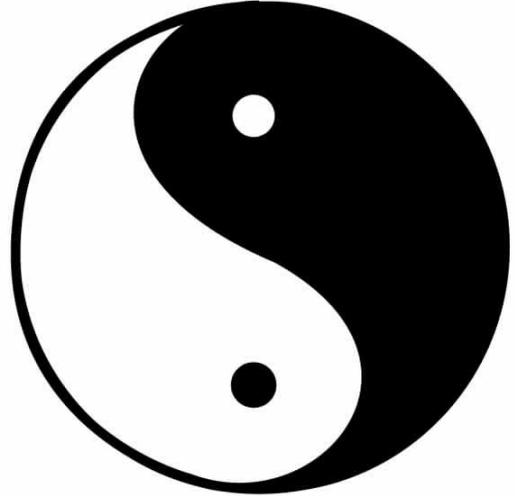
Ancient Chinese Contributions to Civilization

I. Religion and Philosophy

For individuals to attain happiness, the Chinese philosopher Lao-tse taught:

1. Governments should minimize their control over the people. People should be permitted to conduct their own affairs since laws cannot improve conditions.
2. Individuals should passively accept their lot in life.
3. Individuals can achieve peace of mind only by practicing humility and by renouncing (giving up) wealth and prestige.
4. Individuals should live in a simple manner in harmony with “Tao” and “way of nature”

Lao-Tse’s teachings later became part of the polytheistic religion “Taoism”. Taoism was an ancient Chinese religion and philosophy. Taoists have a deep respect for nature and harmony, and accept things as they are rather than trying to change them.



II. Strong Family Ties

In keeping with Confucian teachings, the family – not the individual – became the basic unit of Chinese life. The family included all relatives. Living together or near one another, they sometimes constituted an entire village. The oldest person was the honored and obeyed family head. The family assumed responsibility for the livelihood and good conduct of its members. Marriage was not intended for individual happiness, but to perpetuate the family.

III. Written Language and Literature

Complex Chinese writing existed by 1500 B.C. Lacking an alphabet, it employed up to 40,000 characters (originally pictures), each representing a distinct idea or sound. The resulting difficulty in reading and writing sharply limited Chinese literacy to a small number of educated persons. Despite their complex written language, the Chinese created a noteworthy literature of poetry, history, and philosophy. The sayings of Confucius are recorded in a book called the “Analects”.

IV. Art and Architecture

The ancient Chinese fashioned fine jewelry and figurines using their most prized stone called “jade”. The most distinctive Chinese structure was the “pagoda”, a many-storied tapered temple with a series of upward-curving roofs.

V. Science and Technology

The ancient Chinese invented paper, gunpowder, the sundial, the water clock, and instruments to detect earthquakes. Chinese astrologers observed sunspots, studied eclipses, and devised a solar calendar of 365 and a quarter days (365 ¼ days). Chinese farmers plowed the land, used fertilizer, and rotated crops. The Chinese also wove silk cloth and produced glazed pottery plates (chinaware)

Questions to Answer

1. What are the main beliefs of “Taoism”?
2. How do the Chinese practices strong family ties?
3. Why is the Chinese written language complex?
4. What are the main inventions of the ancient Chinese?