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NEW EDITION

A Biblical Approach to  
**Chinese  
Traditions  
and Beliefs**

DANIEL TONG



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## Foreword

The Preacher says, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Yet we are grateful that Daniel Tong has stretched the advice a bit further. He has painstakingly produced a book which will, no doubt, be of much help to many Chinese Christians who desire to share the Gospel with their loved ones and friends, but know full well the immense complexities and cultural and religious minefields in the process. Daniel, for the sake of the Gospel, and some of the anguish that Paul shared in Romans 9, has collated issues of faith and culture in his pastoral ministry and study, and courageously shared them in this book.

Undoubtedly, the author is more than aware that some of his observations, interpretations and conclusions might not be acceptable to all and sundry. That is not the point. Daniel is, first of all, concerned that whatever the case may be, we must not shy away from difficult issues. We must, however, not hold positions and views without taking seriously and objectively both biblical and cultural studies as well as recognising the underlying influence of emotion and traditions in the faith circles that we grow up or move in.

Above all, Daniel wants to share through this book — both as a biblical Christian and a Chinese — his passion for communicating and holding on to the full Gospel message. *A Biblical Approach to Chinese Traditions and Beliefs* does not provide easy or simplistic answers to questions or tensions of faith and culture, but it is definitely a responsible and laudable

way forward. It is much needed in the midst of the re-emergence of ancient and historical cultures and religions, as well as potential religious sensitivities and tensions in this great land of Asia.

**Rt. Revd. Dr. John Chew**  
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# Introduction

Written for Christians, this book seeks to provide guidelines on what a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ may or may not engage in, in relation to the Chinese culture, its traditions and beliefs. More importantly, it seeks to provide sound biblical reasons for one's decisions. This is done in the hope that more of us may be freed to enjoy the aspects of our Chinese culture and heritage that are free from religious and superstitious entanglement. It is also done that Christians may at the same time learn to make a stand for our Lord Jesus Christ in areas which contradict the teaching of the Word of God. Between cultural heritage and God, we Christians must choose God first and foremost, always.

Our Chinese culture and heritage is rich, yet it is hard for Christians to fully embrace and enjoy it. What irony, and this, because much of our Chinese culture and heritage is so inextricably intertwined with Chinese religious philosophies and beliefs that we Christians are to have nothing to do with. The struggle for Christians lies in how we are to maintain an active appreciation of our cultural heritage, without compromising on our faith. Hence, we struggle with questions like how we are to show filial piety at funerals or celebrate the various Chinese festivals, without going against the teachings of and grieving our God by engaging in non-Christian rites and rituals. Faced with such issues, many Christians are often hurt by the rebuke of loved ones who cannot understand our Christian commitment.

There are no easy answers to these questions, primarily, I guess, because much of them revolve around emotional human and family ties. Here, I would like to request the understanding of any non-Christian who may take up and read this book. Written for Christians, this book uses words and concepts drawn from the Bible that may come across as offensive to those who are not Christians. The purpose, however, is not to be offensive, nor is it to teach intolerance toward those who hold to other religious beliefs. The goal is simply to help Christians live their faith to the fullest, while yet maintaining the fact that we come from an ethnic group with a long and rich heritage.

This book will discuss the major festivals celebrated, the practice of ancestor worship and traditional Chinese medical care. It will also give brief descriptions of the main tenets of the religious philosophies that undergird these traditions. The approach taken is to first describe the tradition, practice or belief, followed by a presentation of its religious or philosophical basis. These would then be reviewed in the light of the teaching of the Bible to present Christians with a biblical perspective of how we should view and approach these traditions and beliefs. Every effort has been made to check the facts and objectively present the original thought and teaching behind the Chinese practices discussed, as well as faithfully uphold the teachings of the Bible. Please do forgive and correct me should any part of this work fall short of fully presenting the facts.

In this second edition, I have added new material picked up since the publication of the first edition. Terms have been qualified, ideas expanded on and new material added. In Chapter 1, some Principles for Evaluation have been proposed, which I trust will help you in your personal exploration and determination of the acceptability of a cultural tradition to our Christian faith. The addition of new material sees a new section on Ghost Marriages being added to Chapter 5, and another on the association of Natural Revelation and Superstition in Traditional Chinese Medicine added to Chapter 10.

The original chapter on Practical Considerations of Ancestral Veneration has been expanded into two new chapters — Chapter 7: The Funeral and Chapter 8: The Ancestral Altar. The original chapter on Traditional Medical Treatments has also been extensively reordered and rewritten, and expanded into two chapters. An appendix on The Chinese

Concept of Hell, and a glossary and index (which provides the Mandarin terms in simplified Chinese script) have also been included. The text has been tidied up to use the standard *hanyu pinyin* (Romanised Mandarin), except for the term “*Lo Hei*” which — though the Romanisation of a dialect term — is recognised and accepted in its own right as the term for a *Chun Jie* dish.

I remain truly grateful to the many pastors who have granted me the privilege of teaching in their churches on how Christians are to view and hold to Chinese traditions and beliefs. I have learnt much from interacting with those who have attended the classes, which has greatly helped my reflection on the issues raised and discussed in this book. My Lord Jesus Christ is to be thanked most of all, for His daily guidance and blessing, and the awesome privilege of allowing me to be of some small service to Him through this book and the doors it has opened for me to teach in various churches and countries. As you delve into this book, I pray that you may do so with an open mind and a prayerful heart, with the desire to grow in faith and trust in Jesus. Search the Word of God and test all that is written in this book, seeking always to discern and obey the Word and Will of God.

## Laying the Foundation

## A Centuries-Old Debate

### **An Age-Old Problem**

Chinese religious beliefs are not new, and certainly not unique to Singapore, the surrounding Asian region and many other parts of the world where Chinese communities exist. This presents for Christian believers certain difficulties. Questions have arisen on whether or not one may bow before the deceased with joss sticks in hand as a mark of filial piety, or participate in traditional funeral rites. Many Christians would like to continue, but are at the same time uncertain about, celebrating the various Chinese festivals. Many also know of the need to remove idols from their midst but few know exactly why. This is not healthy as it leads to the fallacy of people removing idols out of fear of becoming spiritually oppressed, rather than as an act of worship and commitment to God. Issues such as these have been debated for centuries and we would be badly mistaken to think of them as a new problem. In fact, ever since missionary work started in Asia, the acceptability of religious beliefs and cultural practices has been a constant subject of debate.

In many ways, the early Western pioneers who came to the East had the attitude that they were more civilised than the people of the East. This attitude of superiority stemmed partly from the fact that the merchants and traders from the West came with big ships, canons, guns and more advanced science and technology. Many who arrived in China, therefore, did not see any need to learn from the Chinese, holding instead to the idea that they had greater knowledge to share and impart.

Unfortunately, some of the early churchmen who served as chaplains to the Westerners and as missionaries held on to the same mindset. Hence, they too sought, consciously or unconsciously, not just to convert the Chinese to the Faith, but also to the Western way of life.

### James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)

James Hudson Taylor, a nineteenth-century Protestant missionary, however, advocated the need to appreciate and identify with the culture of the people that one is trying to reach out to. To be effective in reaching out to the Chinese, Taylor believed that he first had to learn to understand them and appreciate their ways. This perspective was drawn from the teaching of the Apostle Paul, who wrote, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more...” (1 Corinthians 9:19ff). Taylor, therefore, dressed like the Chinese, learned their language and culture, and began to preach in the Chinese tongue. This requirement was applied to all who subsequently joined in his work and mission.



**Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and the Jesuits**  
Centuries before Taylor came along, however, Matteo Ricci, a Roman Catholic missionary to China and the region, was already advocating similar ideas. Ricci saw the worth of the Chinese culture and suggested that one should accept and adopt what was civilised and good in it. The Roman Catholic Society of Jesus (Jesuits) supported this idea and advocated the acceptability of ancestral tablets and the

offering of joss sticks. In this, they were supported by the Roman Catholic declaration of 1659, the *Propaganda*, which advocated the adoption of local customs and dress, along with the study of local literature and beliefs.

In the early days of Jesuit mission work in China, the Chinese found it easier to accept the Jesuits and their message, as they did not have to give up, among other things, the practise of ancestral worship. In a similar vein,

if I were to approach a non-Christian today and say, “There is no problem to your being a Christian and continuing with your ancestral worship,” I would be making it easier for him to turn to Christ. If I were to say, however, “If you want to turn to Christ, you need to get rid of your ancestral tablets and idols,” that same person would probably struggle a lot more with becoming a Christian.

The attitude and approach of the Jesuits upset other Roman Catholic missions, like the Dominicans and the Franciscans, which did not advocate any accommodation to the Chinese culture and beliefs. It did not take long before there arose a lobby to the Pope and the Roman Catholics back home in Rome to censure the Jesuits, on the grounds that they were advocating wrong teachings. Church history records this as *The Rites Controversy*, during which numerous arguments concerning the “cultural” rites, rituals and practices that a believer could or could not engage in were raised. Over the centuries, a number of decrees were passed for and against assimilating Chinese practices into the Church, the swing of the pendulum being dependent on whether it was the proponents or opponents writing in to the Church authorities at the time with their petitions and arguments.<sup>1</sup> Begun in 1633, the controversy did not see closure till 1939.

In fact, this was not just an issue for believers in China. In Korea, the earliest believers came to faith as a result of reading Christian literature written by Matteo Ricci. These believers followed the teaching of Ricci and adopted a more accepting and accommodating attitude towards local beliefs and practices. When this perspective was denounced by the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, these believers decided to obey the Pope. As a result, they faced tremendous persecution from fellow Koreans. One such persecution took place in 1791 where over 400 scholars who had embraced Christianity were put to death because they had turned away from all that was associated with ancestral worship. In 1801, more than 300 believers were executed for the same reason.

**An Overview:** Believers today continue to wonder about the appropriateness of certain traditions and beliefs in the light of their newfound faith. Differing opinions exist even among Asians, depending on their being either English- or Chinese-educated, and on their awareness of and receptiveness to the ideas of spiritual warfare. For example, an English-educated minister might view the practice of *qigong* as having

a demonic root and decide to have nothing whatsoever to do with it. A Chinese-educated minister, on the other hand, may well have no problems in organising *qigong* classes for the elderly in the church (a situation that did actually occur), viewing it to be simply a traditional Chinese form of callisthenics. The debate has raged for centuries and we should make no presumption that we will end it with this book. The good thing is that whereas this debate has been largely carried out among Western commentators in the past, more and more Asian pastors and theologians are entering into it now to partner with their Western colleagues for a better understanding of the whole issue.

### Attempted Solutions

Over the centuries, there have been many attempts to resolve the issues discussed in this book. One solution is the absolute rejection of anything and everything even remotely associated with a questionable belief or practice. For example, I know of people who have searched through their photo albums to remove and destroy all holiday pictures of themselves or their family taken against a backdrop of temples and religious figurines, etc. Another solution is to focus on the apparent good of traditional practices in the name of culture, while overlooking the deep-seated religious and superstitious beliefs associated with these so-called cultural practices. For example, one could well find traditional demon masks hanging in churches in certain parts of the third world, or oranges and *hong baos* (red packets) placed on the church altar during *Chun Jie* (Chinese New Year).

### The Roman Catholic Concept of Accommodation

The Roman Catholics, right up to today, have been fairly accommodating and open to the adoption of various practices deemed to be cultural. I know of a Roman Catholic church that would, during *Chun Jie*, purchase mandarin oranges, bless them in a service and then give them to members to wish them a blessed *Chun Jie*. Part of the reason for this openness might well stem from the declaration of the First Vatican Council (1890) that, “to hold and teach that God, the beginning and the end of all things, may be certainly known by the natural lights of human reason by means of created things ... known by everyone with facility, with firm assurance, and with no admixture of error”. There is truth to this statement, but one is not to interpret it to mean that a person may find God in and through the practices

and beliefs of other religions.

Romans 1:20 teaches us that the invisible attributes of God may be perceived in the very creation around us. Open your eyes, perceive the beauty, order and complexity of this world, and you must acknowledge that all creation did not come about by accident (be it the “big bang” theory or evolution), but by the careful ordering and making of God. The problem with humanity is that though we perceive there to be a divine hand behind the wonder of nature, we turn and bow down to created things instead of to the Creator (Romans 1:21, 23, 25). The tendency to focus on the creation rather than the Creator is a problem with us to this very day, as people are generally more inclined to turn to what they can see and feel. Believers must, therefore, be very careful and selective in their accommodation of Chinese cultural practices.

### Protestant Pride and Prejudice

Many Protestants have opted for the view that the bulk of traditional Chinese practices and beliefs are rooted in pagan beliefs, thereby advocating a total rejection of them. Sadly, this attitude is not the result of a serious study of the Chinese religious and cultural contexts or the Word of God. Instead, it may be said that one of the main reasons for this rejection is prejudice. Protestant missionaries came to Asia after fighting and debating over the removal of statues and icons within the Western church because too much attention and emphasis had been placed on them. Imagine their horror upon arrival to find statues and icons all around them. It was, therefore, natural for the missionaries to automatically consider the Chinese statues and icons as bad.

Protestants also tend to be wary of and reject much of the practices and culture of the Chinese because of the power encounters faced by pastors and missionaries while ministering to Chinese men and women steeped in cultural practices. Real-life experiences of people being spiritually oppressed and even possessed by demons because they have engaged in Chinese martial arts or rites and rituals, or have been adopted by some deity, etc. are abundant. In many cases, the person in bondage is not set free until he renounces and makes a clear break from these practices. Such experiences are not easily disregarded and do lead one to wonder if there is something fundamentally wrong with the various aspects of our Chinese traditions and beliefs.

### Navigating the Maze

Much of Chinese culture is deeply rooted in religious beliefs and superstitious practices, making it difficult to differentiate between what is acceptable and what is not for the Christian. To avoid confusion and misunderstanding, questions and problems, the easiest thing to do is simply to get rid of everything. This is not, however, the best solution as in doing so, we throw the baby out with the bathwater. To reject and dispose out of hand everything Chinese would impoverish us and simply reinforce the view that Christianity is the religion of the white man, a Western import that is to be rejected. As Christians, we know that this is not the case. Christianity is neither geographically (East or West) nor ethnically bound (Westerners or Asians). Christianity speaks of a living relationship with the Creator of the universe that is for everyone, the expression of which is largely dependent on our identity in Christ and choice.

It is important, therefore, for us to work out and retain those aspects of our Chinese culture that are good and acceptable, and discard without regret any aspect that does not glorify or runs contrary to the Word of God. There is much in Chinese culture and tradition to be appreciated, for example, the development of Chinese civilisation, our rich history and the emphasis on filial piety. We simply need to learn to sift through and divorce from the cultural that which is religious and superstitious. In this way, we may no longer be accused of being “bananas”, yellow on the outside and white on the inside — Chinese by birth and the pigmentation of our skin, but Western at heart and in thought.

### Principles for Evaluation

It is important as we seek to understand our Chinese culture with its traditions and practices, that we lay aside our bias and be open to explore the issues, holding firmly at all times to the authority of the Word of God (the Bible). In the process, we seek to retain that which is not contrary to the Word of God, reject in obedience all that is, and allow our conscience to determine how we might individually respond and proceed with areas that are open to interpretation. With thousands of years of history, culture and varying traditional practices to explore, I suggest the following four principles as an aid in evaluating and determining the compatibility (or not) of Chinese traditions and beliefs to our Christian faith.

### Origins: Fact versus Myth

*The first principle explores the origin of the cultural practice in question, to determine whether it is based on historical fact or pure superstitious myth. A tradition based purely on superstition and myth would in most, if not all, instances be contrary to the teachings of the Bible (1 Timothy 1:3-4), and may not be adhered to by Christians.*

To better understand this principle, let us examine the tradition of the Chinese lion dance (*wushi*),<sup>2</sup> in which two performers dress up as a lion and mimic its movements. The origin for this traditional art is lost in history. One story speaks of an individual dreaming of being delivered by a lion. In one version, the individual is a monk, who sought the lion's aid in delivering people from sorrow and evil. In another, the individual is an emperor of the Tang Dynasty (唐朝, 618-906 AD) who was rescued by a lion. Another story tells of a mischievous divine lion that angered the Jade Emperor. As punishment the lion's head was chopped off and cast down to earth. Out of compassion, the Goddess of Mercy (*Guan Yin*) tied the lion's head back onto its body with a red ribbon, and brought it back to life. Yet another story tells of how Governor Tan He of the province of Song defeated General Fan Yan of Lin-Yi by having his army dress as monstrous lions to scare the war elephants under General Fan's command.<sup>3</sup>

**A Biblical Approach:** We may not hold to the tradition of the lion dance on the basis of a dream or the story of a beheaded mischievous lion of the heavenly court, because these reasons rests on myths and religious beliefs contrary to our Christian faith. There might be some basis for engaging in lion dances in remembrance of a sterling historical victory over a mightier enemy, from which may be drawn the lessons of ingenuity and a never-say-die attitude. However, while certain details of names are stated, I must confess to not being able to find any corroborating evidence to support this apparently historical account of the origin of the lion dance. (If you know of any trusted source that supports such a historical account, please do drop me a line and point me toward it.) As such, our exploration into the purported origins of the lion dance does not lend any support to/for our upholding of the tradition. Before, however, you write off this practice or level criticism at me for consigning this cultural icon of the Chinese to extinction. Let us examine the lion dance from a few other angles, with the help of some other principles of evaluation.

### Practice: Context and Connotation

*The second principle examines the context within which our cultural traditions are practised, and the connotations — of the underlying belief system — projected and represented by the same.* Certain practices are by nature neutral, projecting a certain perspective only when carried out in a particular context. We are to be wary over traditions carried out in a religious or superstitious context, lest our faith be corrupted or our witness for God compromised.

Consider the lion dance, which would be performed on auspicious occasions like the grand opening of a new hotel or business and during *Chun Jie* (Chinese New Year), with the view that these performances would bring good luck and fortune. I remember watching a lion dance troupe going door-to-door, business to business one *Chun Jie*, and all they did to be rewarded with a *hong bao* was to simply step over the threshold of these shops and shake the heavy lion's head a couple of times. In addition to such occasions, competitions are also regularly held to acknowledge the ability of the various lion dance troupes, and encourage the continued spread of the lion dance.

**A Biblical Approach:** Watch a lion dance competition and we cannot but admire the great athletic ability and teamwork of the two who form the head and body of the “lion”, not to mention the drummer who helps them keep rhythm and time. Based purely on acrobatic skill, it would be a shame to lose this Chinese cultural icon. However, consider the context in which the lion dance is performed. A competition may not carry much religious and superstitious connotation. However, the connotation proclaimed by the lion dance in the context of visiting and shaking the lion head from shop to shop is definitely contrary to the teachings of the Bible. With this in mind, may we say that the lion dance is acceptable, so long as we only engage in the acrobatic aspect of the dance, and do not delve into the belief that the dance may bring us blessings and fortune? Possibly so, but let's run through the last two principles first before we make a final determination.

### Belief: Symbolism versus Superstition

*The third principle examines the various aspects and components of our culture to determine between that which is symbolic, and that which is superstitious.* Our Chinese culture is very rich in symbolism, and symbolism is not in

itself negative. Symbolism becomes negative for us when we read more into it than originally intended, thus imputing superstitious ideas upon these symbols. This is a fairly common occurrence in Chinese cultural practice.

Take for example the *dian jing* ceremony, an important component to the tradition of the lion dance, wherein a person of some social stature is invited to “dot the eyes” (*dian jing*) of the “lion” prior to its first performance, so as to animate and empower the “lion”. The eight key points of the “lion” to be “dotted” are as follows:<sup>4</sup>

The Heavenly Bell	:	To experience excellence for all ages
The Eyes	:	For vision bright and clear
The Nose	:	For the flowing of energy
The Mouth	:	To roar in all directions
The Ears	:	To hear up to 10,000 <i>li</i>
The Horn	:	To be a tower of strength
The Body	:	Where the gods reside
The Tail	:	For inexhaustible might



One suggestion attributes the origin of the ceremony to Zhang Seng Yau, 張僧繇 (AD 502-549), a painter commissioned to decorate a monastery, the Jing Ling An Le Si (金陵安樂寺). Upon completing his work, people noticed that the four dragons he painted were without pupils in their eyes. When queried, he proclaimed that this was not to be done otherwise the dragons would fly away. Those who heard him were sceptical, and insisted that he completed his work by painting in the dragons' eyes. Giving into their persistence, he drew in the eyes of two dragons, whereupon there was a flash of lightning and the two mighty dragons came crashing out of the wall and flew up into the sky. With this happening, the eyes of the other two dragons were never painted in.<sup>5</sup>

**A Biblical Approach:** It may be said that the *dian jing* ceremony serves merely to commission a new “lion” for service. However, with each lion dance troupe striving to mimic as closely as possible the actions of a lion in their dance, along with the Chinese belief in animism and the supernatural forces of nature, it must be understood that the *dian jing* ceremony is more than just a symbolic act for many. Advocates believe the *dian jing* ceremony infuses the “lion” with spiritual life, and the dance with the ability to ward off evil and bless. Such beliefs run contrary to biblical teaching, which tells us that such objects are but the “work of man’s hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat” (Psalm 115: 4b-7). This Bible passage, along with the mythological origin for this practice leads us to the conclusion that we believers are to have nothing to do with the *dian jing* ceremony.

#### Emphasis: Proclamation versus Practice

*The fourth principle draws our attention to the verbal explanation (proclamation) given to a cultural tradition, and the non-verbal implication of its actual practice.* It is not uncommon today for many to uphold cultural traditions on the basis of heritage and respect. Yet, when we actually examine the specific practices performed in relation with these traditions, we often find an underlying belief in the occult and idolatry.

To help us understand this principle, let us once again turn to the lion dance, a full performance of which would see the “lion” prancing about and ultimately rearing its head to *cai qing* (literally “pluck the greens”), an auspicious practise because of the homophone between the Mandarin word for vegetables (greens), *cài* (菜) and fortune, *cái* (财). Alternatively, the “lion” would pick up and “ingest” some oranges, “spitting out” the orange peel to form auspicious words or phrases.

**A Biblical Approach:** Forming auspicious words with orange peels and the *cai qing* practice are very creative and entertaining ways with which to wish people well. If this were all there is to the practice, we would have no problems subscribing to it. However, bearing in mind the long held Chinese belief in the ability of the lion dance to ward off evil and call forth blessing, this practice may not be as straightforward as it looks. This is especially so when many lion dance troupes are staffed by people who believe in and worship Chinese deities, primarily *Guan Gong*. The wishes behind these symbolic acts are not wrong, but we must beware against engaging in practices that advocate and encourage a non-biblical, superstitious and idolatrous point of view — in this case, with regard to deliverance from evil and the blessing of our daily life. Human effort will always fall short, but “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

*The above four principles for evaluation are not to be used independently, but in tandem.* The goal is to ensure that the ideas and beliefs promoted by the acclaimed origin and specific aspects of the cultural practise being evaluated fall in line with the teaching of the Bible. A determination of this is made with the information gleaned from the application of all the four principles presented above.

So, is the lion dance an acceptable practice? From what we have been able to discover, there is no clear historical basis for the lion dance. Contextually, it would appear that while the dance may be performed with no religious or occult connotations (as in during competitions), it is primarily performed to ward off evil and call forth blessing. The *dian jing* ceremony is to be avoided; but the *cai qing* practice is ambiguous. Overall, it may be said that the lion dance may be engaged in if we steered clear

of the non-biblical components (e.g. *dian jing*) of this tradition, but we must beware giving others the wrong impression and licence to continue this practice in its traditional form. While some would have no problem divorcing the superstitious from their practice of the lion dance, it is probably safe to say that in our world today, most would not be able to.

I know of a church in Singapore that made an attempt at redeeming the lion dance for the Lord many years ago, forming its very own lion dance troupe. Being the only Christian lion dance troupe, however, meant that this church group was not able to make any significant impact on the practices and beliefs traditionally associated with the lion dance. While their attempt was valiant the attempt to give the tradition of the lion dance a new meaning and emphasis was an uphill task from the very beginning (see Appendix B for a discussion on the possibility of Christianising our culture today). What about having lion dance as a co-curricular activity (CCA) for students? The difficulty here is that while most national schools might be secular, the trainers who run such a CCA would likely not be. By teaching the students, they would impart their own beliefs and ideas about the lion dance.

## 2

## Chinese Religious Beliefs

### Chinese Religions

Interestingly, there is no major indigenous Chinese religion. To begin with, Buddhism is not indigenous to China, being an “import” from India. As such, one will find many similarities between Buddhism and Hinduism. In fact, if one were to visit Laos, a predominantly Buddhist country, and view some of its monuments, one would find that the Buddhist images there very strikingly resemble the images in the Hindu religious epic, the *Ramayana*. So, might the monkey god of ancient Chinese mythology be a parallel image of *Hanuman*,<sup>1</sup> the monkey king of Hindu mythology? Next, an examination of Daoism shows that it did not start out as a religion per se, but as a system of philosophical thought. The same may be said of Confucianism. Basically, the Chinese practised tribal folk religion where each tribe worshipped its own provincial, city or village deities. These deities gained greater prominence during the Shang Dynasty (商朝), and as a result of migration (please refer to the section on Shenism).

### Confucianism

Confucianism (*Ru Jia*) is also known as the School of Scholars or the School of Literati. The founder of this movement was Kong Fu Zi<sup>2</sup> (551-479 BC), of which “Confucius” is the Latin transliteration. Born near Qufu (曲阜) and named Kong Qiu (孔丘) at birth, Confucius rose to Justice Minister of the State of Lu in his mid-fifties, but was soon out of favour with the rulers.