



MORE THAN anything, it is shared beliefs which hold a culture together. The Black-haired Race maintains the supremacy of the Middle Kingdom amid the barbarians of the borders through an unshakeable trust in the superiority of its civilisation. This civilisation stretches back through the various dynasties, and into the far reaches of the past to such divine figures as the Yellow Emperor, Yao and Shun. These are the archetypes who created the China of today: who set down the calendar, established agriculture, created the Book of Changes. It is the common history, more than anything else, that leads to the unity of the Black-haired Race.

However, although many beliefs are shared, there are others which differ. While most people accept the same religious ideas, and believe in the same gods, there are many disagreements. These are mainly between the followers of the three ways: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

*Every sect has its truth;
every truth has its sect*

RELIGION

For the majority of Chinese, there is only one religion. They venerate their ancestors and offer up sacrifices to a variety of spirits and deities. The religion has no name, and only the vaguest of tenets and principles. Some people, however, devote themselves to a more specific religion. It is a distinctive characteristic of China that whatever the opinions of the followers of the specific religions may be, the folk religion followed by the majority is indiscriminate in its adoption of the gods and customs of other religions.

The three main formal religions, Taoism, Buddhism

and Confucianism, too, are not quite as separate as you might expect. The scholar Li Shiqian wrote: 'Buddhism is the sun, Taoism the moon, and Confucianism the five planets.' There is even a doctrine that the three are one religion with three aspects. Certainly, both Confucianism and Taoism revere Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. Taoism and Buddhism too share many aspects. If there is any bad feeling, it is perhaps most evident between Confucians and Buddhists.

In all cases, religion is not conceived of as personal communication between Man and the Divine. Heaven is remote, and not to be dealt with directly. For the common people, local powers and local gods are of most importance. Household gods and ancestors can be addressed directly (though with respect).

The gods are listed after the religions have been described.

FOLK RELIGION

Reverence for ancestors permeates the religious beliefs and practices of the common people. For this reason, having children is a priority, for if you have no children, who will make offerings to your tablet, and that of your ancestors, when you are dead? The tablet, on which is written the name of the deceased, is placed on the family altar, and offerings to it should be frequent. At certain festivals, the graves of the ancestors must also be visited, and respects paid.

Next in importance is the worship of gods. There is a dazzling array of deities available to the worshipper, and clearly it is impossible to worship all of them. People will therefore tend to pay respects to those who are of some relevance to the current circumstances, or those which are local. In fact, the worship of the higher levels of deity is explicitly forbidden to the common people, and is the exclusive preserve of the higher ranks of society. No commoner should ever presume to make an offering to Shang Ti, The Jade Emperor, for example.

Finally, it is essential to propitiate demons and

Buddhists believe the world is an illusion. Life is suffering. Only abstention from evil will allow a soul to reborn in a higher form, eventually to attain enlightenment.

It should be noted that scholars are often sarcastic about Buddhism. It is considered fashionable to be anti-Buddhist in upper-class circles.

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is a religion with temples but no priests. Unlike Taoism and Buddhism, which are both concerned with metaphysics and the otherworldly, Confucianism confines itself to the necessities of everyday life in society. At its heart, as you'd expect from a religion founded by a teacher, is the firm belief that humans can be perfected through education.

Confucianism is founded on the five traditional relationships described by Kong Zi, Confucius himself.

- ◇ Father and son
- ◇ Husband and wife
- ◇ Older and younger brother
- ◇ Ruler and subject
- ◇ Friend and friend

If these relationships are all correctly observed, then society will be well ordered. Confucius also stressed the importance of Names. By this he meant that people should always conform strictly to their occupation and status. In other words, the ruler should behave like a ruler, a father like a father, and a son like a son. Conformity is the essence of harmony. The model for this conformity is to be found in the conduct of the ancients, especially enlightened rulers such as King Wen.

There are two other important lessons to be learned from Confucianism. The first is the notion of the Mandate of Heaven, which derives from the correction of Names. If a ruler should behave like a ruler, it follows that a ruler who *doesn't* behave like a ruler is at fault. According to Confucius, a ruler is divinely entitled to rule, and this is described as the Mandate of Heaven. Divine order is reflected in human order. However, should the ruler behave inappropriately, he will no longer be worthy of the Mandate of Heaven, which will be withdrawn.

In this way, a dynasty may change, and as with the glorious Song dynasty, an Emperor may arise from the common people, and by dint of his superior virtue (and military prowess) ascend to the Dragon Throne.

Confucius also stresses the importance of personal conduct. His watchword is 'Do not do anything to other people which you would not have them do to you'. This defines virtue, a humane quality in which a person shows benevolence where it is deserved. The virtuous man conquers his baser instincts by showing benevolence, and is thus recognised as a man of principle.

This should not be confused with the wishy-washy

pacifism of the Buddhists, however. A virtuous man, in achieving principle, also conquers his weaker emotions. In the governance of man there are some occasions where strong action is called for. Confucius's first act, upon being elevated to the post of Prime Minister, was to order an execution. What is important is that such actions are taken, not from evil motives such as jealousy or greed, but from a recognition of social necessity. What's more, *taking* the proper action is what marks out the proper man. Success or failure are not of primary importance. While this may be related to the Master's own failure to persuade an erring ruler of the folly of his ways, it is nevertheless important. If you have obligations to others, striving to fulfil them marks you out as a virtuous man whether you succeed or fail.

A new movement has recently been growing among Confucians which infuses these ideas with more religious expression. Some say that it takes ideas from both Taoism and Buddhism and applies them to its own ends. This movement of New Confucianism seems to oppose the social Reform movement started by Wang Anshi. While asserting that man is essentially good, it stresses the importance of the Ethics, morals and beliefs of the past.

Although there are temples which could be described as Confucian—in particular the Imperial Shrines at which the Emperor performs the Rites, and the Temple of the City God—there are no Confucian priests. Their role is filled by the magistrates and mandarins of the bureaucracy, who occasionally have to perform temple ceremonies as a part of their duties.

It is perfectly possible to be an upright Confucian, and nevertheless dabble in Taoism. Lao Zi is regarded as highly by Confucians as by Taoists. Buddhism is a different matter. As a foreign religion, which encourages citizens to abdicate their social ties and responsibilities and lead an unproductive life in a monastery, it is not considered worthy of respect.

TAOISM

The religion of Taoism glorifies chaos, the primordial, childlike state of affairs before human society evolved. Thus, for the Taoists, nature is worthy of more respect than human society, and the ultimate goal of a Taoist is withdrawal from the world of Man.

It goes beyond this, however. Taoism has taken up the popular quest for Immortality. Although sages have searched for the secrets of longevity for centuries, it was the success of the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling which led to that search becoming associated almost entirely with Taoism. Zhang was adept at driving out demons and performing other miracles, finally ascending to Heaven in broad daylight, a particularly spectacular method of achieving immortality. Since then, there has been a continual line of Celestial Masters living on Dragon and Tiger mountain in East Jiangnan.

What is the Tao? It is not an entity. It cannot be

MY LORD THUNDER

DRAGON KINGS

DOOR GODS

SNIFFING & PUFFING GENERALS

CAI SHEN, GOD OF WEALTH

YAN LUO, LORD OF HELL

KUAN YIN, BODDHISATTVA

PU XIAN, BODDHISATTVA

DI CANG, BODDHISATTVA

WEN SHU, BODDHISATTVA

*There is no highway to the heavens,
there is no doorway to the earth*

THE OTHERWORLD

Heaven, Yan Luo's Underworld, the Dragon Realms, the Islands of the Immortals and Mount Kunlun—all of these realms comprise the Otherworld. It is the dwelling place of spirits, ghosts, deities and immortals. It is all around us, invisible, inaccessible, but...*there*.

The topography of the Otherworld is complex, and certainly beyond the grasp of mere human intellect. However it is clear that it comprises a number of Realms, as mentioned above. Most philosophers also argue that the Land of Dreams, which is visited by the human spirit-soul, the *hun*, during sleep, is a part of the Otherworld.

One of the most important principles regarding the Otherworld is that the incorporeality of what we call 'spirits' is merely a product of their separation from our own world. If you are physically transported to the spirit

world, you find that 'spirits' have an existence fully as corporeal as your own.

However, communication between the realms is limited. Under normal circumstances, the Otherworld is entirely inaccessible from our world, the Mortal World. Contact can only be established by exceptional—supernatural—means.

CONTACTING THE OTHERWORLD

There are three levels of contact of the underworld. The lowest, and most common, is *communication*. This may be initiated from either world. No physical effect, or energy, is transferred between the worlds. However beings may become aware of sensory information from the other world: visions, smells, voices and so on.

The second level of contact is that of *energy*, perhaps best understood as the manifestation of spirit. In this case, a being manifests in the other world in the form of energy only. This is the most common way in which spirits or ghosts manifest in the Mortal World. In this case, physical action is not possible, unless the being is capable of using their energy to achieve magical effects. Also, perhaps because of the unusual topography of the Otherworld, spirits manifesting in the form of energy are only able to travel in straight lines.

The most absolute level of contact is *physical transference*. In this case, the whole being is transferred into the other world. This usually requires a very high level of magic to achieve.

DEATH

Death is, of course, the great mystery. Thus the following should be taken as a guide to the most common beliefs concerning death in Song China. In the end the referee has the final say on what happens to the dead.

Human beings consist of three elements: the *xing*, or physical form, the *po* or body-souls, and the *hun* or spirit souls. The seven *po* represent the *yin* element of humanity, and they keep the body alive. The three *hun* represent the *yang* element of humanity, and they regulate the higher functions.

Death may occur for a number of reasons. The *xing* may sustain such a lot of damage that the *po* can no longer inhabit it. The *po* may be attacked directly and driven from the body. Or perhaps a person of high spiritual advancement may have refined himself to such an extent that his *po* wither away, and the *xing* is no longer necessary.

In any case, a person dies when his *po* souls leave his body. It is perfectly possible for *hun* souls to leave the body (this happens when a person dreams, for example). If by some accident the *hun* souls are prevented from returning to the body, the body will continue to live, its functions regulated by the *po*, but it will usually be in a coma, or, at best, incoherent and incapable of the higher functions.

Earthly Branch	Direction	Time	Animal
子	North	11pm-1am	Rat
丑	East	1am-3am	Ox
寅	North	3am-5am	Tiger
卯	East	5am-7am	Rabbit
辰	South	7am-9am	Dragon
巳	East	9am-11am	Snake
午	South	11am-1pm	Horse
未	South	1pm-3pm	Sheep
申	West	3pm-5pm	Monkey
酉	West	5pm-7pm	Rooster
戌	North	7pm-9pm	Dog
亥	West	9pm-11pm	Boar

The cycle always starts from the Heavenly Stem 甲 (Young Wood) and Earthly Branch 子 (associated with the Rat). Each subsequent year takes the next Stem and Branch on the list. Thus in a full 60-year cycle the Heavenly Stems will each appear six times, while the Earthly Branches will each appear five times.

ANIMAL SIGN

The Earthly Branch for the year in which a character is born suggests an animal, and this is often considered to influence the character's personality. The personalities associated with the animals are as follows:

Earthly Branch	Animal	Personality
子	Rat 鼠	Smart, quick-witted, bold and daring, optimistic, open.
丑	Ox 牛	Grumbles but big-hearted, long-suffering, honourable.
寅	Tiger 虎	Keeps promises, becomes angry if others don't, fierce, independent, proud.
卯	Rabbit 兔	Clever and talented, moderate, gentle, inoffensive.
辰	Dragon 龍	Energetic, direct, enthusiastic dreamer, achiever.
巳	Snake 蛇	Opportunistic, wise, fighting spirit.
午	Horse 馬	Hardworking, broadminded, irresponsible.
未	Sheep 羊	Quiet, restful, patient, gentle, social.
申	Monkey 猴	Energetic, full of plans, mischievous, fickle, dishonest.
酉	Rooster 鷄	Punctual, thorough, tactful, fond of dressing up.
戌	Dog 狗	Secretive, a natural follower, intuitive, loyal.
亥	Boar 猪	Comfortable, home-loving, lustful, greedy.

These personalities are the stereotypes associated with the animal types. Sophisticated astrologers do not set much store by them, relying instead on the complex interactions between the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches.

DIVINATION

There are many methods of divination, stretching back to the use of tortoise shells. By the Song dynasty, much serious divination was done by means of the *Book of Changes* (also known as the *I Ching*). This book was so respectable that even upright Confucian scholars who scoff at superstition will set great store by its advice.

The main part of the book consists of 64 hexagrams. The hexagrams are each made up of six lines, which may be *yin* or *yang* (represented by broken or unbroken lines). The hexagrams derive from eight trigrams, the *bagua*, which are sets of three lines.

An appropriate hexagram is usually chosen by tossing coins or manipulating yarrow stalks. The coin option is the simplest: first incense is burned, and the question to be answered addressed to the oracle. Next a prayer should be offered with the inquirer introducing themselves and stating their circumstances. The three coins to be used should be passed through the smoke of the incense.

One side of the coins, decorated with writing, is the *yang* side (the illustration of a coin in the *Society* chapter is the *yang* side) while the other is *yin*. A throw of all three coins is made for each line, working from the bottom up.

A throw of one yang and two yins is a simple *yang* (unbroken) line.

A throw of one yin and two yangs is a simple *yin* (broken) line.

A throw of three yangs is a moving *yang* line, while three yins is a moving *yin* line. Moving lines should be marked.

Once you have drawn the hexagram, you can consult the simple list below for a reading. You will soon notice that much of the skill of the *Book of Changes* lies in interpretation. More detailed readings can be found in any book on the *I Ching*.

If the hexagram includes moving lines, then you should first read the hexagram as you have drawn it. This is the initial state. Then redraw it, with moving yins changing to yangs and vice versa. You will have a new reading. This is the final state. Thus the reading shows a change which will take place.

CULTURE

For a thousand or more years, China has been the most civilised nation on earth. Its science, administration and customs mark it out as a highly sophisticated culture in a world of barbarism. At the same time, it has developed a rich heritage of folklore, and a carefully maintained

year-old boys are ceremonially capped; fifteen-year-old girls have hairpins placed in their hair.

16 Holy day of Jun Ti, Goddess of Light (minor)

MONTH 4

8 Buddha's birthday (minor)

15 Buddhist monks return to their monasteries and remain confined there for the summer months (minor)

MONTH 5

5 *Duanwu*

From this day the power of the sun is declining, and evil spirits lie in wait to trap the unwary. This is the day, therefore, to hang out talismans and bottle gourds for protection. It is also the occasion of the Dragon-boat races.

MONTH 7

7 *Weaver-girl Festival*

Celebrated with banquets, and many traditions concerning women's skill at handicrafts.

15 *Hungry Ghosts Festival*

On this day, all the gates of Hell are opened, and ghosts are allowed to return to earth for thirty days. It is important to make offerings to the departed, including those who have no descendants. Lanterns and lantern-boats are common decorations.

MONTH 8

3 Day of worship for the Hearth God (minor)

15 *Moon Festival*

The mid-autumn festival is celebrated by throwing balls, and eating moon cakes as well as drinking lots of rice wine.

MONTH 9

9 *Double yang Festival*

Another occasion to visit the graves of ancestors.

MONTH 11

11 *Winter Festival*

A family occasion, primarily celebrated with a feast.

MONTH 12

24 Hearth God's Report To Heaven. Offerings are made to improve the report. (minor)

25 Zhong Kui talismans and peachwood amulets are hung up (minor)

YEAR NAMES

This table shows the Emperors and the titles for their reign periods. The name for any given year is the number

of the reign name. For example 1095 is God's Welcome 2. Note that the name given for each Emperor is that used *after* death. While alive, the Emperor is simple 'The Emperor'.

Year	Emperor	Reign Name
1064	Ying Zong	Governed Calm
1068	Shen Zong	Bright Peace
1078		Original Plenty
1086	Zhe Zong	Original Boon
1094		God's Welcome
1098		Original Symbol
1101	Hui Zong	Strong Centre Pacifying the Nation
1106		Reverent Peace
1107		Great View
1111		Political Harmony
1119		Proclaimed Harmony
1126	Qin Zong	Pacified Security
1127		Northern Song overrun by Qidan from Liao

OTHER SOCIAL EVENTS

Boxing competitions on Mt Taishan. Prizes include a flag, a silver cup, lengths of silk, a brocade robe and a horse.

HISTORY

In the beginning all was chaos. Nothing separated the world from space, yin from yang. On this point, all agree. Philosophers differ, however, on what happened next. If you ask the average farmer, however, you will learn that the most ancient deity, Pan Gu, hatched from a mysterious egg and created the earth from his own body. He fixed the earth and heaven in their places, and then died, his body parts becoming the features of the earth and sky.

THE LEGENDARY MONARCHS

The first of the legendary Monarchs of ancient times was Fu Xi, who ruled with his sister and consort, Nu Wa. Both had human heads on serpent bodies. Fu Xi discovered the Eight Trigrams that laid the foundation for the Book of Changes. Nu Wa created humanity.

Nu Wa ascended into Heaven, and Fu Xi was succeeded by Shen Nong, the son of a Princess and a dragon. The second legendary Monarch extended the Eight Trigrams to the 64 hexagrams of the Book of Changes.

ANCIENT TIMES

Huang Di

Yao the Flood

Shun

Yu conquered the Flood

Xia dynasty