

ART, FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY (II)

ART IN IMPERIAL CHINA

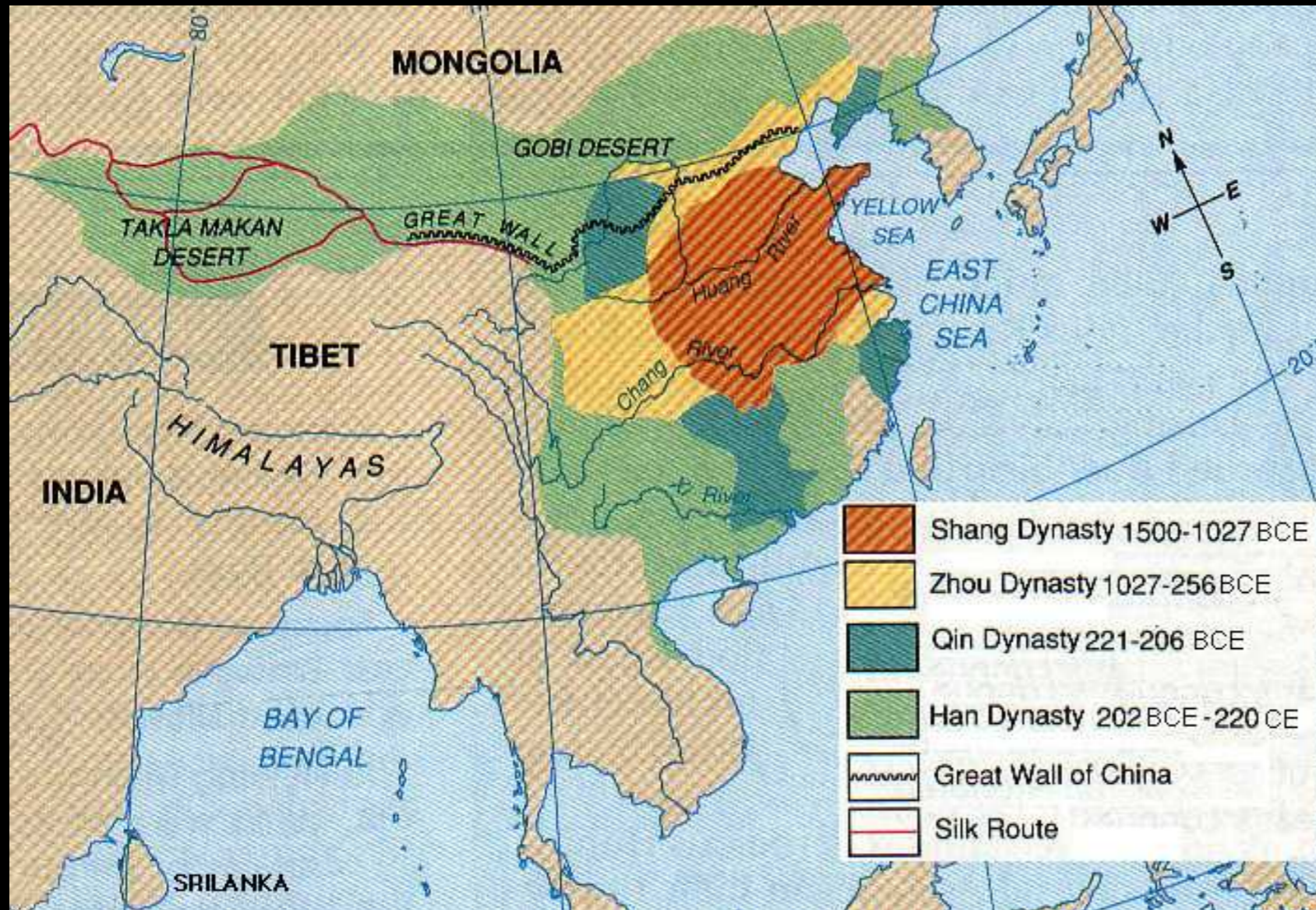
Key Concepts

- ▶ Art as an expression of the artists' character and philosophy (not just skill)
- ▶ Overlap between influence of the court and philosophical values on artistic practices
- ▶ The position or value of the artist in society (by extension the role of art)



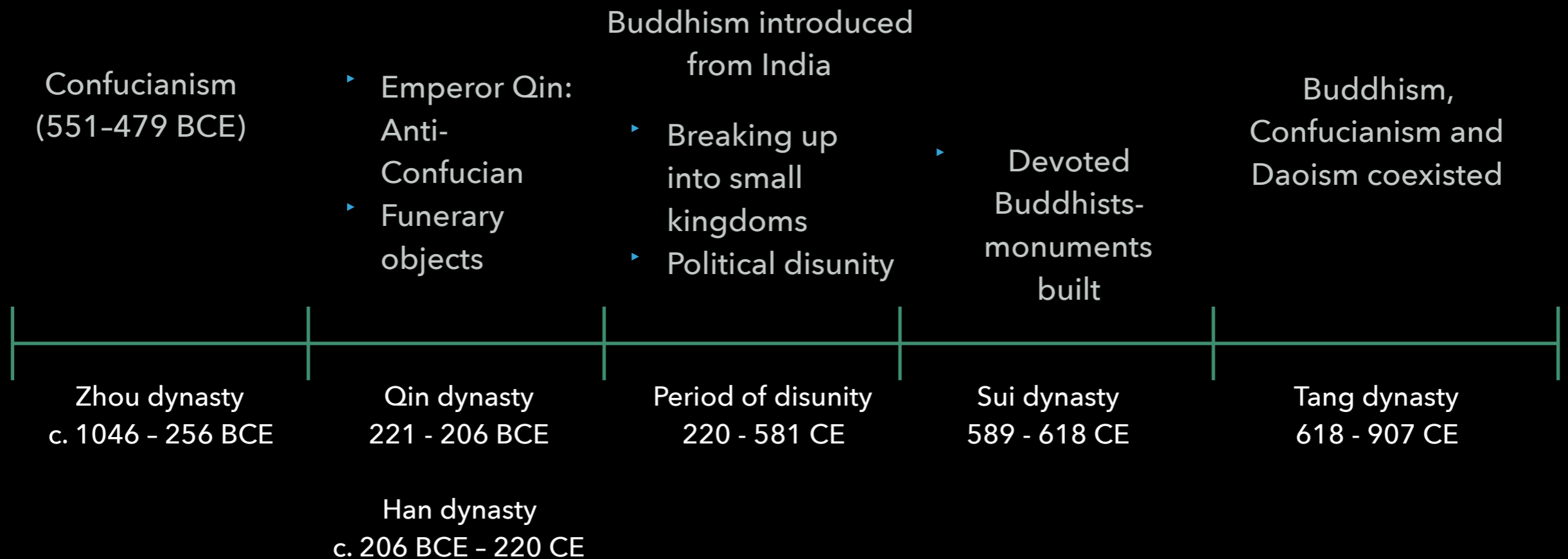
INTRODUCTION TO IMPERIAL CHINA

- ▶ Imperial Chinese history is marked by the rise and fall of many dynasties and occasional periods of disunity, but was marked by a sophisticated governing system
- ▶ Each dynasty had its own distinct characteristics
- ▶ Highly literate society that greatly valued poetry, brush-written calligraphy, painting (Three Perfections)
- ▶ Produced many technological advancements that have enriched the world, including paper and porcelain



A TIMELINE OF IMPERIAL CHINA AND ITS RELIGIONS

Note: we are only studying a part of a much longer history of Imperial China. The dynasties continued until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912



The Purpose of Art Making in Imperial China

Belief in the moral and educational power of art

Love of nature

Means to capture philosophies and values of life



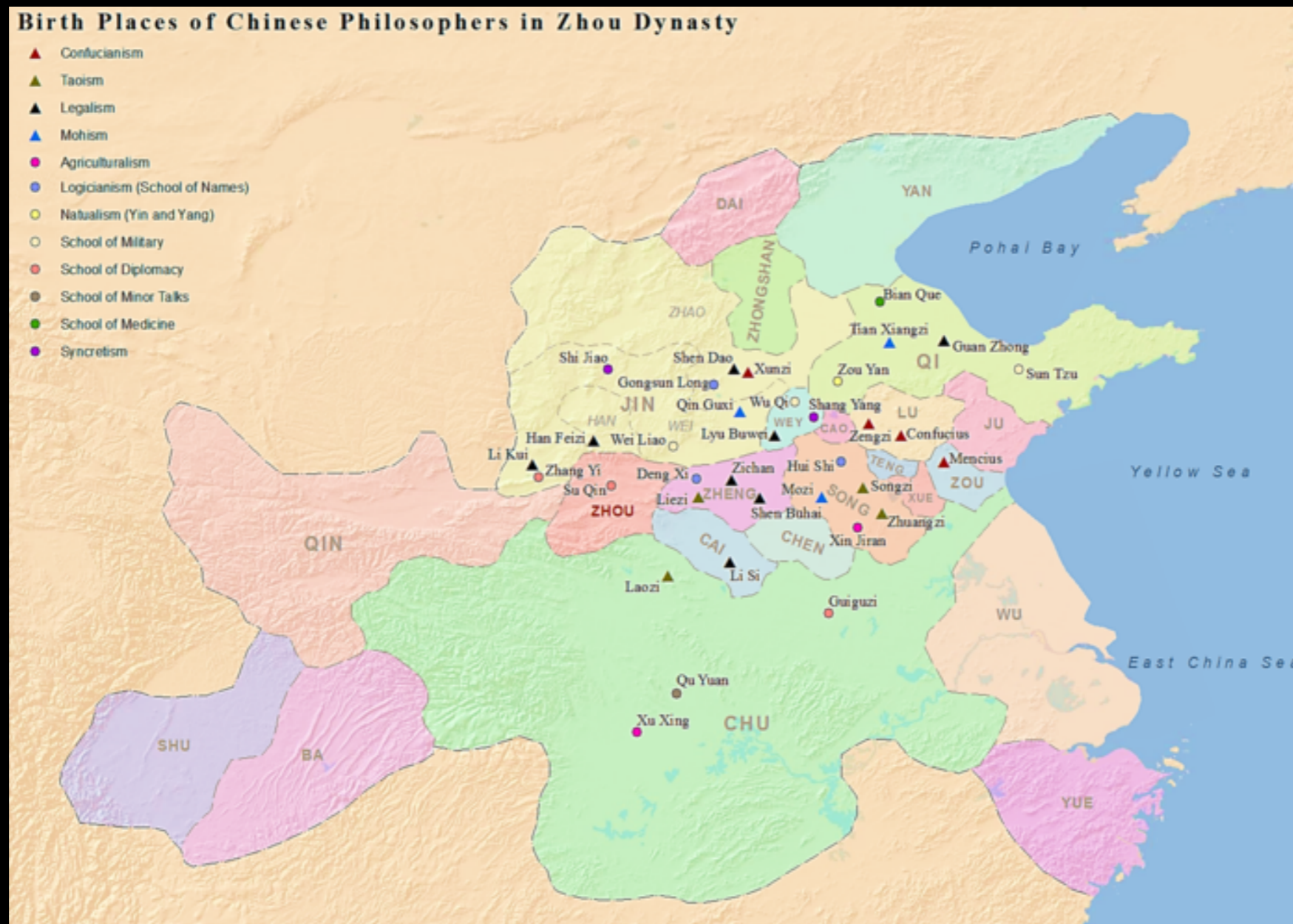
The Eighteen Scholars
Ming dynasty (1368-1644)

Fa Ruozhen
Cloudy Mountains
1684

Li Gonglin
The Classic of Filial Piety
ca. 1085

100 Schools of Thought

- ▶ Warring period of turmoil, chaos and discrimination between 6th century BCE to 221 CE
- ▶ But Golden Age of Chinese philosophy: many philosophical schools and religions begin to emerge because thoughts and ideas were being discussed freely
- ▶ the thoughts and ideas discussed during this time have an influence on the lifestyles and practices of the present day



Confucianism ~ Daoism ~ Buddhism

- ▶ **Three main religions emerged:**
 - ▶ Confucianism founded by philosopher Confucius (c. 551-479 BCE)
 - ▶ Daoism (also called Taoism) attributed to the sage Lao Zi (Lao Tzu) "Old Master" (born c. 500)
 - ▶ Buddhism started by Prince Siddhartha (the Buddha) (c. 563 BCE-483BCE)
[introduced to China later]



CONFUCIANISM

THE SCHOOL OF THE SCHOLARS

- ▶ Focused on morality, ethics and the establishment of a harmonious and well ordered society
- ▶ Believed that humans were social beings and therefore emphasised
 - ▶ service to the state
 - ▶ filial piety (respect for elders)
 - ▶ humanity and kindness
 - ▶ state and family rituals for preserving the social order

The Scholar Officials

- ▶ Important difference between the practices of artist here compared to other cultures: **artists were not professionals but literate men/scholars**
- ▶ There were professional artists employed by the court and wealthy patrons who wanted to decorate their homes and build decorative tombs- but these were not considered to be artists in the modern sense
- ▶ Art is a means to **capture philosophies that they valued**: meant to express the artist's good character and morals



How do you think this compares to our perception of artists in society today? What role do you think class plays in the art world?



Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden
ca. 1437 (Met Museum)

Anti-Confucianism in the Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BCE)

- ▶ Warring period (and 100 Schools of Thought) ends with victory of Qin dynasty
- ▶ Emperor Qin Shi Huang- ruled for a very short time but laid the foundation for China's imperial structure- begins construction of the Great Wall
- ▶ Adopted philosophy of **legalism** hence banned others- prohibited Confucianism
- ▶ Confucian works were burned (and any other non-Legalist works). Copies of the banned works only survive today because they were hidden by some intellectuals at great personal risk.
- ▶ Confucianism returns with the Han dynasty (after the Qin) which made it the state philosophy

Legalism:

A philosophical belief that human beings are more inclined to do wrong than right because they are motivated entirely by self-interest and require strict laws to control their impulses.



Terracotta Warriors

Qin dynasty (221 - 206 BCE)

Terracotta Army: The greatest archaeological find of the 20th century - BBC News

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c_ADqshdSA





BUDDHISM

- ▶ Originates in India between 6th century and 4th century BCE- discontent with Hinduism, which was the dominant religion (too strict, too many rituals)
- ▶ Prince Siddhartha- named the Buddha (The Enlightened One)
- ▶ Introduced to China (and other parts of Asia) in the 1st century through trade routes
- ▶ Dominant during Tang dynasty: flourished especially because foreign missionaries, monks and teachers were welcomed by Tang rulers
- ▶ Teachings include **Middle Path** (rejection of both luxury and ascetism) and Nirvana (release from earthly existence)

The Buddhist Cave Temples

Bodhisattva: a person on the path towards Buddhahood (enlightenment)



Longmen Caves, Henan Province, China, c. 493 AD to 1127 AD

The Buddhist Cave Temples



Dancer Holding A Pipa Behind Her Back
Cave No. 112
Middle Tang Dynasty (781-847)
Mogao caves at Dunhuang



Mogao Cave 275
Northern Liang period

DAOISM

THE WAY



- ▶ Adopted ideas from rural folk religion (hence both a philosophy and religion)
- ▶ Believe in “going with the flow” of the Dao (cosmic force which flows through all things)
- ▶ Emphasis on the natural world
- ▶ Believed to have been founded by the philosopher Lao-Zi who wrote the *Tao Te Ching (Book of the Way)*

Daoist Immortal, probably Laozi (老子), 10th century (Met Museum)

Ink Landscape Painting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZ7CMePiYeA>

- ▶ References to the natural world (thus important to Daoist philosophy)
- ▶ By late Tang dynasty, landscape painting had become a well established genre- represented people's longing to escape the everyday world and withdraw into nature
- ▶ With the fall of the dynasty, collapsing social order and political turmoil- learned men were making these paintings in response to this period



Companionship, Solitude, Isolation and the Pandemic

For more than two thousand years, reclusion—removing oneself from society—has been presented as the ideal condition for mental cultivation and transcending worldly troubles. At the same time, communion with like-minded people has been celebrated as essential to the human experience. This choice, to be alone or to be together, has been central to the lives of thinkers and artists, and Chinese art abounds with images of figures who pursued both paths—as well as those who wove them together in complex and surprising ways.



Companions in Solitude: Reclusion and Communion in Chinese Art

July 31, 2021 – August 14, 2022

Now on view at [The Met Fifth Avenue](#), 210–216

Exhibitions are free with Museum admission.

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<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2021/companions-in-solitude>

What did/does isolation feel like?



Joys of the Fisherman
ca. 1410
Wang Fu



What emotions does "solitude" bring up?

Scholar viewing a waterfall
late 12th-early 13th century
Ma Yuan

Where do you feel serenity or tranquility?



Autumn Landscape, leaf from Album for Zhou Lianggong, 1654, Xiang Shengmo

How do we talk about a shared state of isolation?



*Drinking in the Bamboo Garden
on the Lantern Festival*
1773
Luo Ping

What does companionship mean to you?



White Lotus Society, 14th or 15th century, Unidentified artist

Xu Bing, Book from the Sky

<https://youtu.be/DseIYQdjzgE>

