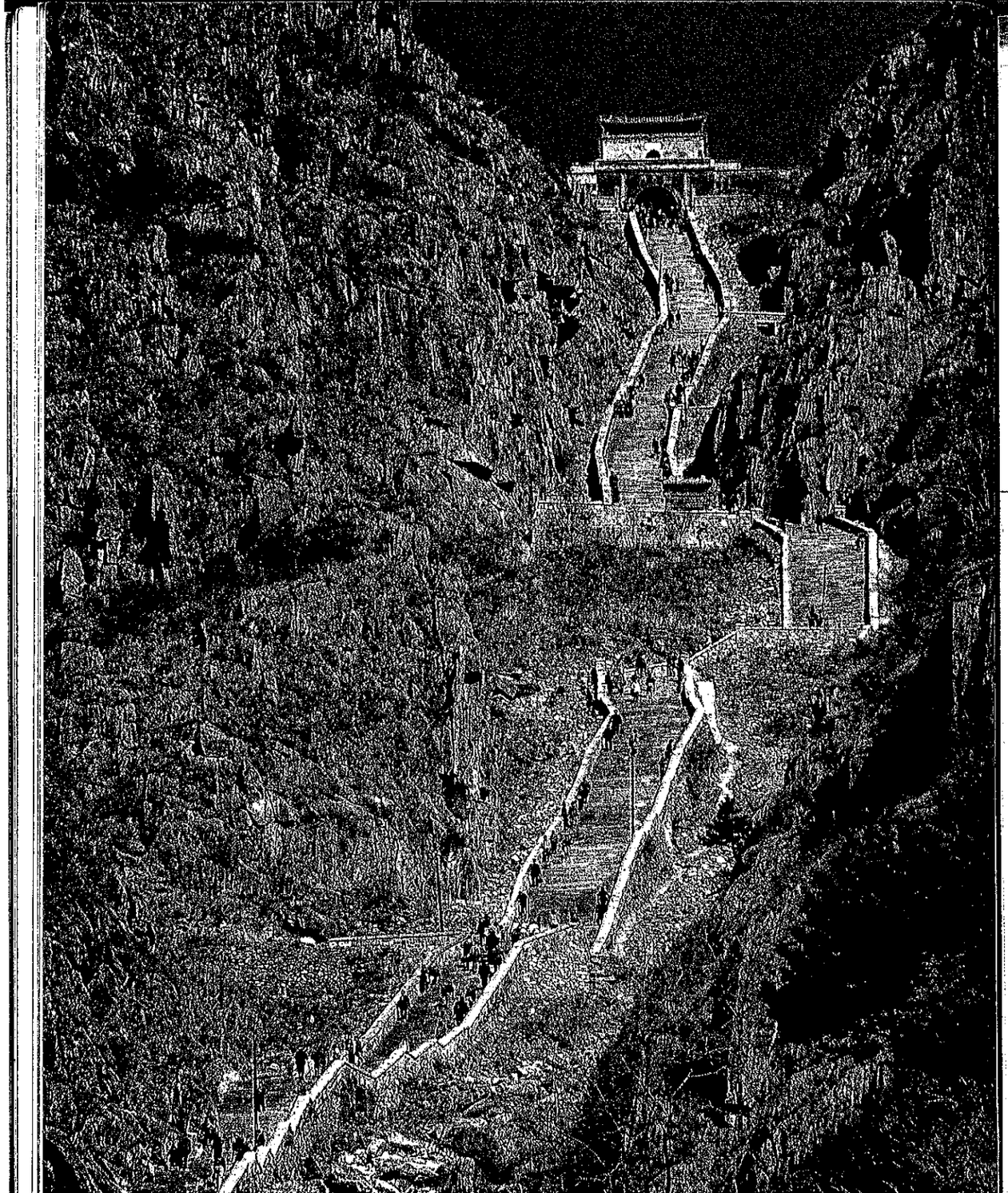
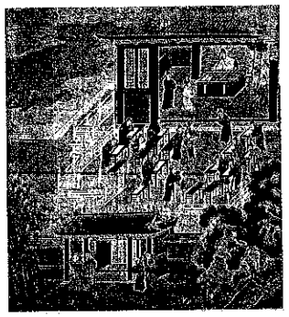


Chapter Six

CHINESE TRADITIONS

Jennifer Oldstone-Moore



An 18th-century depiction of students sitting an examination to qualify as civil servants. The test required a thorough grounding in the Confucian precepts that formed the basis of Chinese government for two millennia.

OPPOSITE *Pilgrims climb to the temple on Taishan (Mount Tai, or the "Great Mountain"), a peak of central importance to Chinese religion since ancient times. It is one of many sacred mountains in China (see map on p.201).*

INTRODUCTION

The three formal traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, as well as the pervasive popular religion, have shaped Chinese culture and history for millennia and remain an important aspect of Chinese civilization. The traditional religions thrive in Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as in Singapore and other overseas Chinese communities. Hong Kong aside, they have a more muted presence in the People's Republic, where practices persist in the face of official discouragement and occasional persecution.

China's religious traditions rest on two fundamental principles: the cosmos is a sacred place; and all aspects of it are interrelated. The central purpose of Chinese religion is to uphold this sacredness by maintaining harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature. This is reflected in the indigenous formal traditions of Daoism and Confucianism, as well as in the popular religion. Buddhism, introduced from India, also came to accommodate the Chinese perspective.

The main octagonal motif on this child's hat depicts the circular yin-yang *symbol surrounded by the eight trigrams used in traditional divination (see sidebar, p.213).*

Buddhism has proved by far the most successful of the international religions to have entered China, although Islam has also had an impact, notably in the west (see illustration, p.119). But elsewhere in China neither Islam nor Christianity has had a significant impact, partly at least because the exclusivity of both faiths sits uncomfortably with the strongly syncretic nature of Chinese religious practice. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, which are known as the "Three Teachings," are seen as complementary rather than exclusive, and a person will usually practice all three simultaneously. While the traditions have their own distinctive histories and specialists, for most Chinese the saying "the Three Teachings merge into One" holds true.

Traditional Chinese religion is underlain by an ancient understanding of how the cosmos functions. According to this, everything that exists, including Heaven, Earth, human beings, and deities, is made up of the same vital substance, or *qi* (*ch'i*: see note on transliterations, opposite). *Qi* is manifested most basically as two complementary forces, *yin* and *yang*. These terms originally signified the shady side of a hill (*yin*) and the sunny side (*yang*), but very early on they came to be used more symbolically. Thus *yin* denotes that which is dark, moist, inert, turbid, cold, soft, and feminine, and the complementary *yang* denotes that which is bright, dry, growing, light, warm, hard, and masculine. All things consist of both *yin* and *yang* in varying proportions.

The *yin-yang* view of the cosmos functions in conjunction with the cycle of the "Five Phases," which furnishes a more detailed structure for understanding how vital forces interact. The phases are represented by "fire," "wood," "metal," "water," and "earth," but rather than concrete

SACRED CHINA

The Chinese religious landscape is characterized by sacred mountains and temples. Some locations have been considered holy since ancient times, such as the Five Sacred Peaks (Taishan, Hengshan [north], Songshan, Huashan, and Hengshan [south]); others became sacred as religious leaders and schools emerged and became identified with a particular peak (such as Mount Tiantai [Tiantaishan], the home of the eponymous Buddhist sect, and Putuoshan, a mountain sacred to the Buddhist deity Guanyin).

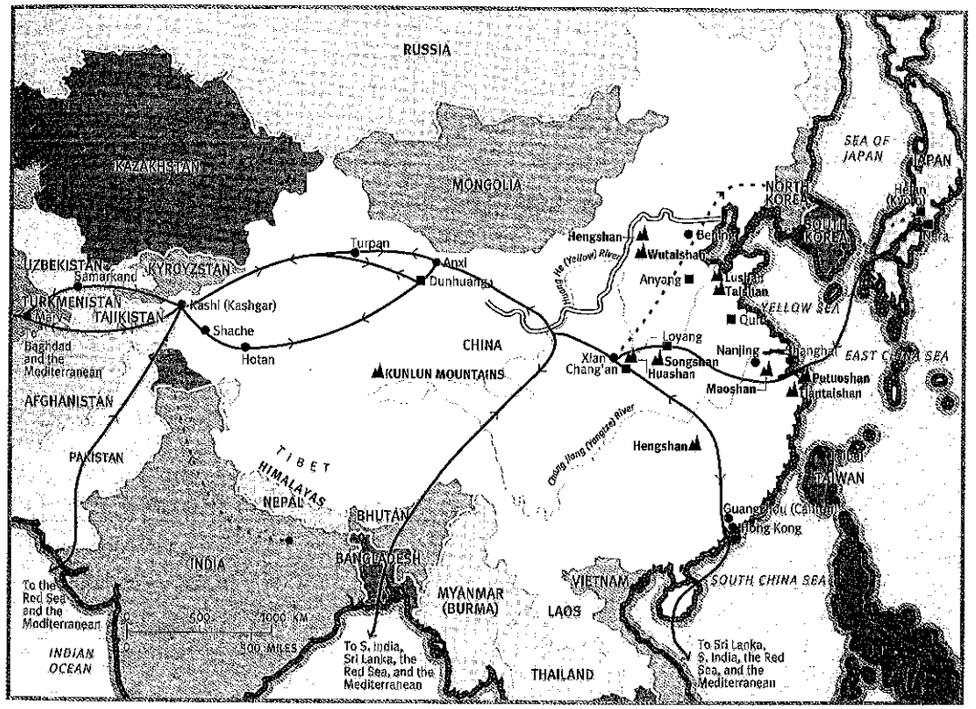
Wherever the traditional religion is practiced, from the tiniest village to the capital, there are a multitude of temples. In the People's Republic, important temples are given official sanction largely on account of their value as tourist attractions, although there is also religious activity.

Other sites of special religious interest shown on the map include Anyang (the site of many oracle bone discoveries); Qufu (the birthplace of Confucius); and Chang'an (the Tang dynasty capital, where many Buddhist scriptures were first translated into Chinese and where China's first Christian community was established in the seventh century CE).

[Note: Throughout this chapter and elsewhere the modern pinyin romanization of Chinese words is used. For certain terms that remain familiar in the older Wade-Giles transliteration, the latter is also given in parentheses.]

Key

- Site of special religious significance
- Other site
- Sacred mountain
- Historical routes of the silk trade
- Other transmission routes of Buddhism to and from China
- Great Wall



elements these are to be understood as metaphysical forces, each exercising a dominating influence at any one time. The phases reflect the *yin-yang* system (fire and wood are *yang*; metal and water are *yin*; earth is neutral) and are ordered in two cycles. In the first sequence (wood, fire, earth, metal, water), each phase is said to produce the next. In the second cycle (fire, water, earth, wood, metal), each element destroys its predecessor. Everything in the universe—the changes and patterns in nature, the heavenly bodies, time, natural phenomena, and human society—is linked by its participation in these cycles of transformation as well as by its varying proportions of *yin* and *yang*. The relationship between each of the Five Phases is paralleled in countless other pentads (groups of five) that express the nature and interaction of Heaven, Earth, and human beings. These include the directions (north, east, south, west, center), deities, animals, numbers, planets, seasons, and colors.

The major spiritual traditions express, in various ways, the ideal of furthering cosmic harmony. Confucianism, based on the teachings of a sixth-century BCE sage, Master Kong (Kong Fuzi, latinized in the West as "Confucius"), focuses on the relationships between people and the creation of a harmonious society founded on virtue. The pivotal virtue is *ren* ("benevolence," "humaneness," or "humanity"). According to Confucius, the primary relationship is that between parent and child, specifically between father and son, ideally characterized by the virtue of *xiao*, filial piety. Through the maintenance of this bond the family, community,

CHRONOLOGY

LEGENDARY PERIOD *(all dates traditional)*

The "Culture Heroes"
- 2852BCE • Fu Xi
- 2737BCE • Shen Nong
- 2697BCE • Huang Di

The "Sage Kings" and Xia Dynasty
- 2357BCE • Yao
- 2255BCE • Shun
- 2205BCE • Yu (founder of Xia dynasty)

2205–1766BCE • Xia dynasty

HISTORICAL PERIOD

Shang Dynasty (ca. 1766–1050BCE)
- Divination; ancestor worship and worship of the "Lord on High" (Shang Di)

Zhou Dynasty (1050–256BCE)
- Worship of Heaven (Tian); idea of Mandate of Heaven formulated; Chinese Classics written; "100 Schools" founded by Confucius (551–479BCE), Mencius (371–?289BCE), Laozi (?b.604BCE), and others; *qi* and *yin-yang* theories articulated; shamanism practiced

Qin Dynasty (221–207BCE)
- Emperor Qin Shihuangdi persecutes scholars

Han Dynasty (206BCE–220CE)
- Confucianism becomes basis for state religion; Buddhism enters China; popular religious movements emerge, such as "Yellow Turbans" and "Celestial Masters"

Era of Division (220–589CE)
- Religious Daoism emerges; Buddhism well established

Sui Dynasty (581–618CE)

Tang Dynasty (618–907CE)
- Buddhism, Daoism ascendant (but Buddhists persecuted, 841–5); Pure Land and Chan Buddhism develop; Nestorian Christian church founded 635CE; Islam arrives (8th century); Judaism, Manicheism, Zoroastrianism present

"Five Dynasties" (907–970)

Song Dynasty (960–1279)
- Rise of Neo-Confucianism; formation of Buddhist devotional societies; popular religion develops

Yuan Dynasty (1276–1386)
- Mongols rule China

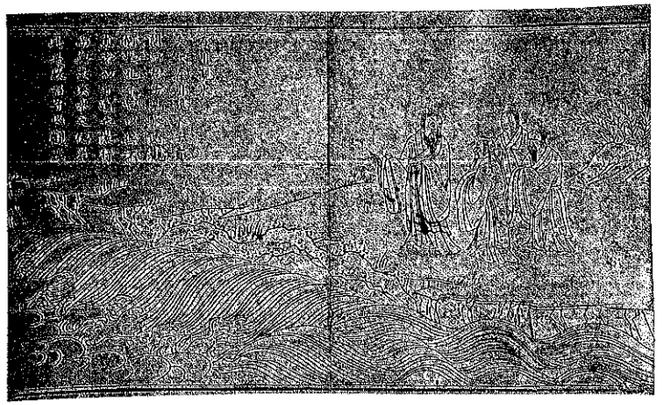
Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)
- Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming (1472–1529); Catholic missionaries arrive (16th century)

Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)
- Christianity suppressed early in dynasty; in 19th century, China is "opened" by Western powers and Christian missions return

MODERN PERIOD

Republic of China (1911–49; 1911–present on Taiwan)
- Traditional religions flourish; some Christian missionary activity

People's Republic of China (1949–present)
- Atheistic state ideology suppresses religious activities; cult of Mao Zedong; persecution of religions during Cultural Revolution (1966–76); some easing of restrictions on religious activity following death of Mao in 1976



Confucius with a group of followers. An illustration from an anonymous 16th-century work, the Book of the Life of Confucius.

state, and ultimately the cosmos would be transformed (see pp.216–7).

Daoism (Taoism), traditionally said to date from the sixth century BCE but primarily based on works of the fourth and third centuries BCE, is less concerned with interpersonal harmony than on concord between human beings and nature. The term Dao ("Way") signifies the natural pattern underlying all cosmic change and transformation, the way in which *qi* is endlessly created and dissolved to form the myriad phenomena of the universe. Daoism is centered on the concept of *wu wei*, "noninterference" with the Dao. To achieve order and harmony in one's own life and in the cosmos, a person must learn to perceive the Dao in nature and to act—or refrain from acting—in accordance with it. Over time, the idea of strengthening oneself through attunement with natural forces was applied to the preservation of the human body through the quest for longevity.

Buddhism arrived in the first century CE and soon attracted many adherents. It brought with it the allure of the foreign and exotic, a fascinating and complex Indian cosmology, and the promise of universal salvation—ideas not present or relatively undeveloped in the indigenous traditions. But Buddhism in China also developed distinct forms, seen most notably in the fusion of Daoism and Buddhism that produced the Chinese Buddhist school of Chan ("Meditation"; see p.219).

Chinese religions are often characterized as this-worldly and practically oriented, and this is certainly evident in the popular tradition. It reflects the major concerns of the Three Teachings, but has no systematic set of beliefs and focuses on improving this life by securing health, long life, prosperity, domestic harmony, children to continue the family line, and protection from disasters. A reciprocal relationship between the living and the spirits (ancestors, deities, and ghosts) is central to popular practice. It is assumed that if humans play their part, the spiritual world will respond in kind, granting blessings or—in the case of ghosts—doing no harm.

The head of the Buddha, part of a massive statue carved into a rock face at Leshan in Sichuan province. While it enhanced the native Chinese traditions, Buddhism in China was greatly changed from its south Asian form. As at Leshan, this sinicization is also evident in Chinese Buddhist art.

A WEALTH OF TRADITIONS

Many core beliefs and themes of Chinese religion were present as early as the Shang and Zhou dynasties (eighteenth to third centuries BCE), and form a common basis for Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and the popular tradition. Reverence for ancestors became marked during the Shang era, and the dead were buried with sumptuous grave offerings. People used "oracle bones" for divination (see box, below). A high god, Shang Di ("Lord on High"), was occasionally invoked, but was perceived to be remote from humanity and during the Zhou dynasty came to be replaced by Tian ("Heaven"), which presided over the spirits of the dead. As the worship of Tian developed, it was considered to bestow the "Mandate of Heaven" on the person or dynasty deemed worthy to rule. Tian's displeasure with a ruler was manifested in disorder, such as rebellion, famine, and natural disasters. If conditions became intolerable, Tian was deemed to have withdrawn its Mandate and the ruler could legitimately be deposed.

The Chinese cosmological system of *qi*, *yin-yang*, and the Five Elements (see pp.200–203) was also established during the Zhou dynasty. In the same period, various practices, arts, literary works, and exemplary deeds were distilled into the Six Classics, which were to become foundational texts for Confucianism (see pp.212–13).

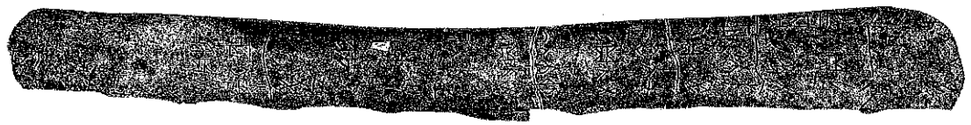
ORACLE BONES

Divination with "oracle bones" was an important practice during the Shang dynasty. The royal house employed it to receive guidance on a range of concerns, from forecasting the weather and determining the cause of a toothache to the right time to wage war, the likelihood of success in hunting, and the abundance of the harvest. Many oracle bones have been discovered at Anyang in northeast China (see map, p.201).

Bones were used to respond to questions requiring a simple "yes" or "no" answer, which were posed to supernatural beings—usually ancestors, who were considered a source of blessing or misfortune, particularly concerning the fertility of humans. Questions might sometimes also be put to the high god Shang Di, as well as to natural forces.

As a question was intoned, a heated rod was placed on the scapula (shoulderblade) of an ox or sheep or the shell of a turtle. A diviner would interpret the cracks made by the hot rod to reveal the answer to the question.

An "oracle bone," part of a sheep's scapula. The question and its answer are inscribed on the bone, as was common practice.



By the sixth century BCE, the political authority of the Zhou rulers had declined, and the ensuing period of disorder saw the formulation of numerous theories of government aimed at restoring harmony and peace. The many teachings that arose in this period are collectively known as the "Hundred Schools," of which Confucianism and Daoism are the most famous. Born in 551BCE at Qufu in modern Shandong province, Confucius (Kong Fuzi) came from a poor but respectable family. After serving in the government of the state of Lu, he spent thirteen years traveling the various Chinese states and asking their rulers to put into practice his ideas about government. He returned home disappointed and spent the rest of his days, until his death in 479BCE, teaching students and editing the Six Classics.

Basically, Confucius asserted that government must be founded on virtue, and that all citizens must be attentive to the duties of their position. His great follower, Mencius (Mengzi, 371–289BCE), elaborated Confucius' teachings about human virtue and good government, proclaiming the original goodness of human nature and the right of the people to rebel against a wicked ruler. The third great Confucian thinker of ancient times, Xunzi (active ca. 298–238BCE), offered a very different view of human nature. He claimed that humans were originally evil and become good only through strict laws and harsh punishments. Xunzi's views were taken to extremes by the "Legalists," who formed another of the "Hundred Schools." They have been reviled in Chinese history for their role in the brutal reign of the first emperor of all China, Qin Shihuangdi (221–209BCE), whose rule was characterized by mass book-burnings and the execution of many Confucian scholars.

The Han dynasty (206BCE–220CE) witnessed a synthesis of Confucianism, Legalism, and *yin-yang* cosmology. But the era was most notable for the formation of the Chinese imperial bureaucratic system that ran the country until the twentieth century with men trained in Confucian virtues.

Over the following centuries, the popularity of Daoism and Buddhism sapped the vitality of Confucianism, but the Song dynasty (960–1279CE) saw a revival known as Neo-Confucianism. The most renowned scholar of this period, Zhu Xi (1130–1200CE), propounded a metaphysical system based on Confucian morality. He posited that all things, including human nature, have an ordering principle, *li* (not the same word as *li* meaning "ritual"), that shapes the vital material called *qi* (see p.200). Humans must "investigate things" to understand their underlying principles, and cultivate themselves so as to base their actions on the appropriate principles of human behavior. The Neo-Confucian advocacy of "quiet sitting" (meditation) as a technique of self-cultivation reflects Buddhist influence.

Tradition holds that Laozi, the legendary founder of Daoism, was born in 604BCE after a miraculous gestation and birth. He served in the imperial bureaucracy and promoted a *laissez-faire* theory of government,

The three towering figures in China's religious and philosophical traditions are brought together in this 18th-century painting. Laozi (left) looks on as Confucius cradles the infant Buddha.

A portrait of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). The Italian missionary had a phenomenal memory and during his stay in China impressed the imperial court by reciting long passages of classical Chinese.

THE JESUITS IN CHINA

The Jesuit mission to China in the sixteenth century was the first attempt by Europeans to seek to understand Chinese religions from the inside. A leading figure in the mission was Matteo Ricci (see illustration, above), who landed in Macao in 1582. In order to win approval from Confucian officials, and thereby gain access to the emperor, Ricci and his colleagues learned Chinese and adopted the dress, manners, and learning of the educated élite.

The Jesuits favored accommodation of Confucian rituals with Christianity, for example permitting the veneration of ancestors, but as an act of remembrance rather than worship. Ricci believed that the ancient Chinese had worshipped the one God in the form of Shang Di (see p.204), but that subsequent religious degeneration had eroded their original monotheism. However, despite the missionaries' acculturation and readiness to be accommodating, the Chinese found the religion of the West far less compelling than they did Western astronomy, mathematics, and machines.

but became disillusioned and retired to the mountains. However, on the way, a guard at the western pass begged him to write down his teachings. The result was Daoism's foundational text, the *Dao De Jing*. There are two distinct Daoist traditions, "philosophical" Daoism and "religious" Daoism. Philosophical Daoism, represented by Laozi and Zhuangzi (fourth century BCE), is concerned with perceiving and following the *Dao*, the force and pattern behind the natural order. Zhuangzi asserted that peace and harmony are the natural state of things until humans interfere, and that one should see the relativity of all values and points of view.

Religious Daoism began in the second century CE with such movements as the "Yellow Turbans" and "Celestial Masters" (also known as the "Way of Five Bushels of Rice"). These groups combined ancient practices and beliefs, such as the pursuit of long life, with their own scriptures, divinities, rituals, and, quite often, millenarian expectations, which were perceived as a threat by the government. Over time, religious Daoism developed a canon of revealed scripture, a pantheon of divinities, a literate priesthood, and established rituals.

Buddhism has been part of the Chinese religious landscape since the first century CE. In its heyday in China (third–ninth centuries CE), it held out the prospect of universal salvation in a time of political instability, and offered an intricate and colorful view of the afterlife. Buddhism proved to be highly adaptable, the most successful schools being those most attuned to Chinese sensibilities. Tiantai Buddhism, by organizing the range of Buddhist teachings into levels of relative truth, appealed to the Chinese inclination to harmonize and accommodate divergent points of view. "Pure Land" Buddhism had a broad popular appeal and met the needs of uncertain times in its devotionalism and promise of a happy rebirth (see p.193). The critique of language and rational discourse that characterized the Meditation school, of Chan, resonated with philosophical Daoism, which shared its goal of understanding the true nature of reality, even if that reality was differently described. (Tiantai, "Pure Land," and Chan were all to exercise great influence on the Buddhism of Japan; see pp.252–3.)

However, Buddhism has always been identified as a "foreign" religion and has suffered several persecutions. After the worst (841–5CE), when thousands of monasteries were closed, Buddhism remained an important force in Chinese religious life, but never regained its former stature. Of the numerous schools, only "Pure Land" and Chan continued to thrive.

The basic structure of the Chinese popular tradition was in place by 1000CE. It includes many ancient indigenous practices, such as shamanism (see sidebar, opposite), divination, and veneration of ancestors. It has also incorporated Buddhist ideas of *karma* and rebirth, and its cosmologies of heavens and hells, *buddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*, together with the Daoist hierarchy of deities. Confucians have scorned popular religious practices, while the role of Buddhist and Daoist priests is to conduct rituals rather than explain doctrine to the masses. They are brought in to perform particular ceremonies at temples run by neighborhood organizations and are not permanently affiliated to temples of the popular religion.

Chinese religious traditions have faced tremendous challenges in the last two centuries arising from both cultural and military encounters with the West. The traditions have been seen by intellectuals and governments as the cause of Chinese weakness, and as "unmodern" in comparison to Western science and rationalism. This attitude is reinforced in the official policies of the Communist regime, and it is difficult to assess the strength of traditional religion on the mainland today. However, it is observable that whenever government pressure eases, religious practices are very quick to reappear.

SHAMANS

Shamans are a vehicle for communication with the spirits: in a trance, the shaman has the experience of leaving the body and traveling to the spirit world. In ancient China, shamans took part in sacrificial rituals at court and served as channels of sacred power, invoking the gods and goddesses, pleading for rain, healing, and exorcising demons. Their official role had ceased by ca. 400CE, but in the popular religion shamans still act as mediums, healers, exorcists, and dream interpreters.

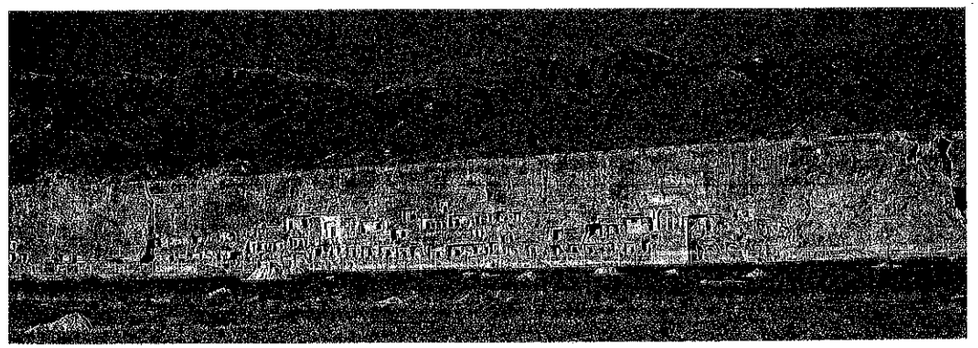
THE CAVES OF DUNHUANG

A group of artificial caves in the remote northwest of China provide remarkable evidence of the early flowering of Buddhism in China and its transformation from an Indian to a Chinese context. Dunhuang was an outpost for Chinese pilgrims and merchants on the Silk Road that linked China to India, the Middle East, and Europe (see map, p.201). The road brought Buddhism to China, and it was the way taken by Chinese pilgrims to India in search of scripture, such as the monk Xuanzang (see p.217).

From the fourth to the fourteenth centuries CE, pilgrims carved the "Caves of a Thousand Buddhas" into the soft stone of a sheer cliff at Dunhuang. Temples, shrines, and lodgings were hewn from the rocks, and their walls were adorned with colorful murals. The iconography at Dunhuang illustrates how Indian Buddhism transmuted into Chinese Buddhism over the centuries as Chinese themes were incorporated.

The caves included a library of many thousands of precious manuscripts of Buddhist literature (see illustration, p.213). The library was sealed shut in the eleventh century for protection against raiders and thus remained intact until it was reopened in 1900.

The caves at Dunhuang, northwest China. Their remoteness ensured that they remained untouched by various eruptions of anti-Buddhist sentiment in China, including the persecution of 841–5CE and, more recently, the Cultural Revolution.



An early 20th-century print of the Kitchen God surrounded by his divine family.

ZAO JUN, THE KITCHEN GOD

The kitchen area of the home is the defining object of the family unit, for related families may share an altar but never a stove. Just as Tudi Gong is the god of the neighborhood (see main text), so Zao Jun, the Kitchen God, is the god of the family, and its link with the celestial bureaucracy. On the 23rd or 24th of the last month of the year, Zao Jun is sent off to Heaven—an image or effigy of the god is burnt—to make an annual report on the family to the Jade Emperor (see main text). Before he goes, the family feeds him treats made of sweet, sticky ingredients so that he will have only sweet things to say about the family—or so that his lips will be glued shut and his words rendered incomprehensible.

THE CELESTIAL EMPIRE

The Chinese preoccupation with the divine takes two main forms. On the one hand there is a wide range of active deities and spiritual beings, many of which are venerated at shrines and temples. On the other, much religious activity focuses on ordering principles—cosmic forces and concepts of ultimate reality—that are the subject of contemplation rather than worship. For most people, contact with the divine takes the form of acts of worship and offerings to those gods and goddesses who may help them with everyday matters or provide protection from danger. However, philosophical Daoists, Confucians, and Buddhists of intellectually-oriented sects such as Chan, concentrate on the pursuit of insight and enlightenment rather than on worship or supplication.

Chinese deities are ranked in a celestial bureaucracy that is modeled on the bureaucracy of imperial China. The pantheon embraces Daoist figures, *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas*, and a host of personalities from Chinese folklore and legend. Each deity has a specific function, and a supplicant chooses the appropriate one for a particular need. There are different divinities to heal particular illnesses, grant offspring to the childless, protect soldiers or sailors, and bring fortune and good luck to a community. One may appeal to gods and goddesses to assist ancestors or to control dangerous and disorderly ghosts.

High-ranking deities have authority over those in the earthly bureaucracy who are of equivalent rank to their own celestial juniors, and vice versa. Depending on their performance, deities, like mortal civil servants, may be promoted or demoted. Those who do not carry out their duties properly may be punished by their superiors in the celestial bureaucracy, or by human officials who outrank them. For example, a god who fails to bring rain during a drought may be removed from a temple and left in the sun to see how he likes being hot and dry. Those who give exemplary service will be rewarded with promotion.

The lowest official in the celestial bureaucracy is one's local god, Tudi Gong, the "God of the Earth." Every neighborhood or village has its own Tudi Gong, who is likened to a village policeman or magistrate. It is his job to keep the peace, to quell local ghosts who cause trouble, and to be aware of what goes on in the area. Residents of small villages might report incidents and important events such as births, deaths, and marriages both to Tudi Gong and to the local (mortal) police station. Tudi Gong passes on any relevant happenings to his superior in the celestial hierarchy.

Tudi Gong resides in a small shrine where people can make frequent simple offerings on the second and sixteenth days of each lunar month (that is, just after the new and full moons), and perhaps a daily offering of incense. More elaborate offerings are made on the god's birthday, which falls on the second day of the second lunar month.

At the top of the hierarchy of Heaven is the high god known as the Jade Emperor, a figure of uncertain origin whose cult appeared in the ninth century CE and was fully developed by the tenth century. He is the supreme judge and sovereign of Heaven, the overseer of the administrative hierarchy, who authorizes the promotion and demotion of his infe-

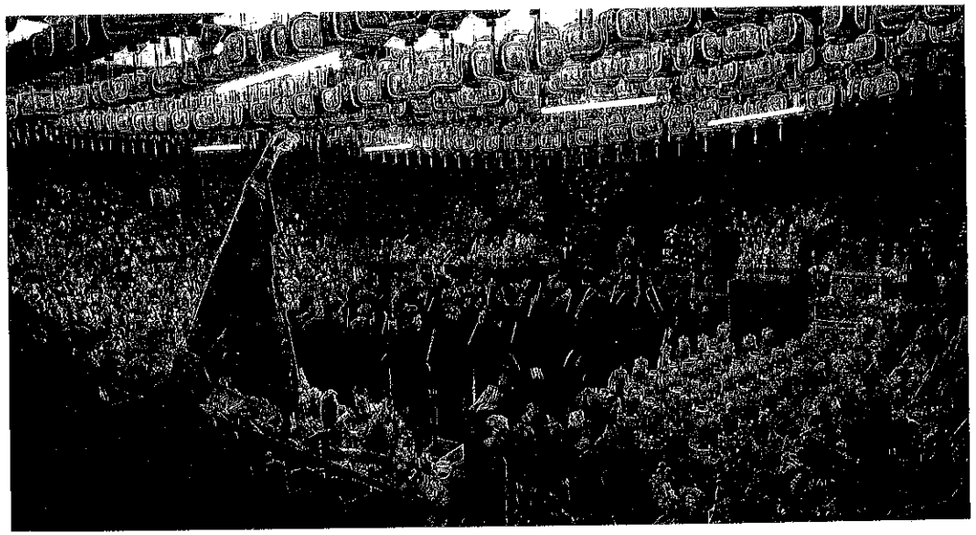
MAZU, THE EMPRESS OF HEAVEN

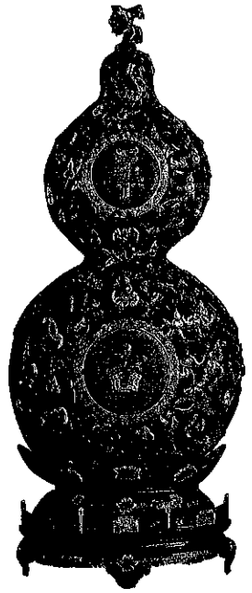
Mazu, or Tian Hou (Empress of Heaven), is one of the most popular deities of southern China and Taiwan. Her story illustrates important aspects of the Chinese pantheon: the human origin of the gods; their particular function and appeal; and the way in which they are promoted for merit.

According to legend, Mazu was born with auspicious portents in the eleventh century to a family of fisherfolk in Fujian Province in south China. The child Mazu displayed supernatural powers. One day, knowing that her father and two brothers were in danger in a storm at sea, her soul left her body to rush to their aid and began to pull their two boats to shore. But her mother found the apparently lifeless body of Mazu and, terrified, shook her arm, causing the soul to release her father's boat. Her brothers returned home, weeping that their father had nearly been saved, but then was lost; they also reported seeing Mazu's shape on the waves.

After Mazu died at the age of twenty-eight, local boats began to carry an image of her for protection at sea. After two centuries of popular veneration, she was officially recognized as a goddess and was subsequently promoted in the celestial hierarchy. Finally, in the seventeenth century, Mazu became Empress of Heaven, a consort of the Jade Emperor (see pp.209–10).

A ceremony at a temple of Mazu in northern Taiwan. The goddess remains a patron of those who make a living at sea.





THE GOURD OF CHAOS

In philosophical Daoism, the Absolute is represented by the original state of primal perfection, the time of chaos and of boundless potential. The symbolic story of Hundun, the "cosmic gourd," describes the destruction of that paradisial state, when what was natural and spontaneous became prescribed and defined.

Hundun ("Chaos"), the king of the Center, had none of the seven apertures of other living creatures. His generosity to King Fast of the North and King Furious of the South was spontaneous and natural, and this troubled them. They fretted about how they would keep face if they failed to repay Hundun's kindness. Finally, they decided to bore seven holes into Hundun, to give him the orifices that all other people have. Fast and Furious therefore paid him a visit, and each day bored a hole into Hundun. But on the seventh day Hundun died.

In the story, Hundun is envisaged as a faceless, lumpy gourd, an irregularly-shaped container of seeds that symbolizes the creative potential of chaos. This is in contrast to Fast and Furious, who, rather than accepting Hundun's gifts with the joy and spontaneity with which they were given, were obsessed with rules and protocol. They assumed, wrongly, that Hundun would appreciate the social "face" by which they allowed themselves to be defined and restricted, and thus brought about the death of creative spontaneity. In the Daoist view, the two kings acted contrary to the Dao.

An 18th-century lacquer vase adorned with lapiz lazuli, jade, and other stones and made in the shape of a gourd. The vegetable has long been associated with Daoism; Daoist immortals are often shown with a gourd full of potent herbs.

riors. He wears the robes and headdress of the old Chinese emperors. There are some temples for the Jade Emperor, but not many—for the average person, as well as for lowly gods such as Tudi Gong, the Jade Emperor is a remote figure and it is possible to communicate with him only through intermediaries.

Apart from the fact that they dwell in Heaven, deities differ from humans mainly in terms of power and function. Humans who live exemplary lives are appointed to the celestial hierarchy after death as a reward, as, for example, in the case of Mazu (see p.209). The life stories and personalities of the gods and goddesses are well known through Chinese operas and folktales, and from communication via spirit mediums. A deity's birthday is an important celebration.

The relationship between worshipper and deity is based on reciprocity. It is understood that when a god or goddess is offered incense, money, and food, the deity has a certain obligation to respond. However, Chinese deities are not omnipotent, not even the Jade Emperor, and there is a limit to what can be requested or given. Requests must go through the proper channels: an ordinary person cannot petition the Jade Emperor directly, any more than a commoner in imperial China could petition the emperor.

While the Jade Emperor is at the apex of the celestial hierarchy, he is only the mouthpiece for a trinity of primordial Daoist beings known as the Three Pure Ones. Although they may be represented on the temple altar, they are rarely worshipped. The Three Pure Ones stand for the undifferentiated, abstracted power of the Dao. They are remote cosmic powers who are not asked for favors, but are invoked by Daoist priests in liturgies of cosmic renewal.

In Confucian thought, the expression of the Ultimate is "Heaven" itself (Tian). Before Confucius, in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the high gods called the Lord on High (Shang Di) and Tian (see p.204) were thought of in anthropomorphic terms, but were rarely approached in divination, being considered too distant. Confucius' understanding of Heaven was somewhat different: he spoke of it as the moral order that underpins the cosmos. He was convinced that, while he personally was not successful in his mission to make virtue the basis for ruling, he was doing the will of Heaven, which was manifest in the celestial Mandate bestowed upon or withdrawn from the terrestrial emperor (see p.204). In imperial China, only the emperor, who was known as the Son of Heaven, was permitted to perform acts of worship to Heaven. This demonstrated his authority under the Mandate, which gave the emperor a pivotal role as mediator between Heaven and Earth.

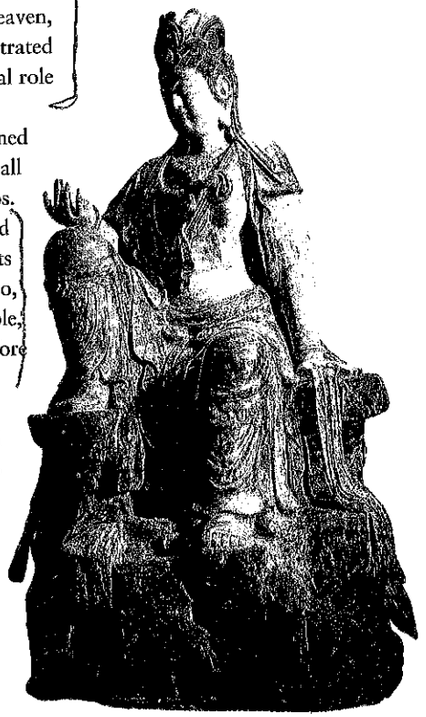
The mystical naturalism of philosophical Daoism is not concerned with virtue and morality, but rather the movement and creation of all things in accordance with the Dao, the "Way" of nature and cosmos. It is the source and pattern for all things which are formed from, and dissolve into, the primal vital material, or *qi* (see p.200). Daoists express reverence for the infinite subtlety and scope of the Dao, which permeates all things. The Dao is silent and imperceptible, impartial and all-encompassing. But it is not divine, and therefore cannot be worshipped as Heaven and the deities can.

Mahayana Buddhism, the tradition that took root in China, recognizes a number of revered savior figures known as celestial *buddhas* (in Chinese, *Fo*) and *bodhisattvas* (in Chinese, *pusa*), who can bestow blessings on human beings from their heavenly realms (see pp.176–7). Although not originally considered to be divine in nature, a number of these figures have become enshrined in the popular Chinese pantheon, such as the historical Buddha (Shakyamuni, Chinese Shijiamouni), Amitabha Buddha (Amituo/Emituo Fo), Maitreya (Mile Fo), and Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin), a male *pusa* who has metamorphosed into the popular Chinese goddess of mercy (see sidebar, above right).

GUANYIN THE MERCIFUL

The Buddhist *bodhisattva* Guanyin ("Hearer of Cries") is the goddess of mercy and one of the most beloved and frequently approached figures in Chinese popular religion. She has various aspects. In particular, Guanyin is the special guardian of women and children, and the goddess to whom women pray for offspring; she is often depicted holding a baby. She is commonly portrayed either as a *bodhisattva* with a thousand eyes and arms (symbolizing her unbounded ability to look favorably on her devotees and dispense compassion); or as a slender figure in a white robe holding a willow branch and a vase of nectar, symbols of heavenly benevolence. (See also pp.177, 248.)

A large wooden figure of Guanyin of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or earlier.



THE *DAO DE JING*

The *Dao De Jing*, attributed to Daoism's founder, Laozi, advocates finding one's place in nature and learning to practice *wu wei* (see p.203) in order to create a harmonious life. In abbreviated, mystical language, he extols the strength of the apparently weak, such as the water that can conquer stone drop by drop. The *Dao De Jing* paradoxically asserts that words and names are not to be trusted, and are impediments to gaining insight into the nature of the Dao. In the Daoist view, words are simply a convenient means to indicate something which is in constant flux and unnameable.

WORDS OF THE SAGES

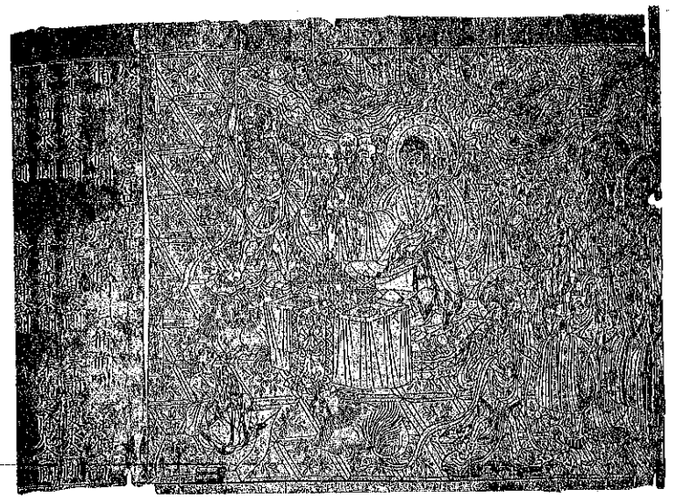
Sacred scripture in the formal Chinese religious traditions is made up primarily of writings that are not considered to represent the word of the divine. Rather, numerous ancient texts of central importance have acquired canonical status for one or more, or all, of the main traditions. At the center of these stand the Confucian scriptures. Although until recently only a small percentage of Chinese have been literate, the ideas and values embodied in the Confucian canon have been so influential that they are an intimate part of the cultural identity of the Chinese people. They were the basis of China's civil service examinations—and hence government—for two millennia. The scholar-officials who ran the empire applied lessons gleaned from the works of the canon to contemporary problems.

The overarching concern of the Confucian canon, which consists of the "Six Classics" and "Four Books," is harmony in the social order. Confucius saw himself not as a creator, but as a mediator of the wisdom of the sage kings of antiquity. For him, this wisdom was accessible primarily through the study of six classic texts: the *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing*; see sidebar, opposite), the *Classic of History*, the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Book of Rites*, and the lost *Classic of Music*. Traditionally, Confucius is credited with writing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and a commentary on the *Yi Jing*, and editing the other texts. According to modern scholarship, these texts were compiled throughout the Zhou dynasty (1050BCE–256CE), the *Classic of History* perhaps even earlier. Confucius drew moral lessons and examples of good government from the *Classic of History* and the *Annals*. He also asserted that to be a cultivated, "superior person," one must be steeped in music, poetry, cosmology, divination, and etiquette, as presented in the other classics.

Confucius' own prescriptions for an ideal society are preserved in the *Analects*, a record of his sayings recorded by his students. In it, he demonstrates how the rites (*li*) of early Chinese rulers—from state ceremonies to etiquette—provide a template for effortless and appropriate human interaction. The remaining three books, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, also describe ways to achieve virtuous government and a harmonious society. All of these Confucian texts are written in the terse, refined language of classical Chinese, which has given rise to a tradition of commentary to elucidate their meaning.

The foundational texts of Daoism, the *Dao De Jing* (see sidebar, above left) and the *Zhuangzi*, have been as influential in forming the Chinese ethos as the Confucian canon. They too teach the way to find harmony, but look to the force of the Dao for pattern and order, not to an ancient golden age. Like the *Dao De Jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, named after its

Ink-stamps of individual maxims from Confucius' Analects *have been popular since ancient times and constitute a minor artistic genre. This one reads: "Be courteous, magnanimous, sincere, diligent, and clement."*



Buddha preaching to his aged disciple Subhuti; a woodblock illustration to a scroll of the Diamond Sutra *(see p.180), one of many Buddhist scriptures found at Dunhuang (see p.207). It dates from the Tang dynasty (618–907CE).*

author (see p.206), advocates harmony with nature. It delights in nature's ever-shifting forms, and refutes standards of worth created by humans and imposed upon its endless variety. Death and life are a part of nature's process, to be embraced with equal joy and enthusiasm. The *Zhuangzi* tells stories of curious people and things, and revels in flights of fancy.

Religious Daoism has a vast scriptural collection of over a thousand works, and is still growing. This canon includes treatises on various topics, including rituals, alchemy, exorcism, the lives of past Daoist worthies, and revelations. These are consulted by Daoist priests and adepts in ministering to others or in their own quest for enlightenment and longevity.

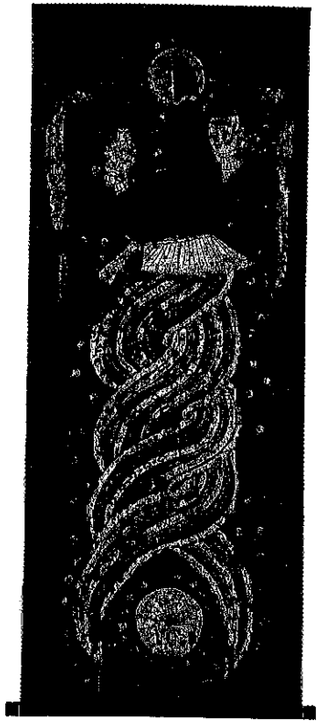
Chinese Buddhist scriptures reflect the effort to adapt the foreign tradition of Buddhism to a very different context. The first Buddhists in China were faced with a huge preexisting corpus of scripture. The *Lotus Sutra*, a text of great significance in all East Asian branches of Buddhism (see also pp.181 and 251), accounts for Buddhism's diverse and often contradictory teachings and asserts that all the Buddhist schools ultimately teach the truth that leads to enlightenment. Another key text, the *Platform Sutra*, is purely Chinese in origin, and describes the enlightenment of Huineng, the sixth patriarch of the Meditation school, or Chan.

The popular religion is by and large without sacred texts, although various sectarian movements have had their own scriptures. The ancient *Songs of the South* (fourth century BCE), describes shamanic flight and other practices and beliefs that have continued in the popular tradition (see p.207). With the advent of printing in the eighth century CE, inexpensive morality texts drawn from the various religious traditions became widely popular.

THE *YI JING*

The tremendous importance of the ancient practice and theory of divination is captured in the Confucian classic the *Yi Jing* (*I Ching*), the *Book of Changes*, which developed over several hundred years beginning in the early Zhou dynasty. Although a part of the Confucian canon, it is universal in its appeal and importance in Chinese religions. Its popularity is due in part to its cosmological speculation, which appealed to the élite, and especially its use as a manual of divination, which continues today.

The *Yi Jing* system of divination is based on combinations of eight trigrams, devices made up of broken and unbroken lines that represent the opposing yet complementary forces of *yin* (broken) and *yang* (unbroken) (see pp.200–203). The trigrams are combined in pairs, in all possible combinations, to form a total of sixty-four hexagrams. These hexagrams are taken to represent all possible situations and developments in the constantly changing universe. In addition to giving judgments on the individual hexagrams and the lines of which they are composed, the *Yi Jing* provides commentaries and explanations to assist in interpreting the results of divination.



A silk funerary banner of the 6th or 7th century CE depicting Fu Xi intertwined with Nü Gua, a goddess who features in Chinese mythology as the creator of humanity from mud.

SAINTS AND HEROES

Many real, legendary, semilegendary, and mythical figures have acquired heroic or saintly status as founders or exemplars of the ideals expressed in the Chinese religious traditions. Confucian heroes are associated with the establishment of the fundamentals of civilization, or the perfection of social norms. These include the quasimythical culture heroes and sage kings of antiquity, who are the earliest figures in traditional Chinese history. There are also records of extraordinary individuals who displayed great self-sacrifice in their devotion to Confucian-inspired virtue. Daoist heroes, by contrast, are those who have perfected their knowledge of the workings of the Dao. However, both Confucian and Daoist heroes are revered for contributing to the goal of universal harmony.

Heroes were often canonized as deities to become part of the celestial hierarchy (see pp.208–211). Perhaps the most famous example of this is the widely popular Guan Di, a military hero of the Han era (206–220CE). Throughout the centuries, he was promoted by imperial decree through the ranks of the celestial hierarchy, and continues today to be the patron god of many trades and professions.

The most noted of the culture heroes—semimythical figures who are said to have brought humanity the basics of civilization—are Fu Xi, Shen Nong, and Huang Di. Fu Xi, the Ox-tamer, is credited with inventing nets for catching animals and fish, as well as with domesticating animals. He established the art of divination by devising the Eight Trigrams (see sidebar, p.213) and invented marriage and thus the family. Shen Nong, the Divine Farmer, invented the plow and hoe and taught humanity the skills of agriculture. He discovered the rudiments of medicine and pharmacology by determining the therapeutic and toxic qualities of all plants. Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, invented warfare and defeated "barbarians" to secure what became the heart of the Chinese empire.

Chinese tradition considers the period following the culture heroes as the golden age of antiquity, the time of the "sage kings" and perfect government. Kings Yao, Shun, and Yu were referred to by Confucius as exemplary rulers. Yao determined that all of his sons—ten in number—were not worthy to rule, and therefore searched for the most virtuous man in the kingdom to succeed him. His criterion of virtue was filial piety, which was demonstrated by Shun, who continued to honor and serve his father and stepbrother without complaint, despite their attempts to murder him. Shun became king and later also bypassed his sons, handing the succession to Yu (see box, opposite).

In every dynasty there were heroes and heroines who embodied such ideals as the virtuous and selfless public servant, the filial child, and the chaste and devoted wife. Their stories are recounted in texts used as primers over centuries, such as the *Classic of Filial Piety* and *Biographies of Heroic Women*, as well as in accounts reported in local gazettes and dynastic histories. Such stories include that of Laizi, who pretended to be a child even when he was more than seventy, so that his aged parents would not feel old; others tell of girls who committed suicide at the death of their fiancés in order to be loyal to their betrothed, and of the secondary wife who ran into a burning house to rescue the children of her husband's primary wife, leaving her own to perish.

In contrast to the ethical, virtuous, and altruistic cast of the Confucian hero, who upholds morality and legitimacy, Daoist heroes exemplify those who practice intense self-cultivation to absorb the teachings of Daoism, in order to acquire magical powers and, above all, achieve immortality. These figures are admired, but they also have a countercultural air. For example, the scabby-headed Daoist monk, free from society's expectations and bonds, laughing uproariously and irreverently, is a recurrent literary image.

THE DUKE OF ZHOU

Much praised by Confucius, the duke of Zhou (died 1094BCE) has long served as a model of the exemplary public servant who did his duty to uphold order and his dynasty, but without seeking the throne for himself. The duke was the brother of King Wu, founder of the Zhou dynasty. After Wu died, the duke acted as regent for Wu's young son for seven years, never attempting to usurp the throne, in spite of accusations—subsequently disproved—to the contrary. This heroic role model proved so enduring that "duke of Zhou" was a popular nickname for the respected Communist premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976).

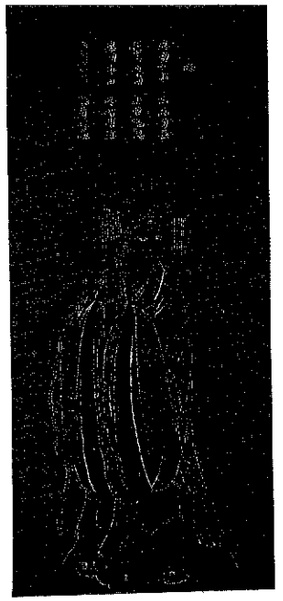
YU, THE CONTROLLER OF FLOODS

From the Chinese perspective, the ideal state is characterized by good government and just rulers who strive to bring about a state of order and harmony between nature and humanity. This is exemplified by the story of Yu, one of the "sage kings" of antiquity and the founder of the legendary Xia dynasty (traditional dates: 2205–1766BCE), whose worthiness was demonstrated in his ceaseless labor to protect the people from flooding—throughout history China's most frequent form of natural disaster.

In the time of Yu, the people were cursed with a great flood that destroyed all in its path. Yu sluiced off the great river that had caused the flood, creating nine provinces and making the land habitable. So great was Yu's dedication to this task that for ten years he did not visit his own home, even when he passed by so closely that he could hear the cries of his young children.

Yu worked until his hands had no nails and his shanks no hair, and persevered even when he contracted so many debilitating illnesses that his body had shriveled to half its size, his internal organs had ceased to function effectively, and his legs were in such a poor state that he could barely walk.

Yu is praised for his great concern for, and dedication to, the welfare of the "black-haired people." The great flood motif is a common one in world mythology; it is telling that in the Chinese version, humanity is saved solely by the agency of a dedicated human hero rather than by a powerful deity.



Yu the Great, third of the exemplary sovereigns of Chinese legend known as the "sage kings" and founder of the traditional first dynasty. His reputed tomb can be seen today near Shaoxing in Zhejiang province.

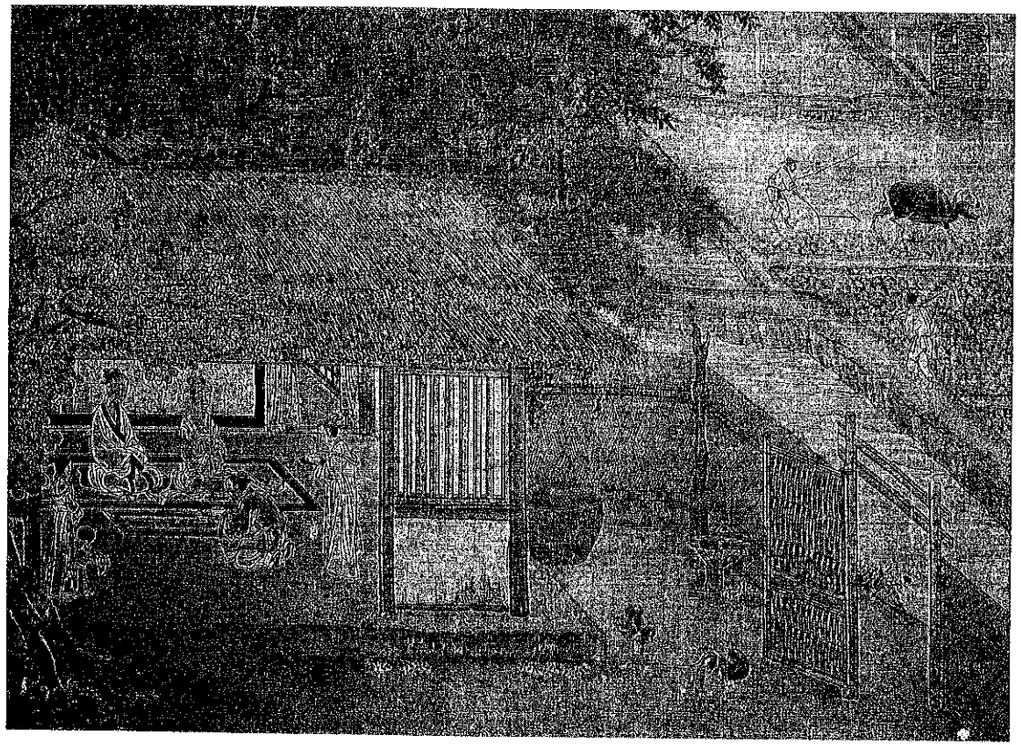
IN QUEST OF CONCORD

Chinese ethics evince a remarkable ability to synthesize diverse strands of religious teachings into a comprehensive system. Elements derived from the distinctive traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and the popular religion are embraced without apparent conflict. The underlying ethical concern of all the traditions can be summed up as the pursuit of concord: living harmoniously within the family, society, and nature.

Ethical teaching is important in Daoism, but not necessarily central. Philosophical Daoism stresses the pursuit of spontaneous, natural action, while the focus of religious Daoism is the pursuit of longevity and immortality. Buddhism has its own distinctive ethical system, related to its principal concerns of enlightenment and salvation. It has accommodated itself to the older Confucian and Daoist ethos, and the indigenous traditions in turn have incorporated such Buddhist ideas as the practice of meditation.

Confucianism places the strongest emphasis on ethical teachings. Confucian ethics are directed toward the creation of a harmonious society and

A 12th-century wall hanging of children paying their respects to their elders, in accordance with the Confucian ideal of filial piety, which demands respect and obedience from the child and care and concern from the parent.

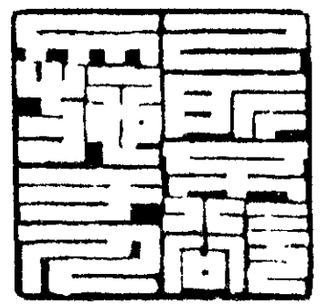


a virtuous, benevolent state. These can be brought about, Confucians believe, if everyone is reflective and sincere, and practices *ren*, "humanity," a deep-seated altruism. Confucius described *ren* as treating all people with respect, and living according to the golden rule (see right).

Confucianism demands that all persons be treated with humanity, but within a well articulated hierarchy. Filial piety—the duty, love, and respect due to parents—is a central Confucian virtue, as is behaving appropriately according to one's rank. The most important relationships are those of father and son, emperor and minister, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, friend and friend. Only the last is considered to be between people of equal rank. An ordered, harmonious society depends on each person playing his or her part appropriately and with good intent.

Confucian ethics pay little attention to reward or punishment beyond this world. However, to a great extent, the Confucian virtue of filial piety became integral to concepts of salvation in the popular tradition, especially in the cult of ancestors. Ideally, in order to become a contented and benevolent ancestor, rather than a potentially malign ghost, one must have living male descendants to perform the necessary sacrifices after one's death.

Like Confucianism, philosophical Daoism is not concerned with salvation, but rather with an acceptance of the constant flux of the universe. For philosophical Daoists, there is no state of being from which to be



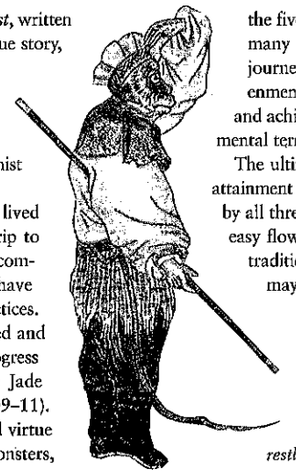
This ink-stamp, or "chop," contains Confucius' version of the golden rule: "Do not unto others what you would not have them do to you" (Analects 12.2).

THE *JOURNEY TO THE WEST*

The Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*, written in 1592 by Wu Chengen and based on a true story, is hilarious, bawdy, irreverent, and highly entertaining. But it can also be read as an allegory of Neo-Confucian mind-cultivation, Daoist physiological alchemy and pursuit of immortality (see p.221), and Buddhist enlightenment and redemption.

In the story, the monk Xuanzang (who lived ca. 596–664CE) sets off on a hazardous trip to India in search of Buddhist scriptures with companions who are celestial beings and have gained their powers through Daoist practices. Under the orders of the Buddha, and guided and protected by Guanyin (see p.211), their progress is charted by the Daoist Laozi and the Jade Emperor, a Confucian figure (see pp.209–11). Having fought off dangers to life, limb, and virtue from various voracious and lascivious monsters, the five pilgrims reach India safely and return with many Buddhist scriptures. In the course of the journey, Xuanzang has attained Buddhist enlightenment; gained fundamental insights into the Dao and achieved physical immortality; and traversed the mental terrain of Neo-Confucian mind-cultivation.

The ultimate reward of the pilgrims is therefore the attainment of the enlightenment and salvation offered by all three teachings. This is a fine articulation of the easy flow which, for the Chinese, exists among these traditions—to the extent that the aims of all three may be embraced by one individual.



A central role in the Journey to the West *is played by Monkey, a trickster of magical powers and great intelligence. He represents the common Daoist and Buddhist metaphor of "the Monkey of the Mind," denoting the restless mind that is so difficult to control.*

saved, because all stages of existence are a part of the natural order of the Dao. The ethic of "noninterference" (*wu wei*) in nature demands that one submit to natural processes and change. To be born, mature, and die are therefore all equally valid, and necessary, parts of the natural process. Criticized for not mourning his wife, the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi replied: "Originally she had no life; and not only no life, she had no form ... form was transformed to become life, and now life is transformed to become death. This is like the rotation of the four seasons ... For me to go about weeping and wailing would be to show my ignorance of destiny" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Death;" Chan, *Source Book*, p.209).

In religious Daoism, by contrast, there is a strong emphasis on the quest for immortality. By understanding the working of the *Dao* one can unlock the secrets of life and death, and use them to advantage. This is attempted through various practices: diet, sex, gymnastics, and meditation. In these practices Daoists seek to reverse the flow of essential fluids in the body, and thus grow younger and nurture within them an "embryo of immortality" that will survive after death. Adepts of these practices should purify their minds and hearts as well as their bodies, and must employ any magical powers that they acquire only to benefit others.

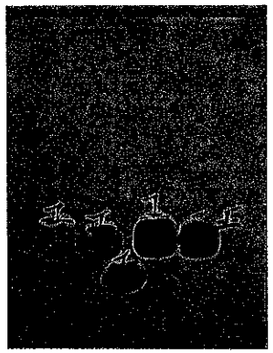
Buddhist ethical teaching, particularly the ancient Indian concept of *karma* (see pp.156–7), is very much integrated into the Chinese religious sensibility. Knowledge of the laws of *karma* encourages acts of merit and compassion, which include distributing scripture, releasing captive animals, and giving food to beggars, including Buddhist monks and nuns.

In Chinese Buddhism, salvation and enlightenment may be seen as two forms of the same goal. For the average person, for whom the rigor of the monastery and meditation are too great or unaffordable, salvation is attained through devotional "Pure Land" Buddhism. In this the devout invoke the name of Amitabha Buddha (Amituo Fo in Chinese), the *bodhisattva* who has promised to help all those seeking enlightenment. Having chanted "Hail to you, Amitabha Buddha" with a sincere heart, a devotee will be saved from reincarnation in Hell and be reborn instead in the Pure Land, or "Western Paradise," where Amitabha presides (see p.193).

The Chan (Sanskrit *dhyana*, "meditation") school of Chinese Buddhism stresses enlightenment rather than salvation. Enlightenment is the flash of intuition that reveals the essential emptiness of all things. Chan asserts that all human beings may become enlightened, because all living creatures are endowed with "*buddha*-nature." This can be accomplished in this lifetime through meditation. In order to gain the great moment of insight, and to force the mind to break from its usual path of discursive thought, the Chan master may employ what is termed the "public case" (*gong an*, whence Japanese *koan*), a question-and-answer session between the master and disciple that may include shouting, beating, and apparently nonsensical statements. Through this process, the disciple is pushed to let go of the mundane perception of reality and grasp ultimate truth.

Meditation is also an important aid to enlightenment in Daoism and Confucianism. In Daoism, immortality is achieved by those who have both preserved their bodies and acquired true insight into the Dao. A tradition of "quiet sitting," or meditative reflection on Confucian teachings, developed in medieval China with a similar aim of attaining true insight.

THE ART OF ENLIGHTENMENT



Art is one means by which Chan Buddhists may articulate truths learned in meditation without resorting to words. Enlightenment comes in a lightning flash, in which all distinctions between the self and the rest of the cosmos dissolve; this experience is captured in the rapid, intense brushwork of Chan artists, who seek to record the insight in its full intensity. Where words might fail, the finished work of art jolts the viewer into a similar realization of ultimate truth.

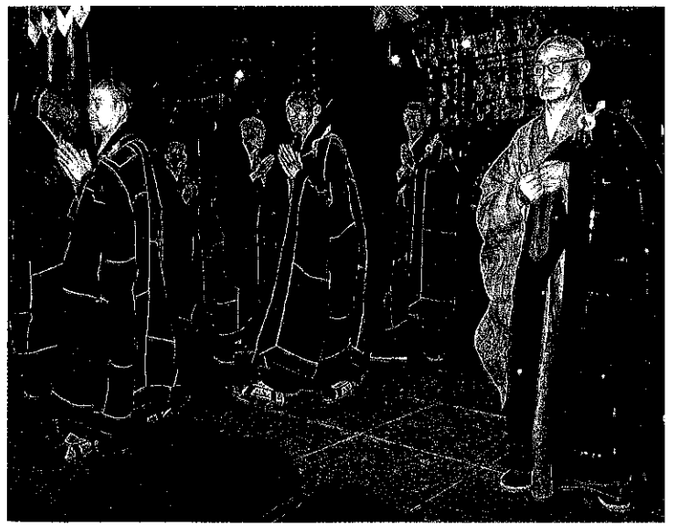
Muqi (active in the first half of the twelfth century), one of the most famous of the Chan Buddhist painters, is a master of this spontaneous style. He painted a wide variety of subjects, but his work always encourages the viewer to identify with the inner nature of his subject and dissolve the boundary of "self" and "other."

Six Persimmons, by Muqi. In this masterpiece of Chan art, Muqi has transformed his fleeting, powerful insight into black ink on paper, on which, to quote sinologist Arthur Waley, "passion has congealed into stupendous calm."

ETHICS AND GOOD GOVERNMENT

Both Confucianism and Daoism are concerned with good government, but have very different ideas about what constitutes an ethical ruler. Confucius' *Analects* envision the ruler as an active exemplar of virtue: "If you desire what is good, the people will be good. The ... ruler is like the wind and ... the people [are] like grass. In whatever direction the wind blows, the grass always bends" (*Analects* 12.19; Chan, *Source Book*, p.40). The *Dao De Jing* expresses Daoism's more passive approach to rule: "I do not interfere and the people are transformed by themselves. I prefer peace and the people correct themselves. I do nothing and the people of themselves have abundance. I have no desires and the people become simple by themselves" (*Dao De Jing*, chapter 57).

Chinese bureaucrats were once selected on the basis of their mastery of the Confucian classics (see illustration, p.199). They were urged to be loyal and virtuous, to the extent of chastising the emperor himself if his rule strayed from virtue, and withdrawing from service rather than serve a despot. As Confucius put it: "When the [good] way prevails in the empire, then show yourself; when it does not, then hide" (*Analects* 8:13; Chan, *Source Book*, p.34). After the invading Mongols founded the Yuan dynasty in 1279, for example, many courtiers chose "virtuous retirement" in preference to serving the "barbarian" foreign ruler.



Buddhist monks at a Shanghai monastery. From the traditional Chinese ethical perspective, Buddhist monks and nuns were seen as parasitical because they begged, and unfilial because they were celibate. Tales such as that of Mulian, a disciple of the Buddha who rescues his mother from Hell, helped to teach that a Buddhist may still be a filial child.

THE *WESTERN INSCRIPTION*

The Neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Zai (1027–77) was the author of a tremendously influential theory of the nature of the universe. In this brief text, called simply the *Western Inscription*, Zhang explains the fundamentally interrelated nature of the cosmos and evokes the holiness and completeness of the created order:

> "Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. The great ruler [the emperor] is the eldest son of my parents [Heaven and Earth], and the great ministers are his stewards ... In life I follow and serve [Heaven and Earth]. In death I will be at peace."

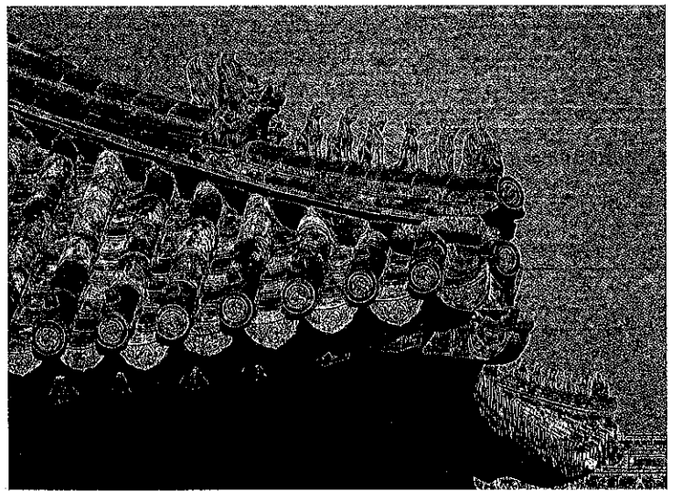
(Chan, *Source Book*, pp.497–8.)

A HALLOWED COSMOS

In Chinese religion the sacred may be encountered in temples and shrines, in the home, and in nature. The temple is the site for community worship and sacrifice to gods and goddesses. Temples of the popular religion are designated "Daoist," but generally speaking they are not exclusively so. Indeed, many temples incorporate statues of Buddha, the *bodhisattva* Guanyin (see p.211), and Confucius, as well as deities of the popular religion. Worship at these temples is usually informal, with the worshipper offering food, incense, and "spirit money" (see p.232). At other times, the community will gather at a temple for important festivals and sacrifices, such as Chinese New Year, the spring and autumn Earth God ceremonies, the Hungry Ghost festival (see p.232), and the *jiao*, or "great offering," an elaborate ritual of renewal for the community (see p.226). Some temples are also popular pilgrimage sites, especially on the birthday of a deity.

Temples are built by private donations, and managed by a temple association made up of local laypeople. Religious specialists, such as Daoist and Buddhist priests, are hired to perform special ceremonies. The temple community often includes spirit-mediums who write or speak on behalf of a particular deity, and exorcists. Temples also function as community centers. They may be a place to discuss village affairs, or to enjoy music and theatre, and are frequently used as somewhere for local social clubs and cultural associations to meet.

In Daoist and popular belief, deities are ranked in a hierarchy paralleling the civil service of the Chinese empire (see pp.208–11). Similarly, the temples where these celestial officials reside are modeled on the buildings of the imperial bureaucracy, with features such as curved eaves; pillars and doors painted an auspicious red; and stone lions guarding the entrances. The temple also mirrors the cosmos: its base is square, like the Earth, and the ceiling may be domed to evoke the vault of Heaven (see p.222).



Part of the roof of a monastery temple in the Forbidden City, the old imperial palace complex, in Beijing. The roof of a Chinese temple is likened to a sacred mountain, and may be "populated" with creatures and characters from Chinese myth, such as famous immortals.

Buddhist and Confucian temples also form part of the religious landscape of China. The former are usually monasteries, with Buddhist monks and nuns in residence. In Confucian temples, members of the (earthly) state bureaucracy traditionally honored Confucius—as a human being, not a god—in twice-yearly sacrifices on the equinoxes. These temples are also built on a square base, and internally they are completely symmetrical, each wall a mirror image of the one opposite, conveying the order and rationality associated with Confucian thought.

Natural features of the landscape, such as rivers, caves, and mountains, are believed to possess spiritual power. Taishan (Mount Tai), the most

THE BODY: A HOLY MICROCOSM

Certain Daoist meditative practices require the adept to look inward and observe the "country of the body." The "country" is a familiar terrain, for it is a microcosm, a faithful duplication of the universe. For example, reflecting the ancient Chinese cosmological premise that Heaven is round and Earth is square, the human head is Heaven and the "square" feet are Earth. This corporeal cosmos is also said to contain the sun and moon, constellations, mountain ranges, bridges, lakes, and pagodas. The inner country is inhabited by a large population, administered in the same way as the imperial Chinese state.

The interplay between microcosm and macrocosm is a constant theme in Daoism. When a Daoist priest performs the actions and liturgy of the *jiao* ceremony (see p.226), he simultaneously employs a technique of meditation on the bodily microcosm known as "physiological alchemy." In this, vital essences and fluids of the body are believed to be purified and transmuted. It is employed in tandem with dietary, sexual, gymnastic, and other practices, in the search for longevity or even immortality.

Physiological alchemy became the dominant activity for seekers after long life during the Tang and Song dynasties and is still practiced today. Before then, they employed a more conventional form of alchemy involving substances outside the body, creating elixirs from metals and other ingredients that they consumed in the hope of promoting long life. Physiological alchemists also endeavor to produce elixirs, but seek to do so internally, by exercising transformations on the substances within their own bodies.

The use of parallels between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the human body reflects the underlying principles of the Chinese cosmos, and of Daoism: that all things derive from the same source, and that once the underlying pattern of the universe—the Dao—has been perceived, it can be applied for personal benefit.

A late 19th-century painting on silk, one of many depictions of Daoist esoteric sexual practices that aimed to further the preservation of the "internal cosmos." Daoism holds that, just as the universe is holy and eternal, the microcosm of the human body can also be made eternal through the practice of alchemical transformation on one's sacred interior.

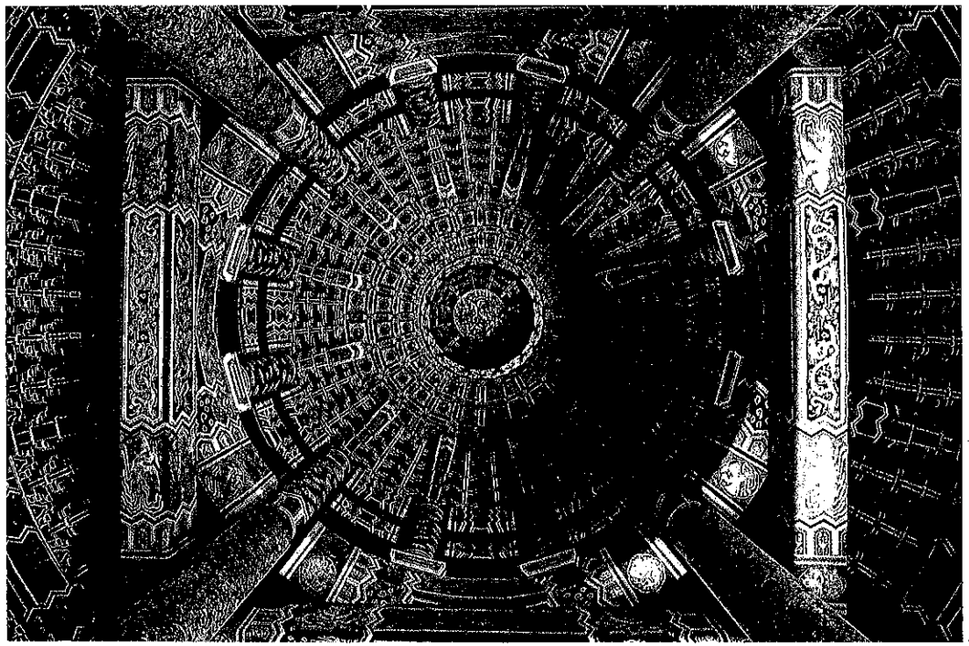
THE TEMPLE OF HEAVEN

South of the emperor's palace in Beijing is a large sacred complex that was one of the holiest sites of imperial China: the Temple of Heaven. Here, the emperor would perform rituals such as the annual sacrifices on the winter solstice when *yin* energy was at its peak and *yang*, bringing growth, warmth, and light, was just beginning to reemerge. As the Son of Heaven, the sole intermediary between Heaven (Tian) and the empire (Tian Xia, "All under Heaven"), he alone could perform this sacrifice. The regular, predictable movements of the heavenly bodies demonstrated the ability of Heaven to regulate the cosmos. Through his sacrifices, the emperor of China called upon Heaven to guarantee the order of the empire.

The Temple of Heaven was sacred ground—commoners were not allowed even to watch the silent procession of the emperor and his entourage from the imperial palace to the temple. At the sacrifice on the winter solstice, the emperor offered incense, jade, silk, and wine. He sacrificed a red bullock, symbolizing *yang*, and prostrated himself nine times (nine is considered the most *yang* of numbers) before the altar to Heaven.

The emperor received Heaven's mandate to govern (see p.204) on the basis of his proper performance of the rituals, and his continued virtuous rule for the benefit of the people. His fulfillment of his duty ensured the successful growth of crops and the continuation of order in the empire. But if Heaven was not satisfied with the emperor, the harmony and regular rhythms of the natural and human world would be disrupted. Portents of chaos such as inundations, earthquakes, famine, drought, and uprisings indicated Heaven's displeasure. If they continued they could ultimately legitimate the replacement of the dynasty.

The ceiling of the Temple of Heaven, Beijing. Like all the buildings in the temple complex, it has a square base and round vaulted ceiling, symbolizing Earth and Heaven. The configurations of individual elements of each structure are based on a complex numerology.



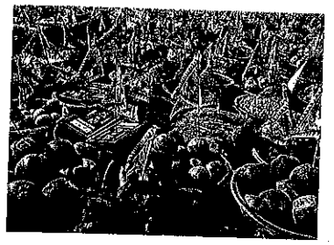
Family members worship at a domestic altar at Dali at Yunnan province, south China. For most Chinese, the home is the most frequently used religious space, in particular the "home altar," which may be freestanding or a simple niche in the wall (see also p.230).

important of five sacred mountains (see illustration, p.198), was seen as a provider of fertility, a preventer of natural disasters, and a symbol of stability. It was worshipped in spring and autumn to ensure a successful planting and an abundant harvest. Chinese people still make pilgrimages to these sacred peaks and perform acts of worship at mountaintop temples.

Sometimes a part of the landscape may take on spiritual power as the site of an unnatural death. For example, roadside shrines might be built at the scene of a fatal motoring accident to propitiate the angry ghost who is considered to linger there and threaten the safety of the living.

The sacrality and latent power of the physical world is expressed in the ancient art of *fengshui*, Chinese geomancy, which is still practiced today and has become popular in the West. *Fengshui* (literally "wind and water") is the art of fixing the most auspicious place for graves, buildings, and even cities, in order to make the most of the sacred power present in the natural environment. Through *fengshui*, it is believed, human beings are able to live harmoniously with and within the natural order. The *fengshui* master uses a special compass to take bearings on the site and on visible features of the surrounding landscape, such as mountain peaks, watercourses, paths, and prominent rocks. In this way, the master is able to detect the celestial and earthly forces, the interaction of which determines the auspiciousness of the site.

Employing *fengshui* to determine the siting of graves is extremely important, because a peaceful resting place ensures the comfort and hence benevolence of one's ancestors. *Fengshui* can also be used to decide the position of doors, windows, furnishings, and so on, in order to create a prosperous and harmonious space within the home or workplace.



An array of fruit, cakes, and other foodstuffs at a Daoist festival in Taiwan.

SEASONS OF WORSHIP

The Chinese calendar incorporates lunar reckoning of time (see box, p.227) and many religious festivals coincide with the important phases of the moon. Others are derived from the agricultural cycle, since farming has been the primary Chinese economic activity since antiquity. The annual festivals also reflect ancient *yin-yang* cosmology, as evident in the waxing (*yang*) and waning (*yin*) phases of the moon and the seasonal round of growth and decay.

Other themes underpin the major festivals of the Chinese religious year: the importance of the family and the respect shown for forebears; the pursuit of longevity; the desire for blessings; and the propitiation and warding off of potentially malevolent forces. Many of these themes are also expressed in the worship of the gods and goddesses of the popular religion, particularly in the celebrations to mark their birthdays. The importance of Confucian teaching is marked on Confucius' birthday (September 28th), also designated Teachers' Day, celebrated today at Confucian temples in Taiwan with traditional costumes, music, and dance.

The Chinese New Year, or spring festival (see box, opposite), is celebrated to mark the end of the ascendancy of *yin* power, which reaches its peak at the winter solstice, and the onset of *yang*. It is a time for families to come together and renew their bonds. The Clear and Bright festival (Qingming), which follows two weeks after the spring equinox, also unites the family, but in this case the focus is on renewing ties with the dead. The spirits of the deceased are also central to the Hungry Ghost festival, which falls on the fifteenth day (full moon) of the seventh month (see p.232).

Two other major festivals are still widely celebrated: the Double Fifth and Mid-Autumn festivals. The Double Fifth falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, close to the summer solstice, when *yang* powers are said to be at their annual peak. In former times this hot season was regularly the time of epidemics, and on the Double Fifth prophylactic herbs and grasses are still hung on front doors. Plants that are pungent and possess sharp points or leaves are believed to be the most efficacious in warding off disease; the pointed leaves of the sweet flag plant, for example, are considered to act as "demon-slaying swords."

Five is an important number in Chinese cosmology, and the Double Fifth is rich in the imagery of pentads (see p.202), especially the "Five Poisons" (centipede, snake, scorpion, toad, and lizard) and the "Five Colors" (blue, red, yellow, white, and black). At the time of the festival, images of the Five Poisons are displayed on clothing, food, and amulets. They are auspicious creatures, thought to repel noxious and dangerous attacks with their potent toxins. The Five Colors evoke the creative power of the Five Elements (see pp.200–202).

The Double Fifth festival also celebrates dragons, water, and the poet Qu Yuan. In agricultural terms, the season of the Double Fifth is when rice seedlings are transplanted into the paddies, which are watered by heavy rains at this time. In Chinese tradition, this rain is caused by dragons that live in clouds and water and bless the Earth with fertility. The famous "dragon boat" races that take place on the Double Fifth reflect this lore as well as the legend of Qu Yuan, a celebrated poet who served in the government of Chu, a small kingdom of the Zhou dynasty during the third century BCE. This conscientious and wise minister gave unpopular advice and was sent into exile. Heartsick, he wandered the land. Finally, after composing his most famous poem, *Li Sao* ("Encountering Sorrow"), which summarized his ideals and his life, he threw himself into

FESTIVE FOODS

The food consumed at Chinese festivals is often chosen for its symbolism and associations. Many foods pun on New Year wishes. "Peanut" is a homophone of "life"; dates (*zao*) and chestnuts (*lizi*) together suggest "early son" (*zaozi*); "lotus seeds" sounds like "many children"; and kumquat sounds like "gold." Other foods are more purely symbolic, such as peaches (the fruit of longevity in myth), pomegranates (its many seeds represent many sons), and bamboo shoots (their rapid growth symbolizes a rapid rise in one's profession). Some foods have auspicious names, such as the steamed bread called "gold ingots" and the noodles called "threads of longevity."

The roundness of many foods symbolizes completion, perfection, and the presence of the whole family circle at the holiday. Examples are the giant pork meatballs ("lion heads") and rice flour balls (*yuanxiao*) of New Year; and the round fruits and mooncakes of the Mid-Autumn festival, which also represent the full moon (see p.266).

CHINESE NEW YEAR

The New Year, or Spring Festival, is the most important holiday of the Chinese calendar. It begins on the first day of the first lunar month, usually between January 21st and February 19th. Beforehand, the house is thoroughly cleansed of the old year's dirt and "inauspicious breaths." All the family returns home, debts are paid, and quarrels settled. An account of the old year is sent off to Heaven with the Kitchen God (see p.208).

The lucky color red is seen everywhere. Doorways are decorated with fresh images of the traditional door gods and auspicious words. On New Year's Eve, the family gathers for a meal, the table also being set for dead family members, who are present in spirit. The family talks through the night, carefully avoiding unlucky or negative topics or words. Traditionally, the doors might be sealed before midnight to keep out the evil spirits and reopened on New Year's Day. For the first two days of the year no one is to work, and there are prohibitions on sweeping or using blades for fear of "brushing away" or "cutting off" the good luck of the New Year.

The final night of the New Year celebrations is the Lantern Festival on the first full moon of the New Year. Happy, noisy crowds gather amid displays of beautiful lanterns to watch stiltwalkers, lion dancers, and people in traditional costumes.

Costumed stiltwalkers are among the crowds celebrating the Chinese New Year on the streets of Beijing.

THE *JIAO*

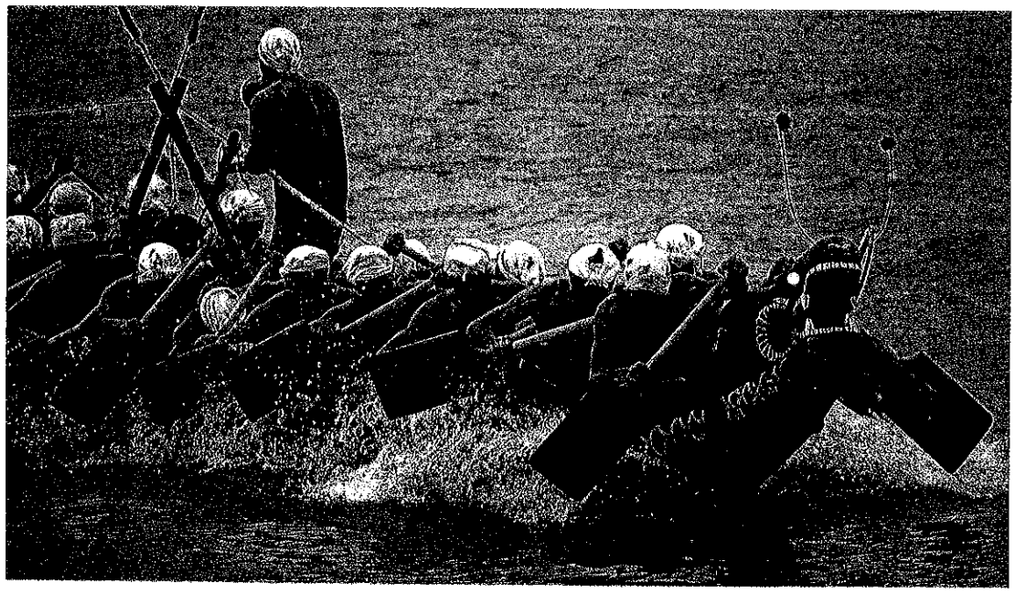
A great Daoist sacrificial ceremony, the *jiao*, is still practiced today at temples on Taiwan. It is conducted at irregular intervals by Daoist priests on behalf of a community in order to renew its connection with the Three Pure Ones, the highest cosmic powers (see p.211). The whole community prepares for the *jiao* by fasting, but only priests, musicians, and prominent benefactors of the temple witness the ritual itself. However, the people make bountiful offerings at the temple and take part in lively festivities that accompany the *jiao*.

the Miluo river in present-day Hunan province. People raced out in boats but failed to save him, so they threw rice into the water so that the fish would eat this instead of Qu Yuan's body. Tradition has it that today's dragon boat races reenact the frantic search for Qu Yuan. The rice thrown to the fish is represented today by *zongzi*, sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves and tied with strings of the Five Colors.

The Mid-Autumn festival falls at full moon in the eighth lunar month. It is a harvest festival that also celebrates the moon and the quest for immortality. In Chinese myth, the moon is home to a rabbit that pounds special herbs to make the elixir of immortality, and to the moon goddess, Chang E. For this festival, a table is set up outdoors and laden with round (full moon-shaped) fruit such as oranges, melons, and pomegranates, and "moon cakes." People gather to watch the harvest moon and to recite stories and poems on lunar themes.

Chinese religious celebrations focus on family and community rather than the individual. Other than death, when a person becomes an ancestor (see pp.230–32), the most significant Chinese rite of passage is marriage, which assures the continuation of the family through the promise of descendants. Traditionally, a marriage became official when the couple bowed before the ancestral tablets of the groom, introducing the bride to her husband's forebears. Such practices maintain the link between the living and the dead, represent proper filial behavior, and thus ensure the blessings of the ancestors on the family. There are also coming of age ceremonies for boys and girls, but these are not of primary importance, and over time they came to be celebrated just before marriage rather than at a particular age. Also significant is a person's sixtieth birthday, which symbolizes the completion of a basic cycle of time (see box, above).

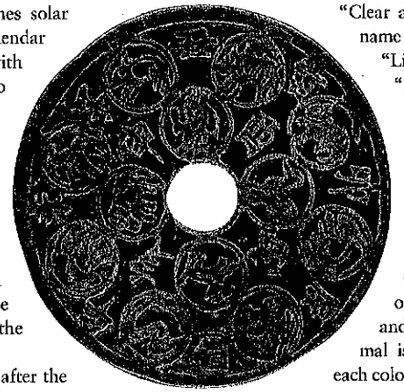
Dragon boat racers during the Double Fifth festival on the Miluo river in Hunan, in which the poet Qu Yuan is said to have drowned. The boats, adorned with a dragon's head and tail, may be over 30 meters (100 feet) long, with as many as 80 rowers.



THE CHINESE CALENDAR

The Chinese religious year combines solar and lunar calendars. The lunar calendar consists of twelve lunar months, with intercalary months added every two or three years to keep the lunar and solar calendars in step. The solar year, in which the solstices and the equinoxes determine the beginning of seasons, is divided into twenty-four periods of approximately fifteen days, called "nodes," or "breaths." They are derived from observation of the climate and the heavens, and reflect the passage of the agricultural year.

Eight of the periods are named after the equinoxes, solstices, and starts of seasons. Others evoke agriculturally and meteorologically significant phenomena, and have names such as "Insects Awaken" (early March); "Clear and Bright" (early April, hence the name of the festival that falls at this time); "Limit of Heat" (end of August); and "Frost Descends" (end of October).



The animals of the Chinese zodiac: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig. A 19th-century bronze disc.

Familiar to many outsiders is the cycle of twelve years based on the animals of the Chinese zodiac. This scheme forms one element of a wider system of cycles. For example, a longer cycle of sixty years involves the zodiac animals, the Five Colors (see pp.224–5), and two sets of symbols, the Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches. Each animal is associated with one Branch, and each color correlates to two Stems. Thus 2000 is the year of the White Dragon; 2012 will be the year of the Black Dragon. The first year of the sixty-year cycle is *jiazi*, the year of the Blue Rat, most recently 1984.

Acts of worship of the great cosmic forces, particularly Heaven and Earth, were the privilege and responsibility of the emperor alone. The proper observance of these rituals ensured that nature remained beneficial. In the imperial capital, the emperor made offerings at the Temples of the Sun on the spring equinox; at the Temple of Earth on the summer solstice; at the Temple of the Moon on the autumn equinox; and at the Temple of Heaven (see p.222) on the winter solstice. He also performed rites at the start of each season. During Qingming, he sacrificed to his own ancestors, to those of all past emperors, and to the culture heroes (see p.214).

All other rites and festivals in the empire were carried out in accordance with an annual almanac of predicted celestial events issued by the official Bureau of Astronomy, a department of the Ministry of Rites. Imperial foreknowledge in such matters indicated harmony between the emperor and Heaven; any unexpected cosmic event could be interpreted as a sign of imminent loss of the sovereign's mandate to rule (see p.204).

OVERLEAF *A girl and lion dancers take part in a traditional New Year parade in China.*

A home altar in Beijing with offerings of incense before portraits of ancestors. In wooden tablets on the altar reside the spirits of the ancestors, to whom the family burns incense and offers food and drink. At the altar the ancestors are also informed of important events in the lives of the family, such as births, deaths, betrothals, trips, and business ventures.

ANCESTRAL TABLETS

The home altar is in many ways the locus of family unity, encompassing all generations, alive and dead. It is here that the tablets are kept in which the ancestral spirits are believed to reside. Generally speaking, the tablets record the names, birth and death dates, and number of sons of each ancestor. The ancestors are addressed and treated as close family members. In theory it is the family of the senior male in the family that is represented on the altar, but under certain circumstances other tablets may be present. For instance, in a family with no sons, a woman may put her own ancestor tablets on the family altar of her husband.

The tablets go back three to five generations. As each generation passes away, the oldest tablets are removed from the altar and placed in an ancestral hall used by several households of the same extended family. Here, devotion takes place to the ancestors as a group; emotions are more formal, and indicative of gratitude to the host of forebears rather than of filial love toward the more recently departed.

THE IMMORTAL BODY AND SOUL

Chinese concepts of death and the afterlife reflect ideas drawn from all the major traditions. Most ideas and rituals may be identified as those of religious Daoism, Buddhism, or the popular religion. Confucianism is not directly concerned with belief in an afterlife, although the Confucian virtue of filial piety is crucial to understanding the life of the dead and the responsibility of the living toward them. Buddhism has its own distinctive teachings about one's fate after death; over many centuries, these have merged with and shaped the indigenous Chinese ideas. In general, Chinese funerary and other practices are more important than the beliefs that lie behind them, because the rituals represent great expressions of family unity and ethical behavior toward others.

The Chinese feel the dead to be near, and to exercise a great influence on the living. Deceased members of a family have a powerful role in that family's continued well-being. Filial piety demands that deceased family members receive a proper burial and regular sacrifices. Thus treated they become ancestors, a source of blessings and fertility (that is, progeny) for the family. This idea dates from at least as early as the Shang dynasty (see p.204). Those not properly cared for after death—through neglect or a lack of descendants—and those who die prematurely or by violence, become ghosts: dangerous, malevolent forces that need to be placated.

The material boundaries between the living and the dead are fluid and vague. Those who reside in this world and the next are composed of the same vital material (*qi*) in its *yin* and *yang* forms (see p.200). Every person has two souls, a *hun* soul, made up of *yang qi*, and a *po* soul, made up of *yin qi*. At death, the *hun* soul, which represents the spiritual and intellectual aspect of the soul, departs from the body and ascends, due to its *yang* nature; it ultimately comes to reside in the ancestral tablets that are to be found on the domestic altar of a traditional Chinese home (see sidebar, left). The *po* soul, as *yin* energy, sinks into the ground. It remains with the body so long as it has been buried with the proper rites and is propitiated by tomb offerings.

If the burial is not performed correctly, or the death was early or violent, or the soul is not "fed" adequately (see below), the *hun* soul will not rise to reside in the ancestral tablets and nor will the *po* soul descend into the grave. Instead, the spirit of the deceased will haunt the living as a ghost until it has been propitiated.

It is the responsibility of the living to provide the things the dead need to be comfortable: food, money, and other amenities. At the most basic level, the care of ancestors consists of offering incense twice a day at the family altar. On the new moon and full moon, offerings may include food and "spirit money" (see p.232) as well as incense.

When offered food, ancestors are believed to consume the "essence" and leave the coarse material part for the family to enjoy. During the funerary ritual, the dead are provided with useful items such as cars, servants, houses, cash, and domestic furnishings—all made of paper and burned so that they ascend to the ancestors in the smoke. Ancestors are offered incense twice a day on the family altar; on holidays and the anniversary of an ancestor's death, food, drink, and spirit money are

IMMORTALS

There is a long history in Chinese civilization of attempting to perfect the human body in order to live forever: immortality as understood by the Chinese was not possible without a physical body. Techniques to produce longevity, and the belief that some people had perfected these techniques, are a part of Chinese history from as early as the Zhou dynasty. Such techniques included tempering the physical body (see box, p.221), but also purifying one's heart and mind, as there was no radical dichotomy between body and soul: any means of purification and preservation would assist the quest for immortality.

A 20th-century depiction of the "Eight Immortals" of Daoism. The accounts of how each of these celebrated figures attained eternal life constitute a popular element of Daoist mythology.

In ancient times, people sought the elixir or pill of immortality, either in their own laboratories (where "potable gold" was made from various substances including cinnabar), or from figures who lived in legendary places at the edges of the known Chinese world. Two such places, Penglai island and Kunlun mountain, were the objects of quests by royalty and commoners alike. Penglai was reported to be inhabited by immortals and situated off the coast of south China. Qin Shihuangdi, the first emperor of the Qin dynasty (221–209BCE), sent expeditions in search of Penglai and the legendary medicine of immortality that could be found there. Mount Kunlun, in the northwestern border area between China and Central Asia (see map, p.201), was thought to be the royal abode of the Queen Mother of the West, a goddess who could bestow immortality. The Queen Mother of the West also cultivates peaches of immortality, produced by her trees once every three thousand years. Peachwood ornaments are still popular in China as tokens of the wish for longevity.

Those who attained immortality would live in the outer boundaries of the cosmos, flying among the stars and wandering the Earth in perfect serenity, nourished by eating the wind and drinking the dew. Some immortals are depicted as "bird men," sprouting feathers and flying away. Others would apparently suffer death like ordinary mortals, but after burial, if their coffin were to be exhumed and opened, it would be found empty except for some personal token such as a cane or a sandal.

offered in addition to incense. Rituals practiced for the dead ensure blessings for the living; they also proclaim the unity and strength of the family through time and space. Offerings show that ancestors, as family, are accorded appropriate respect and love (see also box, below).

The strongly syncretistic tendency of Chinese religion is illustrated by its ability to encompass numerous—and in some cases, apparently contradictory—notions of the fate of the soul after death. Thus the *po* soul of the deceased is also believed to descend into the Chinese underworld, or Hell, to be judged and tried for its sins by the infernal judiciary before being punished and, eventually, reincarnated. This is an ancient belief, well established before the coming of Buddhism to China in the first century CE. Buddhism added its own concepts to the existing framework: the idea of *karma* (an individual's balance of accumulated merits and demerits); the figure of Yama, the king of Hell; and the different punishment levels of Hell, in which sinners suffer to redress their karmic imbalance before being reincarnated on Earth. On entering Hell, souls are judged by the Ten Magistrates, depicted in the costumes of the old Chinese imperial judiciary, who preside over the Ten Tribunals of Hell, each of which tries different crimes. After judgment, the soul pays for its past crimes by passing through various layers of Hell, where it undergoes torments appropriate to the crimes committed. At last, the soul reaches the final court of Hell where, having atoned for its shortcomings in the life just past, it is reincarnated in accordance with all the merits it has accumulated in every previous existence. Families can speed the passage of their loved ones in Hell through offerings and good works, such as the chanting of Buddhist *sutras*.

The "books of life and death," in which every person's allotted days are recorded, are also kept in Hell. Chinese folklore contains many accounts of bureaucratic mistakes that result in a person being wrongly consigned to Hell until the error is discovered.

The soul of an exceptionally virtuous person may, rather than be reincarnated, enter the heavenly bureaucracy as a deity. The celestial bureaucracy mirrors every aspect of a typical earthly civil service (see p.208), including its potential shortcomings: error, incompetence, corruption, nepotism, tedious formalities, and reams of paperwork.

Chinese concepts of what happens after death also include the teachings of "Pure Land" Buddhism. Devotees of Amitabha (Amituo Fo), the *buddha* of the "Pure Land," anticipate rebirth in this paradise as a prelude to attaining *nirvana* and escaping the cycle of rebirth altogether (see p.193).

FESTIVALS FOR THE DEAD

There are two special holidays each year in which the dead are propitiated. One, the Clear and Bright festival (Qingming) in the spring, is designated for ancestors. The other, the Feast of the Hungry Ghosts (Gui Jie) on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, aims to placate potentially malevolent spirits.

Qingming falls two weeks after the spring equinox. On this day families unite to visit the family graves for a celebration picnic. Weeds are cleared and inscriptions repainted. After lighting incense and red candles, the family makes offerings to the deceased of rice, wine, tea, food, paper clothes, and "spirit money."

The Feast of the Hungry Ghosts on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month is not directed at family unity but rather at communal protection. During the seventh lunar month, the gates of Hell are opened, and its residents are free to wander where they will. Those with no descendants to care for them, euphemistically called "the good brethren," are malevolent, unhappy, and potentially dangerous ghosts. The Feast of the Hungry Ghosts is designed to placate such ghosts with things they need, such as sustenance and amusements (music and theater). On Hungry Ghost day, a community celebration at an outdoor altar is performed by Buddhist and Daoist priests to propitiate the ghosts. The priests exhort the ghosts to repent and enter the Buddhist Pure Land. Ghosts who do not repent are sent back to Hell after the ceremony to continue their sufferings.

The food offerings presented to ghosts and ancestors on these and other occasions symbolize their respective relationships to the living. Ancestors are part of the family and are offered food in the home or at the ancestral hall or graveside. Their food is carefully prepared, cooked, and seasoned like that of the living; certain ancestors who are particularly revered may be offered food that they especially enjoyed when alive.

In contrast, ghosts are fed at the back door or outside the house altogether, and their food is generic and coarse—a reluctant, fearful bribe rather than a caring gesture to beloved family members.

The remains of an offering of "spirit money." It is specially printed in various denominations and is used to sustain the dead in the afterlife; like other offerings, it is burned and sent to the ancestor in the smoke.

DEATH AND PHILOSOPHICAL DAOISM

Although Chinese religious traditions place much emphasis on longevity and immortality (see box, p.231), those who were more philosophically inclined had a different attitude toward death and afterlife. Rather than seek immortality to escape death, philosophical Daoists reveled in the creative possibilities of the endless shifting patterns of the Dao. They welcomed death as the time when the *qi* of which they were made would be transformed miraculously into something else in creation.

An 18th-century painting on silk depicting the 4 kings who guard the register of judgments made in Hell.

Buddhist nuns invoking the name of Amituo Fo (Amitabha Buddha) at a temple on Drum Mountain, near Fuzhou in China's Jiangxi province.

THE STATE, THE FAMILY, AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The formal teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have had a role in shaping Chinese society, with the popular tradition reflecting the ethics and concerns of all three traditions. However, Confucianism has played the most obvious role in forming Chinese social expectations and norms, so much so that many cultural attitudes derived from Confucian precepts are designated simply "Chinese."

Confucianism has been the ordering principle for the two most influential entities shaping Chinese life: the State and the family. The ideal expressed in Confucianism—virtuous rule for the benefit of the people—was the basis of the theory of statecraft in imperial China. Autocratic emperors knew that their reigns would be judged on the basis of Confucian ethics and recorded in dynastic histories for posterity to evaluate. Ministers and bureaucrats were chosen on the basis of their knowledge of Confucian teachings and their adherence to Confucian virtues.

The relationship between emperor and subject was considered analogous to the primary relationship of Chinese society: that between parent and child, or more specifically father and son. Children owed their parents absolute loyalty and obedience. They were expected to care for them in their old age and to produce descendants who would continue to care for their spirits when dead (see pp.230–233). Traditional Chinese law reflected this relationship: for example, a father was within his rights to kill a disobedient child, and a son could be executed for striking his father.

Traditional Chinese society was authoritarian and hierarchical. In Confucian thought, each member of the family and of society had a specific role. Women were considered embodiments of *yin* energy and therefore passive and nurturing, in contrast to the dynamic *yang* of males. According to this scheme, they were subordinate to men, and were expected to live in obedience to their fathers when girls, to their husbands when married, and to their sons when old. A married woman was supposed to show filial devotion to her husband's parents, with whom the couple often lived.

In the modern age, the strong emphasis on family unity and the relationship between child and parent continues, although it has lessened in degree. In China it came under severe strain during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when Mao Zedong encouraged children and juniors to denounce the ways of their elders and seniors as bourgeois and counter-revolutionary. This experience, so profoundly opposed to the tradition of filial piety, undoubtedly left deep psychological scars. Even in the officially egalitarian People's Republic, there is still a marked preference for sons over daughters—the Communist policy of allowing couples only one child to counter overpopulation has given rise to a range of methods to ensure that the child is male.

Daoism and Buddhism have provided complementary or alternative outlooks to that of Confucianism. Daoism furnished a contemplative strain and the ideal of retreat to nature to escape urban or official life. The Daoist quest for longevity is reflected in arts such as *taiji-chuan* (*t'ai-chi ch'uan*) and *qigong* (*chi kung*), still widely practiced in China and elsewhere, which aim to strengthen the body and sharpen the mind. Many other arts, such as painting, cooking, and medicine, are influenced by Daoist teachings of harmony and balance. For women, Daoism also provides an alternative vision to Confucian male domination. Philosophical Daoism favors the female over the male, and there have been Daoist nuns and adepts for centuries.

Buddhism has colored, more than created, Chinese traditions. Buddhist monks are associated with Chinese funerary rites, reciting *sutras* to help speed souls through Hell. With its promise of universal salvation, Buddhism has also provided a refuge for many, notably women, from the rigidity of Confucian hierarchical ideals. It is not uncommon for widows or women whose children have left home, to become lay Buddhists or nuns.

A WORD FOR "RELIGION"

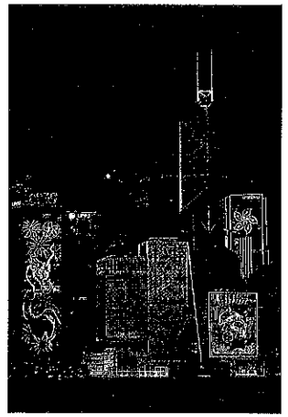
Until recently, the Chinese language had no word for "religion" in the Western sense of a particular set of beliefs, doctrines, and rituals. The Chinese have never seen Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism as exclusivistic, and traditionally refer to them simply as "teachings." However, one result of increased contact with the West from the nineteenth century onward (see box, opposite) was the need to render the sense of "religion" as applied to a belief system such as Christianity. The neologism *zongjiao* was adopted at the turn of the twentieth century; it literally translates as "ancestral (or clan) teachings."

But many Chinese practices and beliefs cannot be categorized as *zongjiao*. For the Chinese, the ways of the "Three Teachings" are reflected in many aspects of everyday life, not simply in formal "religious" rites and acts of worship. These include dealing with officials, relationships, the arts, and even cooking.

WESTERN ENCOUNTER

In the nineteenth century, China's relations with the West largely took the form of humiliating military defeats, one-sided treaties, and an unwanted influx of missionaries, diplomats, and traders. This experience, as well as the impact of Western views of Chinese culture, shattered China's perception of itself as the arbiter of civilization and had a profound effect on its understanding of, and attitude toward, its religious traditions.

Confucianism, the theoretical basis for government and morality for two millennia, came under attack as stiflingly traditional and as the underlying cause for China's political and military weakness. As the quest for modernization and industrialization became more urgent, Buddhism, Daoism, and popular traditions were criticized as superstitions and barriers to progress. But tradition proved too strong to be broken altogether, in spite of the sometimes severe strains put on it. In the twentieth century, traditional Chinese thought has come to accommodate modernity, not only in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas communities with Western-style capitalist economies, but also in the rest of China, where Communism has imposed its own pressures, often in the form of severe persecution.



Neon dragons and other emblems from Chinese traditional religion adorn Hong Kong skyscrapers to mark its return to China in 1997.

In China, the foreign philosophy of Marxism-Leninism has been shaped to fit a Chinese context. For example, although successive Communist leaders have vilified traditional Confucianism, official rhetoric about working for the good of the state, party, or collective is not different in kind from the traditional Confucian emphasis on the group over the individual.