CHINESE PHILOSOPHY - KEY THEMES:

Confucian Thought and Social Ideals.
- Confucius thought that **superior men should rule to serve the interests and welfare of the entire society.**
- In return, the **common people should respect and support their ruler’s superior status.**
- **Social harmony depended upon everyone accepting their social place and performing its required tasks.**
- Society was held together by **personal ties of loyalty and obedience** that made state intervention minimal.

The Confucian Gentleman.
- Confucius thought that the superior man defended his decisions against all opposition.
- Rulers should receive deference, but the *shi* (Chinese scholar-bureaucrats) should criticize them for neglecting their subjects’ welfare.
- The *shi* gentleman was a generalist equally accomplished in public and private aspects of life.
- With such men, said Confucius, China would be peaceful and tranquil.

The Heirs of Confucius. The most important division among Confucius's disciples was between Mencius and Xunzi.
- **Mencius** believed that humans were good by nature and that government should develop that goodness. He stressed the consent of the common people was the basis of political power, and that they had the right to overthrow oppressive rulers.
- **Xunzi** thought that humans by nature were lazy and evil, thus requiring a strong and authoritarian government. Education could improve people, he thought, but he rejected the idea that government was based on their consent. The later **Legalist** school of thought embraced his views.

Daoist Alternatives. The philosopher Laozi offered an alternative to Confucianism.
- Although he urged rulers to cultivate patience, selflessness, and concern for the welfare of all creatures, Laozi thought that a strong state and absolute ethical prescriptions were not significant in solving human suffering.
- Laozi instead advocated a retreat from society into nature where individuals could attune with the Dao, or cosmic force.
- Some of his followers, particularly among the *shi*, followed Laozi's stress on meditation. Others mixed his ideas with magic and eroticism and sought immortality.