

Name _____ Date _____

Daoism

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

In 1046 BCE, the Zhou Dynasty rose to power, ruling over China for the next 800 years. However, the Zhou didn't have a centralized government. Instead, China functioned as a collection of separately governed provinces, whose feudal rulers professed allegiance to the Zhou emperor.

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Over time, these smaller kingdoms amassed more and more power, coming into conflict with each other and with the Zhou dynasty. The period between 475 and 221 BCE was so full of violence that it is now known as the Warring States Period. Leaders during this era looked to philosophy for guidance about how to establish and maintain a healthy social order. This prompted an explosion of new and interesting ideas, now known as the Hundred Schools of Thought. Daoism and Confucianism, both of which continue to influence Chinese life today, emerged during this volatile time.

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2. b'

The Tao Te Ching, or The Way and Its Virtue, likely written in the 3rd or 4th century BCE, is the earliest foundational text of Daoism. Its purported author is Laozi, who some suggest was a records-keeper or curator in the court of the Zhou dynasty. According to one story, Laozi wrote the text right before exiling himself from China. However, there's no evidence that this is anything more than legend. In fact, Laozi may not have existed at all and even if he did, he may not have been the Tao Te Ching's author.

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But if Laozi didn't write the text, who did? No one knows for sure, but one theory is that it's a compilation by several different authors, who put into writing ideas that had originated centuries earlier.

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The Tao Te Ching consists of 81 pithy, poetic verses instructing readers on how to live simply and in balance with nature. Despite their brevity, the verses can inspire deep reflection. Two examples are: "To attain knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom, remove things every day," and "The sage produces but does not own, acts but does not claim."

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3. b'

According to Daoism, the key to a healthy society is for people to live in accord with Dao, or the "way." The Dao is a natural force that guides everything in the cosmos. Living in accord with this natural force means not disrupting it or pushing against it. By letting things take their natural course, conflict, corruption, and oppression can be prevented. In other words, the best kind of action is non-action.

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When it comes to government, this principle of non-action (wu wei) means having very few regulations. So while a Daoist government would not promote high taxes, it would also not promote tax breaks or other subsidies. As the Tao Te Ching states, "Stop trying to control. Let go of fixed plans and concepts, and the world will govern itself."

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The concept of yin-yang is associated with many Chinese philosophies, Daoism included. Yin and yang represent opposing forces in nature. For example, yin is associated with darkness, passivity, and femaleness, while yang is associated with light, activity, and maleness.

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But although these forces are in opposition to each other, they are also complementary; both are necessary for the universe to exist. Nor are they entirely separate; yin contains the seed of yang, and yang contains the seed of yin. Harmony results from a balance between the two. In Daoism, the Dao, or the force behind all of creation, is a perfect balance of yin and yang.

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