

When Buddhism first reached China, many Chinese saw it as a foreign religion. They could not understand the vague concept of nirvana. Also, they criticized people who abandoned their families to become monks and nuns.

In time, Buddhism blended with Chinese beliefs and values. Nirvana became the Western Heaven, reflecting Chinese ideas about the afterlife. Chinese Buddhists emphasized Confucian ideas of proper behavior and respect for family and ancestors. They also absorbed Daoist views of nature. (See Connections With Literature, page 805, "Poems by Wang Wei.")

Diverse beliefs. The Chinese could accept diverse ideas. As a result, many Chinese followed Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian beliefs at the same time. Confucianism and Daoism were concerned with ethics and living in harmony with nature, including the gods and spirits that were believed to be everywhere. Although temples and ceremonies developed around both schools of thought, neither of them was a true religion as Buddhism was.

SECTION 2 REVIEW

- Identify:** (a) Mandate of Heaven, (b) Lao Zi, (c) Han Feizi.
- Define:** (a) ideograph, (b) dynastic cycle, (c) filial piety.
- What were three achievements of the Shang civilization?
- How did the Mandate of Heaven explain the rise of the Zhou?
- (a) What were the three main schools of thought that developed in China? (b) What values did each school emphasize?
- Why did Buddhism appeal to the Chinese?
- Synthesizing Information** How is the spread of Buddhism to China an example of cultural diffusion?
- Writing Across Cultures** Write a dialogue in which the speakers debate whether Confucian ideas would support American democracy.

3

PATTERNS OF LIFE

FIND OUT

What factors affected a person's status in Chinese society?

How did the lives of gentry and peasants differ?

What values did Chinese families teach?

What attitudes did the Chinese have toward women?

“Work, work—from the rising sun
Till sunset comes and the day is done
I plow the sod
And break up the clod,
And meat and drink both come to me
So what care I for the powers that
be? ”

This folk verse suggests the gulf that separated China's rulers from the peasants. For peasants, survival was a constant struggle. They worked very hard to make a living from the land. Wars, famine, earthquakes, and taxes added to their hardships. When those hardships became unbearable, the peasants rose in revolt.

In general, Chinese peasants were self-sufficient and self-reliant. They had little contact with distant rulers. "Heaven is high and the emperor is far away," was a common saying. Peasants relied on their families rather than their rulers to solve the problems of survival.

Social Classes

In traditional Chinese society, all people were not equal. According to Confucian ideas, a person's age, sex, education, and occupation all affected his or her place in society.

Young people had to respect their elders. Women were inferior to men. Scholars held the highest positions in society. Peasants who worked the land were more valuable than people who simply traded goods or fought China's battles.

These beliefs shaped the social system of traditional China. At the top of China's society were the gentry, followed by the peasants. Below them were the artisans and merchants. Soldiers had very low status in this society.

Gentry. The gentry were wealthy landowners who had been educated in the Confucian classics. They were the leisure class, and they looked down on those who did physical labor. To show that they did not have to work with their hands, the gentry allowed their fingernails to grow very long.

The gentry produced most of the scholars, who became government officials. They collected taxes, kept the peace, and advised the emperor. In theory, if not always in practice, the scholar officials admired the Confu-

cian virtues of respect, obedience, and service to the state.

The gentry had the time and wealth to support the arts. They often painted or composed poems. In lavish ceremonies, they carried out the traditional rituals required to honor their ancestors.

Peasants. The vast majority of people were peasants. Some owned and worked small plots of land, and a few were comparatively rich. Others were tenant farmers who had to pay part of each harvest to the landowners. Still others were landless laborers. Besides working the land, many peasants made and sold simple tools, furniture, and cloth.

Peasants lived in villages surrounded by farmland. Most of the time, the emperor's officials did not interfere with their affairs. The village headman, together with heads of families, kept order and resolved disputes. Most peasants paid their taxes but otherwise avoided contact with the imperial government. They feared its harsh system of justice and punishment.



Tea Farmers In this vase painting, women and men are tending tea plants. Tea cultivation probably began in China and then spread to Japan and Southeast Asia. The first description of tea appears in a Chinese dictionary of the 300s B.C. Buddhist priests encouraged people to drink tea instead of alcoholic drinks.

Interdependence How might the use of tea have been spread from China to other lands?

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Despite the hardships of their lives, peasants did have some leisure. They celebrated festivals such as the New Year and enjoyed tales told by wandering storytellers. Events such as marriages, funerals, and religious festivals also enlivened country life.

Social mobility. Although they had low status in Confucian society, artisans and merchants played an important role in China. They produced the goods demanded by both the wealthy and foreign traders. Sometimes, they gained great wealth.

Artisans, merchants, and even peasant families could move up in society. To do so, they used their wealth to educate their sons. If these young men passed the examinations, they might become government officials. Sometimes a village supported an intelligent young boy so that he could get an education. In this way, lower-class families could rise in society.

Family Life

In the *Analects*, Confucius stressed the importance of family, respect for elders, duty, and harmony. These values reflected China's needs as a farming society. Only by working together could a Chinese family produce what it needed to survive. To help the family, younger members had to respect their elders, and women had to obey men. Although women had an inferior position, they deserved the loyalty and respect of their children. (See Connections With Literature, page 806, "The Analects.")

Joint family. The joint family was the ideal in China. It included many generations. The oldest male had the most authority. Few families achieved the ideal, however. Poor families lost many people to death and disease, and many children died young. Only the strongest family members survived to old age.

Among the gentry, families might include several generations. When the head of the family died, his sons and their wives often moved away to set up their own households.

Filial piety. From birth, children learned to put the family's interests before their own wishes. Parents expected complete obedience

and respect. "The bamboo stick makes a good child," advised an old saying.

Folktales supported the ideal of filial piety. One story records the actions of a dutiful son, Koh Ku. During a famine, Koh Ku is willing to let his child starve in order to feed his mother. "We may yet have another child," he said, "but never another mother." The story has a happy ending, however. Pleased with Koh Ku's filial piety, the gods reward him with a pot of gold.

Respect for ancestors. Filial piety included reverence for the family's ancestors. In memorial services, the Chinese paid respect to their ancestors. Westerners who did not understand the practice called it ancestor worship.

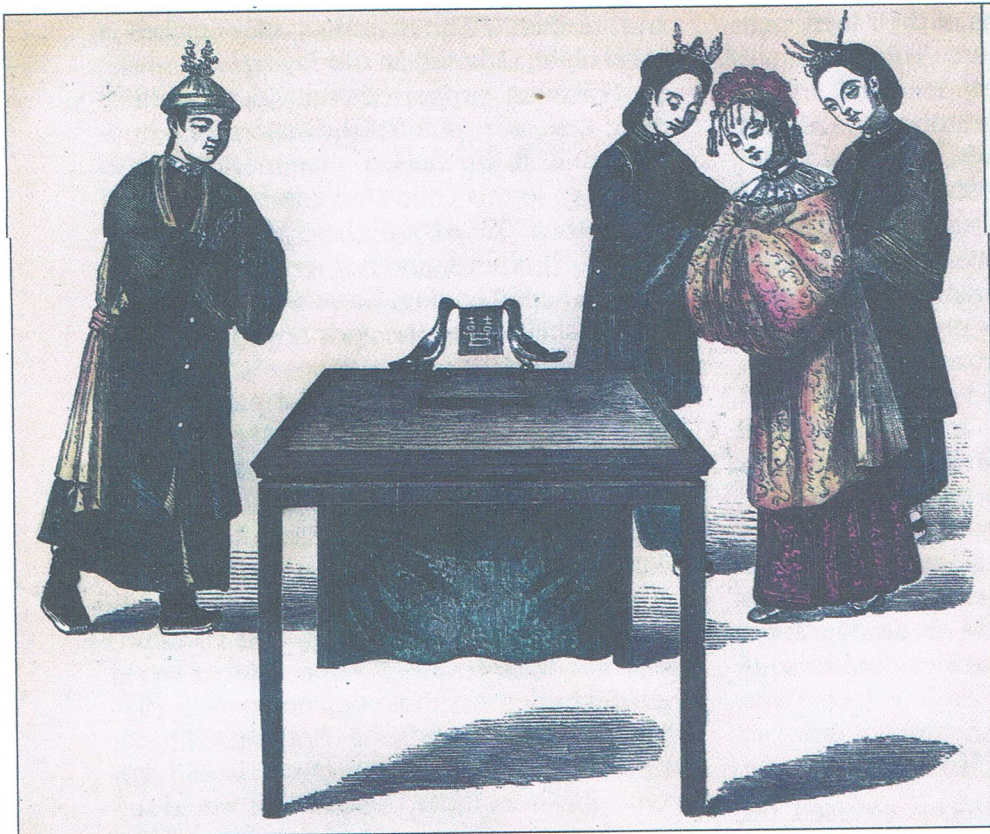
People believed that the extended family included the living, the dead, and all future generations. Ancestors lived in another world but depended on their descendants to provide them with food and clothing. Without these necessities, the ancestors would become ghosts and their descendants would suffer. Throughout the year, the family offered food and clothing to their ancestors. A family must have sons to carry on such rituals.

Marriage. In traditional China, as elsewhere around the world, parents arranged marriages for their children. Through marriage, the gentry strengthened their position in society. A boy's family would examine the resources of a possible bride's family. Among peasants, a man looked for a woman who could work hard and bear him many children.

Before a marriage took place, the families consulted their ancestors for approval of their choice. A go-between worked out the details of the marriage, such as the dowry that the bridegroom would pay the bride's family. Priests studied the birth dates of the girl and boy to determine a marriage day that would bring good fortune.

Role of Women

The Chinese believed that women were inferior to men. They valued girls for their work and for the children they would bear. They did not celebrate the birth of a daughter,



A Chinese Wedding

A bride and groom often met for the first time at their wedding. Usually, their parents had made all the arrangements. A Chinese proverb, using buildings to symbolize families, sums up this tradition in these words: "When doorways match and houses pair, a marriage may be settled there." **Culture** How did arranged marriages suit the ideals of Chinese family life?

however. When she married, she left the family and became a part of her husband's family.

A young bride had to obey her husband's mother. Under the guidance of her mother-in-law, she learned the ways of her new home. If she gave birth to a son, she gained respect. Some mothers-in-law were harsh and cruel to their sons' wives. Because of filial piety, neither a son nor his wife could criticize his mother's behavior. In time, however, a woman became the head of her own household.

Sometime in about A.D. 950, the Chinese adopted the practice of binding women's feet to keep them small. The custom probably began at court, but it spread to many parts of China. Peasants also accepted the custom, even though it limited their freedom of movement.

Only women with bound feet were thought to be beautiful. Parents knew that foot-binding caused pain. However, they feared that they would not be able to find a husband for a daughter who had large feet.

SECTION 3 REVIEW

1. What were the main social classes in traditional China?
2. Describe three ways in which the life of the gentry differed from that of the peasants.
3. (a) List three values of the traditional Chinese family. (b) How did these values reflect the needs of a farming society?
4. How did the Chinese show respect for their ancestors?
5. What role did a young bride play in her husband's family?
6. **Analyzing Information** "In education there are no class distinctions." How does this statement by Confucius reflect Chinese attitudes about social class and education?
7. **Writing Across Cultures** The folktale about Koh Ku supported the Chinese ideal of filial piety. Write a story that supports an American ideal of family life.