Chinese Culture

- People
- Language
- Mythology and Spirituality
- Literature
- Music
- Martial Arts
- Architecture
- Cuisine
- Leisure
- Gallery

Medicine, Pottery, Vessels, Porcelain, Tea, Jade, Vases
Overview of Chinese Culture

- The Culture of China is one of the world’s oldest and most complex cultures
- The area in which the culture is dominant covers a large geographical region with customs and traditions varying greatly between towns, cities and provinces.
People in the Culture

- **Identity**
  - 56 ethnic groups have existed in China
  - Pre-eminent ethnic group is the Han Chinese in terms of the numbers
  - Many within the Han identity have maintained distinct linguistic and regional cultural traditions
  - The term “Zhonghua Minzu” has been used to describe the notion of Chinese nationalism in general
  - Much of the traditional cultural identity within the community has to do with distinguishing the family name
Regional
- Traditional Chinese Culture covers large geographical territories
- Each region is usually divided into distinct sub-cultures
Spoken Chinese

- Spoken Chinese has consisted of a number of Old Chinese, and then Middle Chinese, for its first 4,000 years.
- Then became Chinese dialects and languages throughout recent history beginning 1,000 years ago.
- In the Ming Dynasty, standard Mandarin was nationalized.
- Not until the Republic of China era in the 1900s when noticeable result in promoting a common unified language (standard Mandarin) in China.
Written Chinese

- The ancient written standard was Classical Chinese.
- It was used for thousands of years, but was mostly reserved for scholars and intellectuals.
- By the 20th century, millions of citizens, especially those outside of the imperial court were illiterate.
- After the May 4th Movement, the push for Vernacular Chinese began.
- This allowed common citizens to read since it was modeled after the linguistics and phonology of a spoken language.
Chinese religion was originally oriented to worshipping the supreme god Shang Di during the Xia and Shang dynasties. With the king and diviners acting as priests and using oracle bones, the Zhou dynasty oriented it to worshipping the broader concept of heaven. A large part of Chinese culture is based on the notion that a spiritual world exists. Countless methods of divination have helped answer questions, even serving as an alternate to medicine.
Mythology and Spirituality (cont.)

- Folklores have helped fill the gap for things that cannot be explained
- A blurred line between myth, religion and unexplained phenomenon
- Many deities are part of the tradition, some of the most recognized holy figures include Guan Yin, jade Emperor and Buddha
- Many of the stories have since evolved into traditional Chinese holidays
- Other concepts have extended to outside of mythology into spiritual symbols such as Door god and the Imperial guardian lions
There is also evil along with the belief of the holy.
Practices such as Taoist exorcism fighting “mogwai” and “jiang shi” with peachwood swords are some of the concepts passed down from generations.
A few Chinese fortune telling rituals are still in use today after thousands of years of refinement.
Literature

- Chinese literature began with record keeping and divination on Oracle Bones.
- The extensive collection of books that have been preserved since the Zhou dynasty demonstrate how advanced the intellectuals were at one time.
- The era of the Zhou dynasty is often looked to as the touchstone of Chinese cultural development.
- The “Five Cardinal Points” are the foundation for almost all major studies.
- Concepts covered within the Chinese classic texts present a wide range of subjects including poetry, astrology, astronomy, calendar, constellations and many others.
- Some of the most important early texts include 1 Ching and Shujing within the “Four Books and Five Classics”.

Oracle Bone
Literature (cont.)

- Many Chinese concepts such as “Yin and Yang”, “Qi”, “Four Pillars of Destiny” in relation to heaven and earth were all theorized in the dynastic periods.
- Notable confucianists, taoists and scholars of all classes have made significant contributions from documenting history to authoring saintly concepts that seem hundred of years ahead of time.
- Many novels such as “Four Great Classical Novels” spawned countless fictional stories.
- By the end of the Qing dynasty, Chinese culture would embark on a new era with Vernacular Chinese for the common citizens.
- Hu Shih and Lu Xun were pioneers in modern literature.
Music

- The music of China dates back to the dawn of Chinese civilization with documents and artifacts providing evidence of a well-developed musical culture as early as the Zhou dynasty.
- Some of the oldest written music dates back to the Confucius’s time.
- The first major well-documented flowering of Chinese music was for the qin during the Tang dynasty.
- It is known to have played a major part before the Han Dynasty.
Arts

- Different forms of art have swayed under the influence of great philosophers, teachers, religious figures and even political figures
- Chinese art encompasses all facets of fine art, folk art and performance art
- Porcelain pottery was one of the first forms of art in the Paleolithic period
- Early Chinese music and poetry was influenced by the *Book of Songs*, Confucius and the Chinese poet and statesman Qu Yuan

*Pottery Art from Tang Dynasty*
Arts (cont.)

- Chinese painting became a highly appreciated art in court circles encompassing a wide variety of Shan shui (landscape) with specialized styles such as Ming Dynasty painting
- Early Chinese music was based on percussion instruments, which later gave away to string and reed instruments
- By the Han dynasty paper cutting became a new art form after the invention of paper
- Chinese opera was also introduced and branched regionally in additional to other performance formats such as variety arts
Martial Arts

- China is one of the main birthplaces of Eastern martial arts.
- The names of martial arts were called Kung Fu or its first name Wushu.
- China also includes the home to the well-respected Shaolin Monastery and Wudang Mountains.
- The first generation of art started more for the purpose of survival and warfare than art.
- Over time, some art forms have branched off, while others have retained a distinct Chinese flavor.
Martial Arts (cont.)

- China has brewed some of the most renowned martial artists including Wong Fei Hung, Bruce Lee, and many others.
- The arts have also co-existed with a variety of weapons including the more standard 18 arms, such as Dao (sabre), Qiang (spear), Jian (straight sword), Gun (Staff), Halberd, Axe, etc.
- Legendary and controversial moves like Dim Mak (Death Touch, an attack on pressure points and meridians) are also praised and talked about within the culture.
Fashion

- Different social classes in different eras boast different fashion trends
- China’s fashion history covers hundreds of years with some of the most colorful and diverse arrangements
- Fashionable but questionable practices such as footbinding have also been part of the culture
- Many symbols such as phoenix have been used for decorative as well as economic purposes

Qipao with Phoenix Graphics
Chinese architecture has long been a hallmark of the culture.

There are certain features common to Chinese architecture, regardless of specific region or use.

The most important is its emphasis on width, as the wide halls of the Forbidden City serve as an example.

In contrast, western architecture emphasizes on height, though there are exceptions such as pagodas.
Another important feature is symmetry, which connotes a sense of grandeur as it applies to everything from palaces to farmhouses.

One notable exception is in the design of gardens, which tends to be as asymmetrical as possible.

The principle underlying the garden’s composition is to create enduring flow, to let the patron wander and enjoy the garden without prescription.

Feng shui has played an important part in structural development.

- Feng shui – an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics believed to utilize the Laws of both heaven and earth to help one improve life by receiving positive Qi.
Cuisine

- The overwhelmingly large variety mainly comes from the emperor hosting a banquet of 100 dishes each meal
- Countless number of imperial kitchen staff and concubines were involved in the food preparation process
- Overtime, many dishes became part of the everyday-citizen culture
- Some of the highest quality restaurants with recipes close to the dynastic periods including Fangshan restaurant in Beihai Park Beijing and the Oriole Pavilion
- Arguably all branches of Hong Kong eastern style or even American Chinese food are in some ways rooted from the original dynastic cuisines
A number of games and pastimes are popular within Chinese culture

The most common game is Mah Jong

The same pieces are used for other styled games such as Shanghai Solitaire

Others include Pai Gow, Pai gow poker and other bone comino games

Weiqi and Xiangqi are also popular board games

Ethnic games like Chinese yo-yo are also part of the culture
References:

- http://www.wku.edu/~yuanh/China/culture.html