The yin-yang tai-chi symbol has since ancient times represented the Chinese view of the cosmos.
Respecting the "Way of Heaven" and "Way of Man" is a key feature of traditional Chinese philosophy. Chinese pray for happiness through rituals directed at their ancestors and the gods.

Chinese Philosophical Thought

First-time visitors to the Republic of China may find themselves a bit surprised at the different lifestyles and cultural peculiarities they encounter. To cut through the mystery, one must first understand the basic features of the philosophical spirit underlying the Chinese cultural tradition.

The Chinese nation boasts a history and culture that date back over 5,000 years. Over this long and uninterrupted historical process, 13 dynasties arose, each with its own official historian. The court historian had the job of recording major cultural events in the areas of politics, economy, society, and education, and compiling them into one part of what is now known as the Twenty-five Official Dynastic Histories. While the Han nation constituted the mainstream in this long history of the Chinese people, members of the Han race were continually merging with the other peoples on all sides of China through cultural contact and intermarriage. Except for necessary defense measures, very seldom did the Han people seek to conquer these other peoples militarily. It is because of this that there is a strong historical continuity and cultural comprehensiveness to be found in the Chinese historical and cultural tradition.

Central to the philosophical thought of ancient China are the "Sages and Hundred Schools of Thought." The most notable of these are the Confucian, Taoist, Mohist, Dialectician, and Legalist schools of thought. Starting from China’s Middle Ages (third to ninth centuries A.D.), the Metaphysical School and Buddhism appeared. Buddhist sects, including the well-known Zen (Ch’an in Chinese), abounded. Neoconfucianism appeared after the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) and continued to develop over the next 600 years. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Neoconfucianism all had far-reaching influence on China’s neighbors, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The main characteristics of Chinese cultural tradition that emerged were "richness of ideas," "historical continuity," and "cultural comprehensiveness."
The new life and values constantly brought forth by heaven into the universe and human society result in an unending cycle of life and a unity of heaven and man.

The majority of China's philosophers placed great emphasis on the "Way of Heaven" (天道 T'ien-tao) and the "Way of Man" (人道 Jen-tao). They viewed "heaven" not only as "nature," but also as the source of all life and human values. The concept of "heaven" encompasses the "universe," an organism brimming over with creative life force. The creation of life is not viewed as a mechanical physical process, but a spiritual, purposeful procedure. In other words, "man" is the result of "heaven's" unceasing creation of ever new beings with more and more wisdom. Relying on the wisdom and virtues bestowed by heaven, man creates an increasingly sophisticated and refined culture and cultural values. New life and new values are constantly brought forth in the universe and in human society. The former is designated as "birth of new life" (生生 sheng-sheng), and the latter as "playing out one's inherent nature" (盡性 chin-hsing). The combination of the two is called the "unity of heaven and man" or "heaven and man being of one mind."

This type of philosophical thought was promoted mainly by the Confucian and Neoconfucian schools of thought. Proponents of Taoism and Buddhism espouse essentially the same notions; however, the weight of Confucian cultural value concepts lies in the "ethical plane," that of Taoism in the "artistic plane," and that of Buddhism in the "religious plane."

The weight of Buddhist value concepts, such as working for the salvation of all sentient beings, lies in the religious plane.
Taoism stresses artistic value concepts.

The philosophy of a “unity of man and heaven” evolved into the Chinese life view of “being content with one’s heaven-ordained lot in life.” This view gives the Chinese an enhanced ability to intimately experience the endless beauty of the natural world, and to more fully enjoy the richness of feeling in the world of ethics. At the same time they have fewer resentments plaguing them, and are able to work hard at a job with peace of mind. The work of man, after all, is the work of heaven. This view also offers a kind of religious consolation.

The life philosophies of “giving birth to new life” and “unity of heaven and man” lead the Chinese, on the one hand, to stress ethical feelings such as “benevolence” (仁jen); on the other, to emphasize the humane order of society and a reasonable set of regulations for human behavior, such as “courtesy” or “ceremony” (禮li). “Benevolence” is man’s inborn sense of what is moral and right; it is a broad and selfless love for others. “Love for all is called ‘benevolence.’” It must manifest itself naturally, and the richer, the better. “Ceremony” requires rational forethought and self-restraint. Its purpose is to maintain ethical order in society, and encourage the common development of living harmoniously as a group; the more restraint, the better. “Benevolence” and “ceremony” are inseparable and mutually complementary; they are inherent in man’s nature, and bring forth such virtues as filial respect for one’s parents and fraternal duty toward one’s siblings (孝悌 hsiao t’i), loyalty and empathy for others (忠恕 chung shu), and acting in good faith (信義 hsin i).

Chinese place special emphasis on the virtue of “filial piety.” Viewed superficially, “filial piety” is a familial ethic springing from a clan-oriented society; but more than this, it can be called a “universal ethic.” This is because an individual human life cannot be separated from the macro-level life of the universe. Man’s respect and love for life is also the main expression of his reason for existence. It is only through filial respect for one’s parents that one most appropriately expresses respect and love for the source of life. Only through filial love and care of one’s parents, and loving kindness to one’s children is one better able to extend one’s experience of living from the past to the present and into the future, forming an unbroken stream of life, and expressing the creative continuity of the universe.

This Chinese ethical culture is still preserved in the Republic of China on Taiwan today. Many major festivals have as their main content sacrificial rites to heaven and earth, one’s ancestors, or ancient sages. This is an expression of respect and thankfulness to life and culture. And such traditional notions as venerating heaven, offering sacrifices to one’s ancestors, and showing filial piety toward one’s parents have to an even greater degree provided a firm foundation of family and social ethics for the ROC on its road to modernization.