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Taoism or Daoism is a religion with philosophical undertones that can be traced back to the Han Dynasty in China. It has grown into the culture there and has taken root in many of their traditions. It is similar and comparable to Confucianism in many ways but what most scholars take as their distinctive features are using rituals and having concrete lifestyles as in Confucianism and a lack thereof in Taoism. There is the raw philosophy of Taoism that can be revered and practiced as a separate entity from the religion but the two are closely intertwined with one another. Evidence of the prior mentioned mingling is evident in the overwhelming ties that the common Chinese Folk religions have with Taoism. The Taoist religion is one of deep tradition among many Chinese families and is how it is passed down through the generations. It is one of only five doctrines that are formally recognized in the People's Republic of China to this day. Taoism is also very popular in Taiwan and is practiced in either religious or philosophical means by most of the population. Taoism has also travelled outside of China and even Asia to take root in surrounding cultures.

The religious views of Taoism come from the writings of Zhuang Zhou. The writings of his that have been indoctrinated into Taoism are the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Zhuangzi*. Another

text important to Taoism that was not written by Zhuang Zhou is the *Toa Te Ching*. These texts existed long before the Han Dynasty but were very clearly pieced together to form Taoism during this time. The school of Tianshi was the earliest known place of practice for Taoism. Taoism took a hit during the Qing Dynasty as it was discouraged in favor of the then politically preferred Confucianism and Buddhism. To demonstrate this, the imperial library was formed during this period but included almost no Taoist texts. Also, at one point during the Qing Dynasty there was only one full copy of *Taozang*, a Taoist text, remained in the world. However has seen a small resurgence in modern times.

The principle teaching of Taoism all come from the sacred texts associated with it. It is considered “pantheistic” as it does not recognize a “God” but instead gives its emphasis to the almighty “Tao” or “way.” By doing this Taoism does not worship a deity but instead strives for a common way of life that is viewed as becoming natural and pure. Taoism teachings vary vastly in many regions. Taoism as a whole does emphasize being in harmony with the “Tao” or “the way.” It also uniformly encourages a teaching called The Three Treasures. These treasures are passion, frugality, and humility, although sometimes translated to essence, life force, and spirit. They are taught to be sacred and must be worked toward during meditation, religious activities, and everyday life in order to obtain. Another one of these core principles is meditating in *wu wei* or engaging in “action without intention.” This is referenced many times a state with “no effort” and involved different breathing techniques and postures. This is supposed to shave away all forms of worldly influence and return the meditator to the “original human state” almost like a widdled piece of wood returning to the uncarved branch is used to be. This practice stemmed into Han Dynasty politics with many Taoist emperors adapting a *lassiez-faire* style of governing

as a result of *wu wei* principles. Ziran is another commonly practiced exercise among Taoists. It is the religious act of self-organizing one's self into the primordial state or becoming one with Tao. In order to do this, it is said that one must free themselves from selfishness and desire while also holding on to their creativity and spontaneity. There is a branch of Taoism that moves into alchemy that involves brewing teas and other delicacies that have been said to, for one reason or another, bring the users on religious journeys as a means of harmonizing with Tao. Cosmology is also heavily tied into Taoism. This is where the very popular Ying and Yang originated from. It is believed that these two elements are constantly at play with one another, offsetting each other in the universe. That is why it said to practice as much "good" or "Tao" as one can in order to require less evil in the world. It is said that one can truly understand the universe by practicing these exercises and studying the doctrines. It is said to be possible to become spiritually immortal through Taoism. This title is called Xian but is very rare and only said to have been achieved by a few people in the Taoist history. These Xians are often praised to the point of worship by Taoists. This spiritual immortality, however, is not similar to Hinduism in which the person forms a spiritual union with an immortal spirit.

In conclusion, Taoism has played a very significant role in Eastern society and, by that nature, the world. Even though it is usually overshadowed by the ever more common religions in Asia it is most certainly one of the most influential philosophies weaving itself into Asian culture and into the more popular religions themselves. It has also remained openly practiced and loved in much of China and almost all of Taiwan. It has helped many people obtain their version of peace and has encouraged peace among people for centuries and will continue to do so for centuries to come.