Philosophy During The Ming Dynasty

When the Mongol Empire, also called the Yuan Dynasty, collapsed due to revolt, the successor dynasty was the Ming. The Ming ruled China for nearly three centuries, from 1368 to 1644. During this time, the empire was transformed in a number of ways. One area that clearly shows how China changed during this period is in philosophy.

Confucianism

For centuries, the prevailing Chinese philosophy was Confucianism. The leader of the Confucian school of thought was a man named Confucius who lived over two and a half millennia ago. Confucius, who taught during a time of civil war in China, held that order and respect for authority were the most important principles for Chinese men to follow.

Neo-Confucianism

Beginning in the 9th century, a new form of Confucian philosophy began to emerge: Neo-Confucianism. While similar to Confucianism, neo-Confucianism was also somewhat of a response to the religions of Taoism and Buddhism. During the Ming Dynasty, a particular Neo-Confucian scholar named Wang Yangming rose to prominence. Wang Yangming taught many things. But he is most well remembered for his idea of innate knowing. By this meant that every person knows from birth the difference between good and evil. These weren't ideas people had to learn. Rather, he argued, people were born knowing the difference.

Instructions

In this activity, you will use what you've learned about Neo-Confucianism during the Ming dynasty. As you read, take notes in the graphic organizer below. Then, use those notes to complete the activity.

Reading Analysis

Use the graphic organizer below to take notes as you read.

Confucianism:
Neo-Confucianism:

Apply and Elaborate

Now, apply what you've learned about philosophy during the Ming Dynasty to analyze quotes from Confucius and Wang Yangming. Complete the chart below and make sure to provide reasoning to support your analysis.

Philosophy	Quote	How does it exemplify the philosophy?
Confucianism	"He who conducts government by his virtue may be compared to the northern constellation, which remains in its place and all the stars bend	

PBS LearningMedia
pbslearningmedia.org

	toward it." – Confucius	
Neo-Confucianism	"The tranquility resulting from the dominance of natural law is a state in which no discrimination is made between good and evil; while the stirring of the passion nature is a state in which both good and evil are present. If there are no stirrings of the passion nature, there is neither good nor evil, and this is what is called the highest good." – Wang Yangming	