

Chinese Religion and Culture



How the “Three Teachings” shaped Chinese culture.

Although China today, under communism, is officially an atheist country, hundreds of millions of Chinese are still religious, most of them practicing their beliefs and rituals which originated thousands of years ago. One would say that the traditional religion of China is a blend of the “Three Teachings”:

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Each of these religions are distinct but often borrow practices and beliefs from each other. Let’s examine each one:

Confucianism is a way of life modeled after the philosophical teachings of Confucius, also known as Lao Tze or Laozi. Confucius taught the importance of family and filial piety, being good to one’s parents. This has always been a key virtue of Chinese culture. Confucianism also believe that humans are fundamentally good and the cultivation of this virtue through personal and communal endeavor is the law of heaven. Lum Sai Ho Tong, as a benevolent society, embodies the teachings of Confucius.



Taoism emphasize living in harmony with the “Tao”. The Tao (or the “Way”) is the universe or the way of nature. Taoists believe that being one with the Tao will bring peace and harmony to oneself. The Taoist symbol, taiji (tai chi), illustrates how opposing forces in nature, like man and woman, or, summer and winter, are actually

complementary, interlocking and interdependent to each other, bringing balance to the universe and thus harmony. This is the underlying principle of the martial art, Tai chi. Taoism differs from Confucianism in that Confucius thought is rigid and believes in order. Taoism embraces chaos and believes that each individual must find their own “way”. Taoists do believe in the concept of God but the Taoist god is usually a tangible being like an enlightened immortal that will guide you, or provide you inspiration in finding your path. One of the Taoist gods is our very own patron saint, Tin Hau Sung Mu, also known as Mazu. Tin Hau, goddess of the seas, is also referred to as the Queen of Heaven.

Buddhism originated in India and is based on the teachings of Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. The basic doctrine of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truths:

- 1) existence is suffering
- 2) suffering is caused by cravings and attachment
- 3) there is a cessation of suffering (nirvana)
- 4) there is a path to nirvana. This path is achieved through ethics, meditation, and wisdom.

Chinese Buddhism is Mahayana Buddhism but differs in that they believe that Buddha is a god. Chinese Buddhists teach that one must be kind and compassionate to every living being, and the world with the goal of being happy.

Legend has it that Buddha traveled to China and visited the Shaolin Monastery. After he criticized the Shaolin monks and their practices, he was asked to leave. Not to be dissuaded, Buddha spent 9 years in a nearby cave meditating. Impressed by his religious prowess, the Shaolin monks accepted him back into the monastery and started to follow his teachings.

By understanding the teachings of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, one can see how together these religions have shaped Chinese culture.