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The Religions of China.

IN this great country containing nearly four hundred millions—almost one third of the whole human race—there is a diversity of faith and many shades of the same faith. They may be classed however under three systems believed in by the great mass of the people—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Having already noticed Buddhism as one of the religions of India, it need only be added that although it prevails largely in China, its influence is on the wane. Its temples are crumbling to decay and no new ones are taking their places. Its priests are illiterate and profligate. The educated classes have practically abandoned it. *Taoism* was introduced by Laou-Tze or Lao-Tze—a celebrated sage, born, it is said, in the Province of Honan, 565 B. C.—fourteen years before Confucius. He taught the existence of a Supreme Being under the name of *Tao*, or the “supreme reason,” and inculcated retirement from all worldly pursuits and thoughts as the panacea for human happiness. Some of his maxims were very good; e.g., “He only can be called wise who knows himself; He only can be called valiant who subdues himself; He only can be called rich who knows what is necessary.” He laid great stress

on universal benevolence. Modern *Taoism* however has degenerated into a confused round of mystic rites which are not understood by its own priests, consisting of spells and incantations akin to spiritualism. It has developed into what Dr. Bainbridge calls “*Fung-shway-ism*,” and which he describes as the most prevalent form of superstition at the present time in China—a kind of astrology,—“The most thorough and complicated system of *Materialism* which the human mind has ever invented. No priesthood in the world has more tightly bound the people with ecclesiastical fetters than the magicians of *Fung-shway*. They must be consulted at every turn in life by these hundreds of millions. They monopolize the native medical business—which is pure quackery. Millions of farmers will not hire a boat on river or canal to take their produce to market unless the *Fung-shway* declares the voyage will prove a lucky one. They make the most money of any professional class.”

But the national religion is *Confucianism*. This is the key-stone of the whole social fabric of China. It is the system adopted by the Government as its highest law, and an intimate acquaintance with its moral precepts is required of every candidate for a political office. *Khoun-fou-tseu*, as Confucius is called by his countrymen, was unquestionably the most illustrious of