

ASIAN RELIGIONS

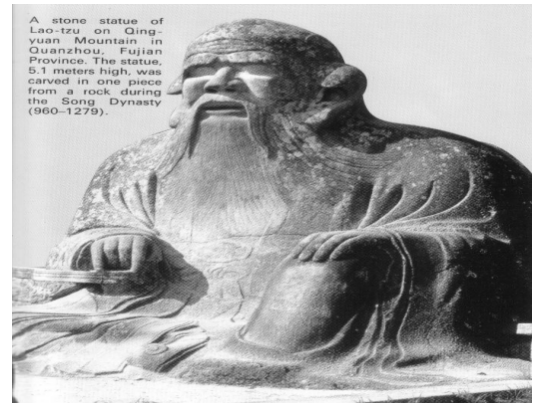
CHINA

TAOISM

"May the FORCE be with you"

- The history of Tao
 - Tao, "the path, or the way." It is basically indefinable. It has to be experienced.
 - It "refers to a power which envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe.
 - It embodies the harmony of opposites (i.e. there would be no love without hate, no light without dark, no male without female.)
 - Yin & Yang

- The founder of Taoism is believed by many to be Lao-Tse (604-531 BC), a contemporary of Confucius.
- He was searching for a way that would avoid the constant feudal warfare and other conflicts that disrupted society during his lifetime.
- The result was his book: *Tao-te-Ching*.
- Taoism started as a combination of psychology and philosophy but evolved into a religious faith in 440 BC when it was adopted as a state religion.
- At that time Lao-Tse became so popular, many would treat him as a God. (He would not have agreed with this.)

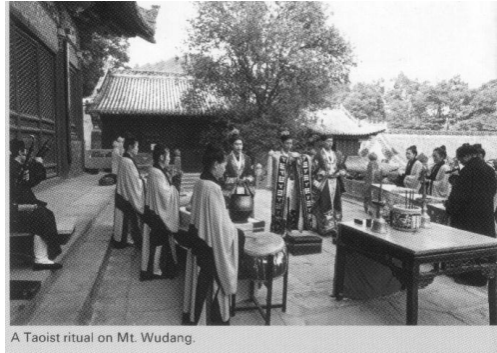


- Taoism, along with Buddhism and Confucianism, became one of the three great religions of China.
- By the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911, state support for Taoism ended.
- Much of the Taoist heritage was destroyed during the next period of warlordism.
- After the Communist victory in 1949, religious freedom was severely restricted & during the cultural revolution in China from 1966 to 1976, much of the remaining Taoist heritage was destroyed.
- Some religious tolerance has been restored under Deng Xiao-ping from 1982 to the present time.

Taoist Beliefs and Practices

- Taoism has provided an alternative to Confucianism.
- The two traditions have coexisted in the country, region and generally within the same individual.
- Tao is the first-cause of the universe. It is a force that flows through all life. "*The Tao surrounds everyone and therefore everyone must listen to find enlightenment.*"
- Each believer's goal is to become one with the Tao.

Taoist Ritual



A Taoist ritual on Mt. Wudang.

- The priesthood views the many gods as manifestations of the one Tao, "*which could not be represented as an image or a particular thing.*"
- The concept of a personified deity is foreign to them, as is the concept of the creation of the universe.
- They do not pray as Christians do; there is no God to hear the prayers or to act upon them.
- They seek answers to life's problems through inner meditation and outer observation.

- In contrast with the beliefs and practices of the priesthood, most of the common people have "*believed that spirits pervaded nature... The gods in heaven acted like and were treated like the officials in the world of men; worshipping the gods was a kind of rehearsal of attitudes toward secular authorities. On the other hand, the demons and ghosts of hell acted like and were treated like the bullies, outlaws, and threatening strangers in the real world; they were bribed by the people and were ritually arrested by the martial forces of the spirit officials.*"

- Time is cyclical, not linear as in Western thinking.
- Taoists generally have an interest in promoting health and vitality.
- Five main organs and orifices of the body correspond to the **Five parts of the sky**: water, fire, wood, metal and earth.
- Each person must nurture the **Ch'i** that has been given to them.
- Development of virtue is one's chief task. **The Three Jewels** to be sought are compassion, moderation and humility.

- Taoists follow the art of "**wu wei**," which is to let nature take its course.
- One should allow a river to flow towards the sea unimpeded; do not erect a dam which would interfere with its natural flow.
- One should plan in advance and consider carefully each action before making it.
- A Taoists is kind to other individuals, largely because such an action tends to be reciprocated.
- Taoists believe that "*people are compassionate by nature...left to their own devices [they] will show this compassion without expecting a reward.*"



■ Yin Yang

- This is a well known Taoist symbol. *"It represents the balance of opposites in the universe. When they are equally present, all is calm. When one is outweighed by the other, there is confusion and disarray."*
- One source explains that it was derived from astronomical observations which recorded the shadow of the sun throughout a full year.

- The two swirling shapes inside the symbol give the impression of change -- the only constant factor in the universe.
- One tradition states that Yin (or Ying; the dark side) represents the breath that formed the earth. Yang (the light side) symbolizes the breath that formed the heavens.
- *"The most traditional view is that 'yin' represents aspects of the feminine: being soft, cool, calm, introspective, and healing... and 'yang' the masculine: being hard, hot, energetic, moving, and sometimes aggressive. Another view has the 'yin' representing night and 'yang' day."*

- However, since nothing in nature is purely black or purely white, the symbol includes a small black spot in the white swirl, and a corresponding white spot in the black swirl.
- Ultimately, the 'yin' and 'yang' can symbolize any two opposing forces in nature.
- Taoists believe that humans intervene in nature and upset the balance of Yin and Yang.

Tai Chi

- There is a long history of involvement by Taoists in various exercise and movement techniques.
- Tai chi in particular works on all parts of the body. It *"stimulates the central nervous system, lowers blood pressure, relieves stress and gently tones muscles without strain. It also enhances digestion, elimination of wastes and the circulation of blood. Moreover, tai chi's rhythmic movements massage the internal organs and improve their functionality."*
- Traditional Chinese medicine teaches that illness is caused by blockages or lack of balance in the body's "chi" (intrinsic energy).
- Tai Chi is believed to balance this energy flow.



Taoists practicing martial arts on Mt. Wudang.

CONFUCIANISM

- K'ung Fu Tzu, aka Confucius, was born in 551 BC in the state of Lu. He lived during the Chou dynasty, an era known for its moral laxity.
- Later in life, he wandered through many states of China, giving advice to their rulers & accumulating a small band of students during this time.
- The last years of his life were spent back in Lu, where he devoted himself to teaching.
- His writings deal primarily with individual morality and ethics, and the proper exercise of political power by the rulers.

- In China, and some other areas in Asia, the social ethics and moral teachings of Confucius are blended with the Taoists communion with nature and Buddhists concepts of the afterlife, to form a set of complementary, peacefully co-existent and ecumenical religions.



Confucian Temple at Biyong



Confucian Beliefs

- Ethical teachings include the following values:
 - **Li**: includes ritual, propriety, etiquette, etc.
 - **Hsiao**: love within the family: love of parents for their children and of children for their parents
 - **Yi**: righteousness
 - **Xin**: honesty and trustworthiness
 - **Jen**: benevolence, humaneness towards others; the highest Confucian virtue
 - **Chung**: loyalty to the state, etc.

Confucian Practices

- Confucianism does not contain all of the elements of some other religions, like Christianity.
- It is primarily an ethical system to which rituals at important times during one's lifetime have been added.
- Since the time of the Han dynasty (206 AD) four (4) life passages have been recognized and regulated by Confucian tradition.

Birth

- The **T'ai-shen** (spirit of the fetus) protects the expectant woman and deals harshly with anyone who harasses the mother to be.
- A special procedure is followed when the placenta is disposed of.
- The mother is given a special diet and is allowed rest for a month after delivery.
- The mother's family of origin supplies all the items required by the baby on the first, fourth and twelfth monthly anniversary of the birth.

Becoming an Adult

- This life passage is no longer being celebrated, except in traditional families.
- It takes the form of a group meal in which the young adult is served chicken.
- Basically, no more "birthdays".

Marriage

- Is recognized by 6 separate steps:
 - **Proposal:** the couple exchange the "8 characters": the year, month, day and hour of each of their births. If any unpropitious event occurs within the bride-to-be's family during the next three days, then the woman is believed to have rejected the proposal.
 - **Engagement:** after the wedding day is chosen, the bride announces the wedding with invitations and a gift of cookies made in the shape of the moon.

- **Dowry:** This is carried to the groom's home in a solemn procession. The bride-price is then sent to the bride by the groom's parents. Gifts by the groom to the bride, equal in value to the dowry, are sent to her.
- **Procession:** The groom visits the bride's home and brings her back to his place, with much fanfare.
- **Marriage and Reception:** The couple recite their vows, toast each other with wine, and then take center stage at a banquet.
- **Morning after:** The bride serves breakfast to the groom's parents, who then reciprocate.

Death

- Relatives cry out aloud to inform the neighbors.
- The family starts mourning and puts on clothes made of a coarse material.
- The corpse is washed and placed in a coffin.
- Mourners bring incense and money to offset the cost of the funeral.
- Food and significant objects of the deceased are placed into the coffin.
- A Buddhist or Taoist priest (or even a Christian minister) performs the burial ritual.
- Friends and family follow the coffin to the cemetery, along with a willow branch which symbolizes the soul of the person who has died.
- The latter is carried back to the family altar where it is used to "install" the spirit of the deceased.
- Liturgies are performed on the 7th, 9th, 49th day after the burial and on the 1st & 3rd anniversaries of the death.

Confucian Sacred Texts

- These were assembled by **Chu Hsi** (1130-1200 AD) during the Sung dynasty.
- The **Si Shu** or Four Books
 - **Lun Yu** the Analects of Confucius
 - **Chung Yung** or the Doctrine of the Mean
 - **Ta Hsueh** or the Great Learning
 - **Meng Tzu** the writings of Meng Tzu (371-289 BCE) a philosopher who, like Confucius, traveled from state to state conversing with the government rulers

- The **Wu Jing** or Five Classics
 - **Shu Ching** or Classic of History: writings and speeches from ancient Chinese rulers
 - **Shih Ching** or Classic of Odes: 300 poems and songs
 - **I Ching** or Classic of Changes: the description of a divinatory system involving 64 hexagrams.
Ch'un Ch'iu or Spring and Autumn Annals: a history of the state of Lu from 722 to 484 BC.
 - **Li Ching** or Classic of Rites: a group of three books on the **LI** the rites of propriety.

Japan

SHINTO

The Way of the Gods

Brief history

- Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion. Starting about 500 BC, possibly earlier.
- It was originally "*an amorphous mix of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism.*"
- The name was derived from the Chinese words "*shin tao*" ("*The Way of the Gods*") in the 8th Century AD.
- At that time, the Yamato dynasty consolidated its rule over most of Japan.

- Divine origins were ascribed to the imperial family.
- Shinto established itself as an official religion of Japan, along with Buddhism.
- A complete separation of Japanese religion from politics did not occur until just after World War II.
- The Emperor was forced by the American army to renounce his divinity at that time.
- Unlike most other religions, Shinto has no real founder, no written scriptures, no body of religious law, and only a very loosely-organized priesthood.

Shinto Beliefs

- Shinto creation stories tell of the history and lives of the "Kami" (deities).
- Among them was a divine couple, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto, who gave birth to the Japanese islands.
- Their children became the deities of the various Japanese clans.
- Amaterasu Omikami (Sun Goddess) was one of their daughters. She is the ancestress of the Imperial Family and is regarded as the chief deity.

- Her descendants unified the country. Her brother, Susano came down from heaven and roamed throughout the earth.
- He is famous for killing a great evil serpent.
- The Kami are the Shinto deities.
- There are numerous other deities who are conceptualized in many forms:
 - Those related to natural objects and creatures, from "*food to rivers to rocks.*"
 - Guardian Kami of particular areas and clans
 - Exceptional people, including all but the last of the emperors.
 - Abstract creative forces.

Natural or Rock Shrine



- They are seen as generally benign; they sustain and protect the people.
- Buddhism first arrived in Japan from Korea and China during the 6th - 8th centuries AD.
- The two religions share a basic optimism about human nature, and for the world.
- Within Shinto, the Buddha was viewed as another "*Kami*". Meanwhile, Buddhism in Japan regarded the Kami as being manifestations of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

- Shinto does not have as fully developed a theology as do most other religions, nor does it have its own moral code.
- Shintoists generally follow the code of Confucianism.
- Their religious texts discuss the "*High Plain of Heaven*" and the "*Dark Land*" which is an unclean land of the dead, but give few details of the afterlife.

- Ancestors are deeply revered and worshipped.
- All of humanity is regarded as "*Kami's child*." Thus all human life and human nature is sacred.
- Believers revere "*musuhi*", the Kamis' creative and harmonizing powers.
- They aspire to have "*makoto*", sincerity or true heart.
- This is regarded as the way or will of Kami.
- Morality is based upon that which is of benefit to the group.

The Four Affirmations

- **Tradition and the family**: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.
- **Love of nature**: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the Gods. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.
- **Physical cleanliness**: Followers of Shinto take baths, wash their hands, and rinse out their mouth often.
- **"Matsuri"**: The worship and honor given to the Kami and ancestral spirits.

Shinto practices

- Shinto recognizes many sacred places: mountains, springs, etc.
- Each shrine is dedicated to a specific Kami who has a divine personality and responds to sincere prayers of the faithful.
- When entering a shrine, one passes through a *Tori* a special gateway for the Gods.
- It marks the demarcation between the finite world and the infinite world of the Gods.



- **Torii**
- One or more torii gates mark the approach and entrance to a shrine. They come in various colors and are made of various materials. Most torii, however are made of wood, and many are painted orange and black.



- **Purification through**
Found near the entrance, the water of these fountains is used for purification.
- You are supposed to clean your hands & mouth before approaching the main hall

- In the past, believers practiced "*misogi*," the washing of their bodies in a river near the shrine.
- In recent years they only wash their hands and wash out their mouths in a wash basin provided within the shrine grounds.
- Believers respect animals as messengers of the Gods.
- A pair of statues of "*Koma-inu*" (guard dogs) face each other within the temple grounds.
- Shrine ceremonies, which include cleansing, offerings, prayers, and dances are directed to the Kami.



- **Komainu** Komainu are a pair of guardian dogs or lions, often found on each side of a shrine's entrance. In the case of Inari Shrines, they are foxes rather than dogs.



- Depending on the shrine's architecture style, the main hall (*honden*) and offering hall (*haiden*) are two separate buildings or combined into one building.
- The main hall's innermost chamber contains the shrine's sacred object, while visitors make their prayers and offerings at the offering hall.

- *Kagura* are ritual dances accompanied by ancient musical instruments.
- The dances are performed by skilled and trained dancers.
- They consist of young virgin girls, a group of men, or a single man.
- *Mamori* are charms worn as an aid in healing and protection.
- They come in many different forms for various purposes.
- An altar, the "*Kami-dana*" (Shelf of Gods), is given a central place in many homes.

- Seasonal celebrations are held at spring planting, fall harvest, and special anniversaries of the history of a shrine or of a local patron spirit.
- A secular, country-wide **National Founding Day** is held on FEB-11 to commemorate the founding of Japan.
- Other festivals include:
 - JAN 1-3 Shogatsu (New Year)
 - MAR-3 Hinamatsuri (Girls' festival)
 - MAY-5 Tango no Sekku (Boys' festival)
 - JUL-7 Hoshi Matsuri (Star festival).

- Followers are expected to visit Shinto shrines at the times of various life passages. For example, the *Shichigosan Matsuri* involves a blessing by the shrine Priest of girls aged 3 & 7 and boys aged 5. It is held on NOV-15.
- Many followers are involved in the "offer a meal movement," in which each individual bypasses a breakfast (or another meal) once per month and donates the money saved to their religious organization for international relief and similar activity.
- *Origami* ("Paper of the spirits"): This is a Japanese folk art in which paper is folded into beautiful shapes. They are often seen around Shinto shrines. Out of respect for the tree spirit that gave its life to make the paper, origami paper is never cut.

Forms of Shinto

- **Koshitsu Shinto** (Shinto of the Imperial House)
 - Involves rituals performed by the emperor, who the Japanese Constitution defines to be the "symbol of the state and of the unity of the people."
 - The most important ritual is Niinamesai, which makes an offering to the deities of the first fruits of each year's grain harvest.
 - Male and female clergy (Shoten and Nai-Shoten) assist the emperor in the performance of these rites.

- **Jinja Shinto:** (Shinto of the Shrine)
 - This is the largest Shinto group.
 - It was the original form of the religion; its roots date back into pre-history.
 - Until the end of World War II, it was closely aligned with State Shinto.

- **State Shinto**
 - The Emperor of Japan was worshipped as a living God.
 - Almost all shrines in Japan are members of *Jinja Honcho*, the *Association of Shinto Shrines*. It currently includes about 80,000 shrines as members.
 - The association urges followers of Shinto
 - *To be grateful for the blessings of Kami and the benefits of the ancestors, & to be diligent in the observance of the Shinto rites, applying oneself to them with sincerity, brightness, and purity of heart.*
 - *To be helpful to others and in the world at large through deeds of service without thought of rewards, and to seek the advancement of the world as one whose life mediates the will of Kami.*
 - *To bind oneself with others in harmonious acknowledgment of the will of the emperor, praying that the country may flourish and that other peoples too may live in peace and prosperity.*

- **Kyoha Shinto** aka **Shuha Shinto** (Sectarian Shinto)
 - This consists of 13 sects which were founded by individuals since the start of the 19th century.
 - Each sect has its own beliefs and doctrines.
 - Most emphasize worship of their own central deity; some follow a near-monotheistic religion.

- **Minzoku Shinto** or Folk Shinto
 - This is not a separate Shinto group; it has no formal central organization or creed.
 - It is seen in local rural practices and rituals, e.g. small images by the side of the road, agriculture rituals practiced by individual families, etc.
 - A rural community will often select a layman annually, who will be responsible for worshipping the local deity.

Shinto texts

- Many texts are valued in the Shinto religion.
- Most date from the 8th century AD.
 - **Kojiki** (Record of Ancient Matters)
 - **Rokkokushi** (Six National Histories)
 - **Shoku Nihongi** and its **Nihon Shoki** (Continuing Chronicles of Japan)
 - **Jinno Shotoki** (a study of Shinto and Japanese politics and history) written in the 14th century.