

# Relief Systems in China



A Unit of Study for Grades 6-12

JOEL ROTHBLATT



National Center for  
History in the Schools  
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Cover Illustration:

The Men of the Three Creeds Tasting Vinegar (Reisai, ca. 1450)

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# **Belief Systems in China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism 581 BCE – 1368 CE**

**A Unit of Study for Grades 6-12**

**Joel Rothblatt**

**National Center for History in the Schools  
UCLA**

The electronic version of this teaching unit is available at



<http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Joel Rothblatt teaches social science at Emerson Middle School, a Title 1 School in the Los Angeles Unified School District. He participated in the National Consortium for the Teaching about Asia seminar and study tour to China in 2006. He has been elected to the Board of Directors of the California Council for the Social Studies (CCSS) and is also Chair of Membership for the CCSS. He is also a Member of the House of Delegates of the National Council for the Social Studies. He is a participant in a project in the Los Angeles area to pilot and evaluate the World History for Us All model curriculum. His parents were both educators.

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# Introduction

## I. WHY THIS UNIT?

This teaching unit explores the three main traditional belief systems, that is, religions or philosophies of China: Confucianism, Daoism (Taoism), and Buddhism. It provides background on each of these systems, including how, when, where, and by whom they were developed and diffused throughout China. Using translations of primary sources, students will examine the major tenets of each belief system, their specific differences, and their importance in the historical development of China. Students will understand the significance of belief systems in helping to establish a sense of belonging and building social cohesion, focusing on China in the premodern era. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on the impact that their own belief systems have on their lives.

Teachers may present material from this unit in a variety of classroom contexts, including the following:

- An example of the power of belief systems in shaping the views of individuals, as well as helping to forge a country's cultural identity.
- A case study of how and why belief systems are important, transmitted, and accepted in a society.
- A basis for comparison with other belief systems.
- Part of a general study of East Asia in the medieval centuries.

## II. UNIT OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Explain the meaning of "belief systems" and give examples.
2. Trace the spread of the three main belief systems in China over time and assess their impact on the politics, economy, society, and culture.
3. Identify the similarities and differences between Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.
4. Draw inferences about the effects of a particular belief system on a society residing in a geographic region.

5. Describe how and why Buddhism spread in China during the period of the Tang dynasty.

### III. TIME AND MATERIALS

This unit will take three to four 50-minute class periods (150-200 minutes in class).

Materials required: pencils, overhead or computer projector, transparencies, and history textbooks with glossaries or dictionaries.

### IV. CORRELATIONS TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR WORLD HISTORY

**Era 4:** Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE.

**1B:** The student understands the expansion of Christianity and Buddhism beyond the lands of their origin.

**3A:** The student understands China's sustained political and cultural expansion in the Tang period. Therefore the student is able to assess explanations for the spread and power of Buddhism in Tang China, Korea, and Japan.

**Era 5:** Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000-1500 CE.

**1B:** The student understands developments in Japanese and Southeast Asian civilization.

**Era 6:** The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450-1770.

**3A:** The student understands the extent and limits of Chinese regional power under the Ming dynasty. Therefore the student is able to compare the role of Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in Chinese government and society.

### V. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As anyone who witnessed the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing can attest, the Chinese continue to take great pride in their three main belief systems: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. These three belief systems continue to exert tremendous influence over life in China. Thus, by examining this unit, students can appreciate the connection between the past and the present in China.

Both belief systems indigenous to China that are covered in this unit originated during the fourth and fifth centuries BCE. The founders of these belief systems—Laozi



(Lao Tzu) and Confucius—lived during the violent and chaotic “Warring States Period” of the eastern Zhou dynasty. This occurred nearly three centuries before China was first united into an empire by Shi Huangdi in 221 BCE. This “Warring States Period” was a time when the line of succession within each state was murky at best, since rulers would often have children with wives and concubines; many of the progeny of these unions would try to claim their rightful place on the throne. Bitter, rejected “wannabe” rulers often joined forces with rival states to seek justice and revenge and attempt to clear the heir, so to speak, in their own states. In addition, these Chinese states often united in common cause against a more powerful state (or states) in order to preserve a balance of power between them.

In military terms, this period saw a move away from the aristocrat-led, chariot-based, and chivalrous battles to large-scale armies, cavalry, walled fortifications, and use of the crossbow. These developments caused battles to be larger in scale and intensity than ever before, requiring the skills of well-organized generals. Iron-making technology, developed in the early Zhou period, promoted economic expansion. The economic growth of the late Zhou period is evident in the appearance of cities all over northern China. In the fourth century BCE, rulers of city-states in China began attempting to conquer neighboring states. Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of the third belief system—Buddhism—discussed in this unit, also lived around 500 BCE in India.

Chinese societies were in closer contact with Indian societies than they were with other ancient civilizations given the geographic proximity to each other. However, early India differed from ancient China in many ways due, in large part, to its climate: India was farther south, closer to the equator, and warmer year round. India also had closer relationships to other early Indo-European societies, such as Persians and Greeks, than did the early Chinese. Within two centuries before Siddhartha, records indicate that philosophers in India began questioning the meanings of sacrificial rituals and pondering the role of humans in the cosmos. Ancient Indian beliefs envisioned endlessly-repeating cycles of birth and death. Those who lived good lives would be reborn into a better life, and those who did bad deeds would be reborn as lower beings. This led some to seek a more mystical understanding of the universe—and attempt to perform good deeds only—by practicing asceticism and retreating from society. It is from this environment that the philosophy of Buddhism emerged. The spread of Buddhism both inside and outside of India was greatly supported by the Indian King Ashoka who became a Buddhist after recognizing—and agonizing over—the carnage he inflicted when he defeated his enemies in a bloody battle in 261 BCE.

By 100 CE, the economy of the cities of Inner Eurasia was becoming dependent on east-west trade along the silk roads. During the powerful Han dynasty, the Chinese controlled much of eastern Inner Eurasia, although trade continued after the Han fell.

Thus, the message of Buddhism was first introduced into China by foreign merchants. Soon after, missionaries also carried the teachings of Buddhism to China. The spread of Buddhism deepened when the sutras (Buddhist holy writings) were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by both Inner Eurasian and Chinese monks.

After the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, China disintegrated into the “Period of Division.” The territory was broken into competing states until 589 CE. At one point non-Chinese were able to control parts of northern China. This was due in large part to the invention of the stirrup about 300 CE. This device gave advantage to cavalry in warfare and favored the superior riding ability of northern tribes. During this disunity, Buddhism spread in China and connected Chinese society with societies throughout Asia. At the same time, Daoism emerged as a rival to Buddhism, and Daoists wrote their own sacred texts and instituted monastic rites as a way to become more accepted into higher society and political circles. Finally, in 589 CE, the Sui dynasty defeated the last of the southern dynasties and China was politically reunited. The Sui founder, Wendi, presented himself as a Buddhist king and spread the teachings of Buddhism across China. At the same time, the Sui selected government officials based on their scores on civil service examinations which stressed knowledge of Confucianism. However, the costly (in terms of money and casualties) battles the Sui waged to regain China’s control over Vietnam and Korea—as the Han had done—caused the Sui dynasty to fall after only two generations.

The Tang dynasty, which took over in 618 CE and lasted until 907 CE, continued the civil service examinations. Eventually there were two main examinations: one tested knowledge of the Confucian classics, and the other tested the candidates’ ability to answer political questions and compose poetry. The Tang dynasty rivaled the Han in terms of territorial control, and the Tang elite was perhaps even better educated than the Han elite. For example, the Tang elite continued to prepare for and take the civil service exams as a matter of personal prestige. As we will see in the lessons in this unit, all three belief systems—Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—flourished under the Tang and Song dynasties (roughly 960-1279 CE).

## VI. TABLE OF DATES

<b>BCE</b>	
1766-1123	Shang dynasty (traditional dates)
1122-249	Zhou dynasty (traditional dates)
1122-771	Western Zhou dynasty (traditional dates)
770-249	Eastern Zhou dynasty
722-479	Spring and Autumn Period
4th century	Laozi (Lao Tzu)
551-479	Confucius
563-483	Buddha
478-222	Warring States Period
370-290	Mencius
369-386	Zhuangzi
221-207	Qin dynasty
206 BCE-220 CE	Han dynasty
206 BCE-8 CE	Western (or Former) Han dynasty
<b>CE</b>	
25-220	Eastern (Later) Han dynasty
1-100	Buddhism introduced into China from India
206-220	Confucianism as state orthodoxy
c. 220	Confucianism falls out of favor
220-581	Seven Dynasties Period
317-589	Buddhism becomes established in China
581-618	Sui dynasty
618-907	Tang dynasty
c. 618-844	Buddhism enjoys broad support in China
c. 618-907	Daoism flourishes in China

## INTRODUCTION

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844-845	Buddhism suppressed
846	Buddhism accepted again after death of Emperor Wu Zong: increasing blending with Daoism and Confucianism
907-959	Five Dynasties Period
960-1279	Song dynasty
c. 1020-1912	Revival of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism
1279-1368	Yuan (Mongol) dynasty
1368-1644	Ming dynasty
1644-1912	Qing dynasty
1912-1949	The Republic of China
1949-present	The People's Republic of China
c. 1980-present	Chinese government permits the reopening of Daoist and Buddhist temples
c. 2006-present	Book on "pop-Confucianism" called <i>Confucius from the Heart: Ancient Wisdom for Today's World</i> by Yu Dan is published in English and becomes a best-seller.

# Lesson 1

## *What are Belief Systems? Differences Between a Religion and a Philosophy*

### **I. PREPARATION**

Teachers should make double-sided copies of Student Handouts 1.1 (Belief Systems: Philosophy and Religion) and 1.2 (Vocabulary Words and Terms) to distribute to the class. Additionally, teachers should make overhead transparency copies of Student Handouts 1.1 and 1.2 in order to help debrief students on the assignments and/or ensure that all of them have standardized or similar answers. Students should have some knowledge of China, as well as the belief systems of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. This unit might best be introduced after a basic overview of Chinese history and geography to maximize student understanding and contextualization of the material.

### **II. INTRODUCTION**

This first lesson will provide students with a framework for comparing and contrasting belief systems with religions and will enable them to understand key concepts and vocabulary covered in the remainder of the unit.

### **III. ACTIVITIES**

1. Students begin each class period with an exercise that can be called a “warm-up,” a “dispatch,” or a “question of the day (QOTD)” that serves to preview material, pique students’ interest in a topic, or review material from a previous class or homework. The warm-up exercise should always be written out in front of the classroom (using a white board, chalk board, overhead projector, PowerPoint slide) so that students can see it when they enter the classroom, copy it down, and begin working on it immediately. One way to administer the warm-up exercise is to give students at least five minutes to complete it after the start of class. A suggestion for a complete warm-up exercise is to require students to copy the prompt (question) and answer it with at least eight lines.
2. Today’s warm up exercise will be, “Does everybody believe in the same things? Why or why not? Are there some things that everybody believes in?” Ask a few students to share their answers with the class.

3. Compile a short list of things that students think “everyone” believes in. Possible answers on the list include the following:
  - People should treat others as they want to be treated.
  - People should not kill each other.
  - People should not steal.

Ask students where they think these beliefs come from. Possible answers: their parents, guardians, grandparents, teachers, and “it’s the law.” Explain that these beliefs (or ideas or values) are part of our belief system.

4. Distribute Student Handout 1.1. Tell the students that they will complete it during the class. A belief system is a way of organizing our beliefs. Explain that we all have belief systems. Belief systems are important because they help us understand the world around us, guide us on what is important, show us right from wrong, and lead us to behave properly and reasonably.
5. Students should complete Part A of Student Handout 1.1. Point out to the class that some of the beliefs that everyone accepts are in the Ten Commandments, which will likely be the case. The Ten Commandments are from the ancient Hebrew Bible and are a foundation of the Judeo-Christian (Jewish and Christian) heritage. Therefore, one important part of a person’s belief system may come from religion.
6. Ask students for their definition of religion. A student may be asked to look it up in a dictionary or the glossary of the history textbook. Students should understand religion as a way of believing in – and worshipping or praying to – a God or gods. This involves a belief in the supernatural. Religion also shows us right from wrong and how to live a good life. Religion explains to people why and how we are here and what happens to us after we die.
7. Students may begin working on Part B of Student Handout 1.1.
8. Ask students to give examples of different religions. Explain that there are other ways – besides religion – that contribute to people’s belief systems. One important other way is philosophy. That word comes from two Greek words: 1) *philos* meaning friend or love/lover, and 2) *sophia*, meaning wisdom or knowledge. Therefore, philosophy means “love of knowledge.” Philosophy is the search for wisdom or knowledge. A philosophy is a belief system accepted by a cultural or social group.
9. Students may complete Parts C and D of Student Handout 1.1, as well as any other parts of it that are incomplete, at this time.

10. Tell students that in the next class they will begin learning about the three main belief systems of China. Emphasize that they need to understand the vocabulary for the next lesson and that they should complete Student Handout 1.2. If students have time before the current class has ended, they can begin their homework in class.

*Belief Systems: Philosophy and Religion***PART A**

<b>Vocabulary word</b>	<b>Class definition</b>	<b>Definiton in your own words</b>	<b>Why it is important</b>
Belief System			

**PART B**

<b>Vocabulary word</b>	<b>Class definition</b>	<b>Definition in your own words</b>	<b>Why it is important</b>
Religion			
Philosophy			



**PART C**

A religion is **different** from a philosophy because a **religion** is:

A **philosophy** is:

**PART D**

A religion and a philosophy have the following things **in common**. They both:

*Vocabulary Words and Terms*

<b>Vocabulary word</b>	<b>Dictionary definition</b>	<b>Definition in your own words</b>	<b>Why it is important?</b>
1. pious			
2. piety			
3. filial piety			
4. virtue			

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Vocabulary word	Dictionary definition	Definition in your own words	Why it is important?
5. ritual			
6. reincarnation			
7. enlightened			
8. nirvana			

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Vocabulary word	Dictionary definition	Definition in your own words	Why it is important?
9. yin yang			
10. noble			
11. symbol			
12. harmony			

# Lesson 2

## *The Three Main Belief Systems of China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism*

### **I. PREPARATION**

Teachers should make overhead transparency copies of Student Handouts 2.1 and 2.6-2.9. Teachers should also make double-sided copies of Student Handouts 2.2-2.4, preferably using different colored paper for each to aid in the distribution, collection, and monitoring of student work. (For example, the double-sided copies of Student Handout 2.2 can be reproduced on green paper, the double-sided copies of Student Handout 2.3 on yellow paper, and the double-sided copies of Student Handout 2.4 on purple paper.)

Additionally, teachers should make double-sided copies of Student Handouts 2.5 and 2.6, as well as a double-sided half-sheet of Student Handout 2.10. (If you copy the full sheet of Student Handout 2.10, recopy it upside down on the back side, then cut in half after quotation #6; you should have all quotations on both sides of the half-sheet. You may have to readjust the top and bottom margins for this to work.) Also, make a full-size, double-sided copy of Student Handout 2.11 to distribute to all students.

Students should have some knowledge of China as well as the belief systems of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. It is suggested that this unit be introduced after a basic overview of Chinese history and geography to maximize student understanding and contextualization of the material. It is also suggested that this lesson be taught after students have already completed Lesson 1 of this unit.

### **II. INTRODUCTION**

This lesson will provide students with knowledge of the history and basics of each of the three main belief systems of China and allow them to compare and contrast those belief systems. They should be able to make distinctions between each belief system by distinguishing between quotations from each of the three different belief systems and identifying each belief system's quotation correctly.

### **III. ACTIVITIES**

1. The warm-up exercise for this lesson will be: "How does a new religion or philosophy begin?" Ask a few students to share their answers with the class.
2. Discuss with the class that religions and philosophies can both shape a society

and be shaped by it. Belief systems often try to provide answers to problems that exist within a society. Therefore, they may appear when times are difficult and people are looking for ways to deal with their problems. Often there is a founder who begins the movement and for whom the belief system is later named (e.g., Christianity for Jesus Christ, Confucianism for Confucius, and Buddhism for the Buddha).

3. Display on an overhead and/or distribute copies of Student Handout 2.1 (The Vinegar Tasters) to all students.
4. Divide the class into three “expert groups.” All students in one group should receive a copy of Student Handout 2.2 (Confucius), all students in another group will receive Student Handout 2.3 (Laozi), and all students in the third group will receive Student Handout 2.4 (the Buddha).
5. Ask students to complete Student Handout 2.5 (Worksheet on Your Group’s Belief System). Then distribute Student Handout 2.6 (Three Belief Systems of China), which is a comparison and contrast overview of all three belief systems. Display the overhead and call on students from each group to complete it. While the instructor is doing the overhead, each student should be completing Student Handout 2.6.
6. The teacher may reproduce (preferably in color) and show images on overheads of Student Handout 2.7 (Confucianism), Student Handout 2.8 (Buddhist Practice), and Student Handout 2.9 (Daoist Practice) while debriefing the student groups and completing Student Handout 2.6.
7. For homework or the next class period, students should receive double-sided, half-sheet copies of Student Handout 2.10 (Sayings of the Three Belief Systems of China). Students are to select at least two sayings from each of the belief systems and complete Student Handout 2.11 (Worksheet on Sayings of the Three Belief Systems of China) by:
  - identifying the correct belief system.
  - justifying their choice (why that saying is from that particular belief system).
  - writing in their own words what the saying means.
  - explaining why each saying is important.

NOTE: The key to the correct pairing of each quotation with its belief system is found on the Teacher Answer Key (p. 40).

### *The Vinegar Tasters*



The Men of the Three Creeds Tasting Vinegar (Reisai, ca. 1450)

This painting of a famous image represents the three main belief systems of China. The founders of each of the belief systems are portrayed and their systems examined. These three men are (from left to right) Confucius, the Buddha, and Laozi.

They are standing around a container of vinegar. Each has dipped his finger into the vinegar and tasted it. The expression on each man's face shows how the vinegar tasted to him. The vinegar they are sampling is really a symbol of the true nature of life.

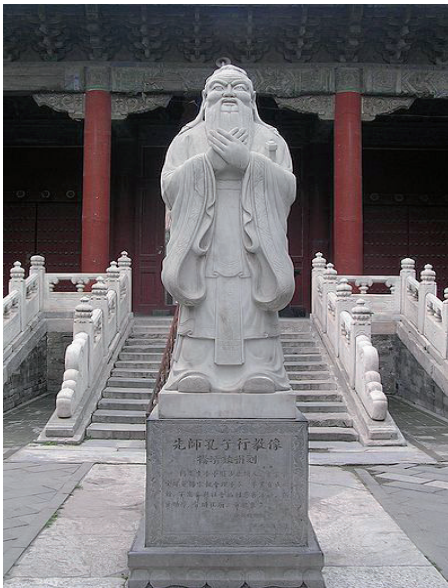
Confucius has a sour look on his face, showing that he believes that life is unpleasant. The Buddha wears a bitter expression, showing that he believes that life is harsh. Lao Tzu is smiling, meaning that he is happy with life.

Let us learn about each belief system and its founder to discover why the same vinegar tastes different to each man.

## *Confucius (Kong Fuzi) 551-479 BCE*

Confucius was a sage, that is, a wise man. He was born in 551 BCE, during a period when China was divided into many small states, each with its own lord. This time is known as the “Warring States Period” because the different states were always fighting with each other. There were many attempts to overthrow the lords because they were often cruel to the people they ruled. It was a period of great chaos (disorder) and suffering among the people.

Like other people during this difficult and dangerous time, Confucius looked for ways to improve society and make it more peaceful. He believed that life would be better and safer if there was clear order, or harmony, in society. He also understood that rulers needed to govern more wisely to avoid or reduce bloodshed. Confucius believed that people should not use family connections to obtain government positions as many people did during that time. Instead, he thought that government officials should be well-educated, talented, honest, and fair. Confucius believed that government officials should live lives of virtue so that the people they ruled would follow their example. Therefore, he developed a philosophy that established clear relationships between people in all aspects of their lives.



**Statue of Confucius at the Confucius Temple in Beijing China**  
Wikimedia Commons  
Photo by Miguel A. Monjas



**Tomb of Confucius in Qufu, China**  
Wikimedia Commons  
Photo by Rolf Miller



According to Confucius, there are five basic relationships. In each relationship, people have certain duties or obligations to each other. If people understand and carry out these duties, then there will be order and peace. These are the five relationships and their duties:

1. **Parents-Children.** Parents should love and care for their children. Children should respect and obey their parents. The children's respect and devotion for their parents is often called filial piety.
2. **Ruler-Subjects.** A ruler should care for the people he governs. The people he rules (the subjects) should obey a ruler who takes care of them.
3. **Older brothers-Younger brothers.** Older brothers should care for younger brothers. Younger brothers should respect and obey older brothers.
4. **Husband-Wife.** Married people should live in harmony. A wife should obey her husband.
5. **Friend-Friend.** Friends should trust each other and treat each other well.

Do you notice a pattern? Those in power must take care of those who are weaker. Those who are weaker must respect and obey those who are in power. Those who are equal should treat each other equally. The primary and most important relationship is between parent and child. Children who understand their roles and duties to their parents will then be able to go into the world and understand their positions in society. It will be very difficult, however, for those who do not fulfill their primary duties (to their parents) to lead a successful life.

These relationships are based on traditional Chinese values, such as respect for elders (older people) and ancestor worship, which existed before the time of Confucius. This was an important reason why Chinese people were able to embrace the teachings of Confucius: they were already familiar with many of these ideas. The teachings of Confucius were rooted in things that the Chinese already believed in and practiced.

On the other hand, Confucianism also placed greater importance on learning, or scholarship. According to Confucianism, people can become government officials to help rule the land if they study hard, are just and fair, and can pass difficult exams. Under his philosophy, it is not as important which family you are born into; it is much more important how smart and just you are. Therefore, Confucianism gives everyone the opportunity to become more powerful.

The main writings of Confucius are in the *Analects*, the sayings of Confucius. In addition to his own words, the ideas of Confucianism were developed by many other

people who were the disciples of Confucius. These people accepted and spread his teachings. The most famous of these was Mencius. He was born almost 100 years after Confucius died. He tried to convince rulers in China that they should accept the teachings of Confucius.

In Confucianism, memorizing the sayings of Confucius was one of the most important rituals. That way, if someone spoke the first part of a saying of Confucius, the other people in the group (Confucians) would be able to complete it. If they could not, they would not be considered to be part of that group of well-educated people or leaders.

Some of the sayings of Confucius were about the five relationships, but many others were examples of the way people should behave in order to keep harmony in society. These sayings often talked about people who were superior or inferior.

Here are two examples of famous sayings by Confucius:

- “What is a superior person? One who acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions.”
- “Good government results when those who are near are made happy, and those who are far are attracted to it.”

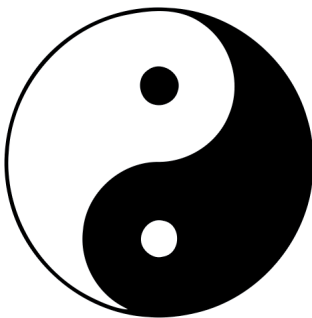
### *Laozi (Lao Tzu), Fourth Century BCE*

We do not know if Laozi was a real person or not. The name in Chinese means “Old Philosopher” or “Old Master.” This name may actually have represented several different writers who contributed to the *Daodejing*, or *The Way and Integrity Classic*, which was the earliest set of teachings associated with Daoism. This person or persons lived during a period when China was divided into many small states, each with its own lord. This time is known as the “Warring States Period,” because the different states were always fighting, or warring, with each other and their lords. There were many attempts to overthrow the lords because they were often cruel to the people they ruled. It was a period of great chaos and suffering among the people.

Like other people during this difficult and dangerous time, Laozi looked for ways to improve society and help comfort people. According to legend, he wanted to leave the problems in China in order to live out the end of his life in peace and quiet in Central Asia (west of China). A border guard asked him to write down his teachings before leaving China, and so Laozi composed the *Daodejing*, which lays out the main ideas of what later became known as Daoism.

According to Daoism, people have problems because they do not understand the natural world they live in and how it behaves. Therefore, the basic goal of Daoism is for people to understand the Dao (the way) of nature and behave according to it. Those who follow the Dao achieve mental clarity, power, and inner peace.

It is difficult to describe the Dao in words. In fact, when we put things from nature into words, we remove ourselves from the experience of reality, according to Daoism. Therefore, Daoists (people who practice Daoism) say that instead of using words, the best way to experience nature is by observing it and being in tune with it. For example, when we watch waves at the beach, we do not judge waves and say, “This one is right and beautiful” or “That one is wrong and ugly.” Nature is just what it is; it does not make mistakes. There is no good or bad in nature. These are ideas that people made up to describe how things affect them.



Therefore, it is easier to explain Daoism with the yin yang symbol. Many people (especially in Western countries) tend to separate ideas in nature into opposites like good and evil, black and white, or life and death. Daoists see nature as being whole (the complete outside circle in the yin yang symbol), and everything inside of it as being connected and as part of the whole. The yin is represented by the black in this symbol. It also represents water, the moon, and earth, as well as the quiet, soft, and feminine qualities. The yang is represented by

the white in the symbol. It also represents fire, the sun, and heaven, as well as the dynamic, hard, and masculine qualities. Nature is always moving and flowing, and the yin and yang work together. For example, black and white are only seen in relation to the other, part of each other, and flowing into each other.



**The yin yang symbol is seen everywhere in a Daoist monastery near Chongqing, China. But even here, the concept of yin yang can be understood in food combination, such as sweet and sour.**

Photo by J. Rothblatt



**Statues of gods in a Daoist monastery near Chongqing, China**

Photo by J. Rothblatt

The Daoist belief system was accepted in China (in part) because it reflected earlier philosophies and legends. For example, according to a very famous legend, one of the mythical founders of China faced a problem about how to deal with a huge dam that was leaking. Rather than trying to block it, he formed channels to naturally drain the water away, thus creating China's landscape.

Aside from Laozi's writings in the *Daodejing*, the philosophy of Daoism is based on the ideas of other people who accepted and spread the teachings of Daoism. The most famous of these was Zhuangzi (or Master Zhuang), who was born perhaps 100 years after Laozi died and who wrote *Zhuangzi*.

In Daoism, meditation and tuning into nature are the most important rituals. Daoists also memorize the main writings of Daoism, especially the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*. That way, if someone begins speaking the first part of a saying from one of these books, the other people in the group (Daoists) are able to complete it. If they cannot, they are not considered to be part of that group of Daoists.

Examples of two famous Daoist sayings:

- “Who can make the muddy water clear? Let it be still and it will gradually become clear.”
- “That which goes against the Dao will come to an early end.”

### *The Buddha (born Siddhartha Gautama), 563-483 BCE*

Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince in Northern India. According to legend, it was predicted at Siddhartha's birth that he would become either a great ruler or a great teacher. His father, the king, wanted Siddhartha to succeed him as ruler. For this reason, his father tried to prevent him from seeing or experiencing anything sad, which might cause him to become religious and teach others. Therefore, Siddhartha enjoyed his early years in the palace in luxury without knowing about things such as old age, sickness, or death. Eventually, the young prince decided to go outside of the palace. There, for the first time, he saw an old person with wrinkled skin who had difficulty walking. Siddhartha understood that he himself would also become old. He also saw a sick person and a dead person. All this made Siddhartha feel much suffering. During another trip, he saw a holy man who appeared to be happy and at peace. Siddhartha learned that this person had given up his home and everything he owned. The holy person was trying to find wisdom and peacefulness by living a pure and simple life.

From then on, Siddhartha searched for a way to end suffering and become happy. He decided to follow the path of a holy person. He gave up everything he owned. He left his wife and young child and a life of luxury in the palace. He traveled around India for years, but he still did not find a way to end suffering. Finally, he decided to sit under a tree and meditate (become quiet and relaxed and clear his mind of thoughts) until he became enlightened (understood the truth about the world and such things as why there is suffering and how to end it). After meditating for several hours, he became enlightened and became known as the "Buddha," or the one who knows the truth.



**Two Golden Statues of  
Buddha in a Temple  
Shanghai, China**

Photo by J. Rothblatt



**Buddhists burn incense and chant  
in a temple  
Shanghai, China**

Photo by J. Rothblatt

In order to share with others the truths he found, the Buddha became a teacher. (Remember: this is one of the career paths predicted for him at birth and the one that his father did not want him to take.) There are two main beliefs of Buddhism, that is, the teachings of the Buddha and his followers.

One belief is the “Four Noble Truths,” which the Buddha discovered when he meditated beneath the tree. These truths are:

- Life is full of suffering from birth to death.
- People suffer because they desire (try to get) things that do not last, for example, money and possessions.
- The way to end suffering is to stop desiring things.
- The way to get rid of desire is to follow the “Eightfold Path.”

According to Buddhism, the “Eightfold Path” means to lead a good life. People who follow this path are freed from suffering and gain happiness. These steps are:

- Right understanding. It is important to be certain that you understand the teachings of the Buddha correctly.
- Right thought. Think thoughts that are pure and good.
- Right speech. Speak words that are truthful and not harmful.
- Right action. Treat people well, as you would like to be treated.
- Right work. Do not harm others as you earn a living.
- Right effort. Keep trying to become a better person; stop bad habits.
- Right mindfulness. Be mindful (or aware) of what you are doing and what is going on around you; always think about how you live.
- Right meditation. Meditate correctly each day to clear your mind of desires and be able to find peace and truth.

When and why did Buddhism arrive in China? Buddhism probably first entered China along the “silk roads,” that is, the system of trade routes that connected China to lands farther west extending to the Mediterranean sea and Europe. Trade on the silk roads goes back thousands of years. By about 100 BCE, Buddhist missionaries began traveling on the routes along with traders. Trade routes opened contact and communication between people and places. In addition to goods, people and ideas spread along the trade routes.

By 68 CE, a Chinese Han emperor asked some advisers to visit India to learn more about this western religion, that is, Indian religion. They returned to China with Buddhist monks. New religions and beliefs often become popular during difficult times when people are searching for answers to why there is suffering. When dynasties were ending in China there was much unrest, and the Chinese tended to embrace Buddhism more. For example, at the end of the Han dynasty, Buddhism became more popular.



*Worksheet on Your Group's Belief System*

1. Name of belief system:
2. Name of the founder of the belief system:
3. When did the belief system begin?
4. When did it arrive in China?
5. Describe how this belief system views the world (is it sweet, sour, or bitter?)
  
6. Describe why this belief system views the world this way (your answer to number 5 above):
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. List the main goals of this belief system. What is it trying to achieve? Why do people practice or believe in this belief system?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. According to this belief system, how should people treat each other?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Using four words or less (or a symbol), describe this belief system.

*The Three Belief Systems of China*

1. Name of belief system	
2. Founder	
3. When it began/came to China	
4. Basic outlook on life	

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5. Goals	
6. Relationship with others	
7. Summary/Symbol	

*Confucianism*

IMAGE A



**Statue of Confucius at the Confucius Temple  
Beijing, China**

Photo by Miguel A. Monjas

IMAGE B



Photograph of the Tomb of Confucius  
Qufu, China

Photo by Rolf Müller

*Buddhist Practice*

IMAGE A



Two Golden Statues of Buddha in a Temple  
Shanghai, China

Photo by J. Rothblatt

IMAGE B



**Buddhists Burn Incense and Chant at a Temple  
Shanghai, China**

Photo by J. Rothblatt

*Daoist Practice*

IMAGE A



Statues of Gods in a Daoist Monastery  
Chongqing, China

Photo by J. Rothblatt



## IMAGE B



The yin yang symbol is seen everywhere in a Daoist monastery near Chongqing, China. But even here, the concept of yin yang can be understood in food combination, such as sweet and sour.

Photo by J. Rothblatt

### *Sayings of the Three Belief Systems of China*

This page lists sayings or quotations from the founders/leaders of each of the three belief systems of China that we studied. Your job is to identify which sayings are from which belief system and complete the worksheet.

1. Have no friends [that are not] equal to yourself.
2. If you think that you do not have enough, then you will never have enough.
3. Live and let live.
4. The inferior man is disrespectful to great men; he makes fun of wisdom.
5. Suffering can be ended.
6. The fully enlightened one is the highest among all living beings.
7. While his parents are alive, a son may not move far away.
8. The best way to run the world is to leave it alone.
9. A mother cannot shield her son from old age, disease, and death; nor can the son shield his mother from them.
10. Of all people, girls and servants are most difficult to behave.
11. The progress of a superior person is upwards; the progress of an inferior person is downwards.
12. Happiness does not come from having much, but from being attached to little.
13. Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts.
14. A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.
15. If you are not always trying to be someone, you can be who you are.

### *Worksheet on Sayings of the Three Belief Systems of China*

Place in categories and describe sayings from the three belief systems of China by completing the following steps:

1. Copy at least two sayings under the correct belief system it represents.
2. Justify your choice: explain why that saying is from that particular belief system.
3. Write in your own words what the saying means.
4. Explain why each saying is important.

#### **Confucian Saying 1**

1. Copy saying
2. Why is this Confucian?
3. What does it mean?
4. Why is it important?

#### **Confucian Saying 2**

1. Copy saying
2. Why is this Confucian?

3. What does it mean?
4. Why is it important?

**Buddhist Saying 1**

1. Copy saying
2. Why is this Buddhist?
3. What does it mean?
4. Why is it important?

**Buddhist Saying 2**

1. Copy saying
2. Why is this Buddhist?
3. What does it mean?
4. Why is it important?

**Daoist Saying 1**

1. Copy saying
2. Why is this Daoist?
3. What does it mean?
4. Why is it important?

**Daoist Saying 2**

1. Copy saying
2. Why is this Daoist?
3. What does it mean?
4. Why is it important?

*Answer Key***Sayings / Quotes from Confucianism (*Analects of Confucius*)**

1. Have no friends [that are not] equal to yourself.
4. The inferior man is disrespectful to great men; he makes fun of wisdom.
7. While his parents are alive, a son may not move far away.
10. Of all people, girls and servants are most difficult to behave.
11. The progress of a superior person is upwards; the progress of an inferior person is downwards.

**Sayings / Quotes from Buddhism (*The Buddha*)**

5. Suffering can be ended.
6. The fully enlightened one is the highest among all living beings.
9. A mother cannot shield her son from old age, disease, and death; nor can the son shield his mother from them.
12. Happiness does not come from having much, but from being attached to little.
13. Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts.

**Sayings / Quotes from Daoism (*The Daodejing*)**

2. If you think that you do not have enough, then you will never have enough.
3. Live and let live.
8. The best way to run the world is to leave it alone.
14. A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.
15. If you are not always trying to be someone, you can be who you are.

# Lesson 3

## *The Spread of Buddhism*

### **I. PREPARATION**

Teachers should make overhead transparency copies of Student Handouts 3.1-3.3. Teachers should also make copies of Student Handouts 3.1-3.3 to distribute to all students. Students should have some knowledge of China as well as the beliefs systems of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. It is suggested that this unit be introduced after a basic overview of Chinese history and geography to maximize student understanding and contextualization of the material. It is also suggested that this lesson be taught after students have already learned Lessons One and Two of this unit.

### **II. INTRODUCTION**

This third lesson will focus on why Buddhism, one of the main belief systems in China, spread especially during the reunification of China. Since this is the main non-indigenous belief system in China, it can be seen as a case study of why belief systems spread outside of their region and society of origin.

### **III. ACTIVITIES**

1. Today's warm-up exercise will be, "If you ruled China, which belief system would you want your people to accept and why?" Ask students to copy the question and write their answers individually in their notebooks.
2. Ask a few students to share their answers with the class.
3. Discuss with the class the idea that, although Confucianism might seem to be the obvious choice because it encouraged respect for rulers, this has not always been the case. Rulers often want the people they rule to be content. If the people want to believe in something besides the ruler's religion, that ruler might let them do it. In fact, as we will see, Confucianism was the choice belief system for the Han dynasty, which ruled for about 400 years (from 206 BCE to 220 CE). Confucianism became linked to that dynasty, however, and when it collapsed, many people turned toward Buddhism instead. Today we will learn more about why and how that happened.
4. Distribute Student Handout 3.1 (Vocabulary for the Reunification of China and the Spread of Buddhism). Ask students to look up vocabulary words in the glossary of the textbook, a dictionary, or the World History for Us All glossary. Students may work individually or in pairs. Review words and their mean-

### LESSON 3

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ings to ensure student understanding of these critical terms. Note: The Student Handout may be optional if students are already familiar with these terms. It can, however, be a good way to review.

5. Distribute copies of Student Handout 3.2 (The Reunification of China and the Spread of Buddhism). Ask students to take turns reading out loud while all other students follow along. Reading aloud may take place as “popcorn” reading, where the reader chooses the next reader, or the teacher may call each student reader.
6. Students should complete Student Handout 3.3 (Worksheet on the Reunification of China and the Spread of Buddhism). Students may work individually or in pairs.



*Vocabulary for the Reunification of China and the Spread of Buddhism*

Write the definition of the following words and use each word in a sentence:

1. Reunification:

Use in a sentence:

2. Political:

Use in a sentence:

3. Geographical:

Use in a sentence:

4. Economic:

Use in a sentence:

5. Social:

Use in a sentence:

6. Intellectual:

Use in a sentence:

## *The Reunification of China and the Spread of Buddhism*

### **Why did Buddhism spread during the era of the Tang dynasty in China?**

Confucianism was the official belief system in China under the Han dynasty, which ruled China from 206 BCE to 220 CE. When this dynasty fell, however, many people became disillusioned (disappointed) with Confucianism. It did not seem to work to keep order in China. There was much suffering throughout China because the once-unified empire was again broken into smaller pieces, and almost constant fighting occurred during the next 400 years. People naturally began to embrace Buddhism, a new religion that promised an end to suffering.

#### **Political reasons**

Several other events caused Buddhism to spread in China. One was the political reunification (making whole again) of China. The person who did this was Emperor Wendi. He started a new dynasty called the Sui (pronounced “sway”) in 581 CE. He became a Buddhist and promoted the spread of Buddhism in China. For example, he sent statues of the Buddha to Buddhist temples throughout China. Those statues had an inscription saying that all people could reach enlightenment. Emperor Wendi was a clever ruler: he kept Confucianism as the official belief system to help remind the Chinese of the old, strong, and long-lasting Han empire.

#### **Geographical Reasons**

Another cause of the spread of Buddhism in China was that, as the Sui and Tang dynasties expanded China, they seized new lands to the west. Many of the people living there were Buddhists, and they spread their religion as they traveled throughout China. The Sui dynasty, however, did not last long. Despite the wisdom of Wendi, other leaders fought expensive wars to try to gain more land at the same time that they undertook great projects like the 1,200 mile Grand Canal, which connected northern and southern China. The Sui dynasty was overthrown in 618 CE and replaced by the Tang dynasty. The Tang period was a golden age for China as it kept the land united and strong for almost 300 years, from 618 to 907 CE.

Chang’an, the capital of the Sui and Tang dynasties, became one of the largest cities on earth. It had a diverse population of more than one million people from many parts of the world. Also, since Chang’an was a key staging center for the silk roads’ caravans, it was a city of trade, culture, and wealth, and a center for the spread of Buddhism far and wide in China.

### **Economic and Social Reasons**

Many Buddhists, even some Chinese emperors, gave money and land to build Buddhist monasteries and temples where monks could live and pray. These temples and monasteries also provided numerous social services in China: they ran schools, took care of the sick, helped the poor, and gave travelers a place to stay. They even played important economic roles in China. For example, they acted as banks to loan people money for business. The Buddhist monasteries ended up owning much land and becoming powerful.

### **Intellectual and Religious Reasons**

As interest in Buddhism grew, especially among the Tang rulers, many of whom were Buddhists, Chinese travelers went to India to bring back holy Buddhist writings and translate them into Chinese. When Buddhist writings became more available to people in China, however, they also caused a split in how this religion was practiced. Two main groups formed that did not follow the main style of Buddhism practiced in India. A main style of Buddhism practiced in India is called Theravada Buddhism (or “Way of the Elders”). According to Theravada Buddhism, Buddhists have to work on their own to attain nirvana and have to be born and reborn many times until they are able to have a possibility of entering nirvana. However, the types of Buddhism that became more popular in China were from the style of Mahayana (or “Greater Vehicle” Buddhism). One type (called Zen Buddhism in Japan) focused on self-discipline and meditation. The other type, called Pure Land Buddhism (or Amida Buddhism in Japan), focused on attaining “Western (Indian-style) Paradise” through chanting words over and over again with the assistance of the Amida Buddha.

### **The Spread of Buddhism to Korea and Japan**

Buddhism spread through much of East Asia because most governments and people there looked up to China as the mother culture and as the most powerful government in the region. The other governments in Asia wanted to adopt the types of cultural practices that made China strong. Buddhism spread to these regions and the rest of Asia especially during the Tang era because China was going through a golden age of power and culture. It was the Chinese forms of Mahayana Buddhism, notably “Pure Land” and “Zen,” that spread to Korea and Japan, and not the main type of Buddhism (Theravada) practiced in India.





*This Unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking  
(National Standards for History)*

**Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking**

The student is able to (F) reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration in which historical developments have unfolded, and apply them to explain historical continuity and change.

**Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation**

The student is able to (A) compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences.

**Historical Thinking Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making**

The student is able to (F) evaluate the implementation of a decision by analyzing the interests it served; estimating the position, power, and priority of each player involved; assessing the ethical dimensions of the decision; and evaluating its costs and benefits from a variety of perspectives.

## Resources

### RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Baker, Liva. *World Faiths: A Story of Religion*. London: Abelard-Schuman, 1965.

A concise history of Confucianism and Daoism.

Berger, Gilda. *Religion: A Reference First Book*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1983.

Good basic definitions of major religions and the people who began them.

Brown, Waka Takahashi. *Religions and Philosophies in China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism*. Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), 2002.

A resource with lesson plans and a CD with slides.

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, Anne Walthall, and James B. Palais. *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Gives a description of Buddhism in India and its spread along the silk roads, as well as a good discussion of Daoism and Confucianism in China: scholarly, yet accessible with excellent maps and graphics.

Fairbank, John K, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig. *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*. Houghton Mifflin, 1978.

A classic, but dense scholarly work that includes a detailed history of the arrival and spread of these great belief systems in China and Asia.

Han Feizi. *Basic Writings*, section 12, "The Difficulties of Persuasion," and section 49, "The Five Vermin," trans. Burton Watson. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

Interesting and scholarly discussion of Confucian thought with polemics regarding other Chinese belief systems, especially Daoism.

Hart, Diane. *World History (Part 1): Prehistoric Times through the Middle Ages*. New Jersey: Globe Fearon Educational Publisher, 1990.

Discussions of the basics about each of the three belief systems in China: Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, as well as the rest of world history through the middle ages.

## RESOURCES

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Helfman, Elizabeth S. *Signs and Symbols around the World*. New York: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard, 1967.

A brief but concise description of the yin yang symbol, as well as dozens of other signs and symbols.

Kettelkamp, Larry. *Religions: East and West*. New York: William Morrow, 1972.

A description of Confucianism and Daoism with short quotations about each belief system.

Mencius. Trans. D. C. Lau. London: Penguin Books, 2004. Book I, Part A, no. 7, Book II, no. 2, Book III, Part B, no. 9.

Interesting and scholarly primary source writings about Confucianism by Mencius.

“Model Lesson Three: The Spread of Buddhism in Tang China,” *7th Grade World History: Medieval and Early Modern Times manuscript*. Secondary Instructional Support Services (History/Social Science Branch). The Los Angeles Unified School District, 2008.

A lesson plan that explains how to analyze the spread of Buddhism to China using several main themes.

Rice, Edward. *Ten Religions of the East*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1978.

A good discussion of Daoism and Confucianism in China with interesting graphics.

Tillman, Hoyt Cleveland. “Reflections on Classifying ‘Confucian’ Lineages: Reinventions of Tradition in Song China.” In *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002.

Detailed examination of some of the antecedents of Confucian thought in China, as well as some of the similarities between Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism in China (and why all three belief systems can be held by the same person simultaneously).



Xunzi I. Book 5, “*Contra Physiognomy*.” Trans. John Knoblock and Zhang Jue. Library of Congress Classics. Changsha: Hunan People’s Publishing House, 1999.

Interesting and scholarly discussion of Confucian thought with polemics regarding other Chinese belief systems.

Zhuangzi. “In the World of Men.” *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson. New York: Columbia UP, 1964.

Stories about Confucius elaborating on his belief system using dialogue of teacher (sage) and student (disciple).

## RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

*Early Chinese History: The Hundred Schools Period*. Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), UCLA.

In this teaching unit, students explore the “Golden Age” of Chinese philosophy, when philosophers sought to account for the political fragmentation of the Zhou period and to articulate solutions to restore order. Students analyze texts from Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, and Legalism, the four most influential of these philosophical traditions.

Hart, Diane. *World History. Part 1: Prehistoric Times through the Middle Ages*. New Jersey: Globe Fearon Educational Publisher, 1990.

Discussions of the basics about each of the three belief systems in China: Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, as well as the rest of world history through the middle ages.

Kleeman, Terry and Tracy Barrett. *The Ancient Chinese World*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.

This book is one of the volumes in *The World in Ancient Times* series. It includes lively material on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

“Model Lesson Three: The Spread of Buddhism in Tang China”, *7th Grade World History: Medieval and Early Modern Times* manuscript. Secondary Instructional Support Services (History/Social Science Branch). The Los Angeles Unified School District, 2008.

## RESOURCES

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*Wang Mang: Confucian Success or Failure?* Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), UCLA.

Students investigate primary source documents for a biographical perspective and historical context concerning emperor Wang Mang of the Hsin Dynasty. Students critically and creatively examine the reign and eventual demise of Wang Mang through the enactment of a mock trial, determining whether he was a victim of circumstances or a morally corrupt ruler. Ideals for good government and just rulers, as propounded by Confucius and Mencius, are interwoven throughout the text offering students a standard by which to measure Wang Mang.

"A World of Faith," *Calliope: Exploring World History*, 19, 3 (Nov./Dec. 2008).

This issue of this children's magazine includes articles on Buddhism.