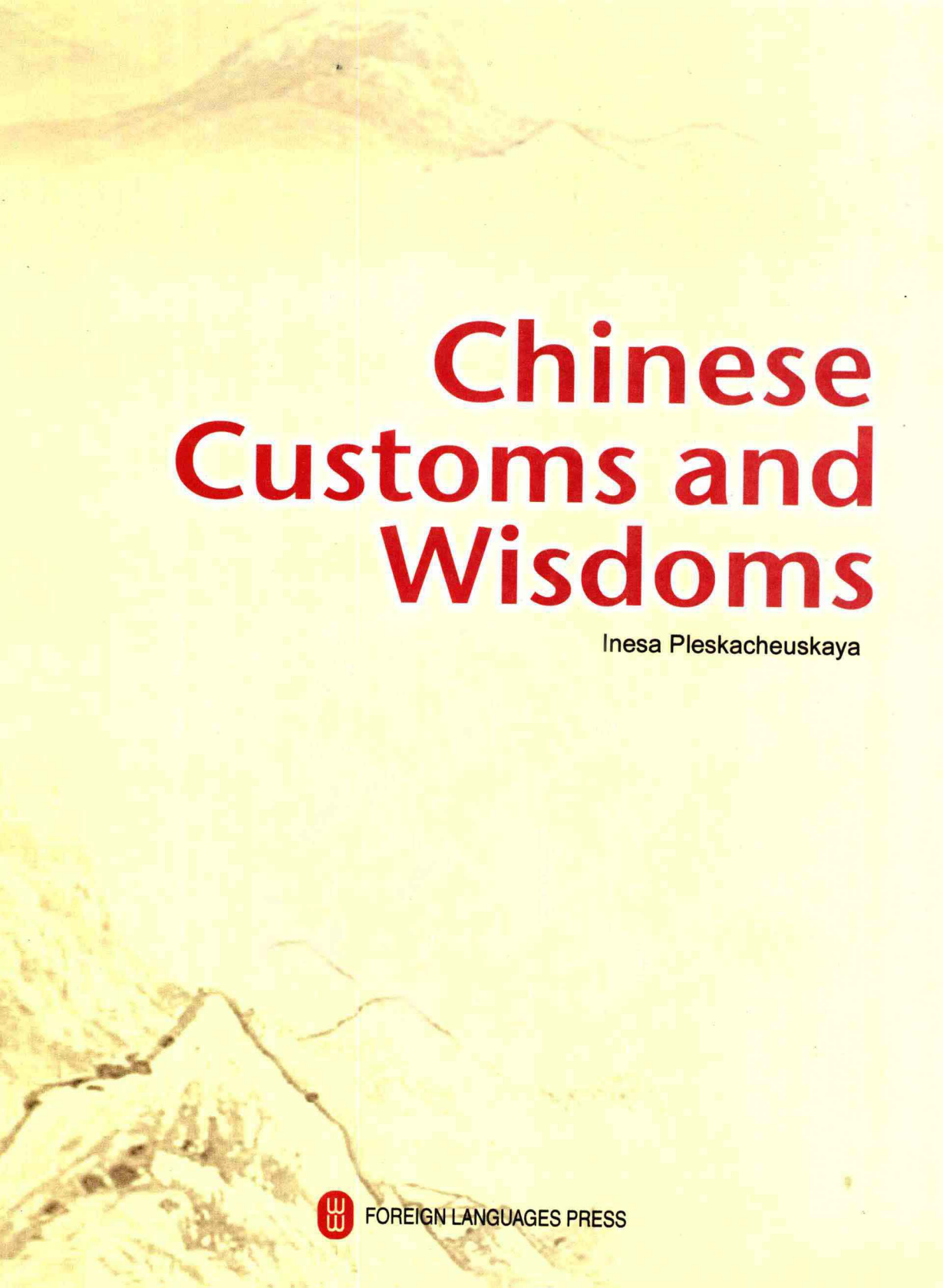


# Chinese Customs and Wisdoms

Inesa Pleskacheuskaya



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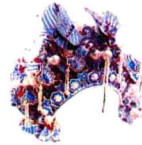
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# Traditional China





## An Ancient Country in the East

China is a wonderful country. The whole world and history revolve around it — at least it is what the locals think. In many aspects they are right as years, centuries and even millennia didn't seriously alter outer boundaries of the country. For almost four thousand years China has occupied nearly the same territory. Centuries and wars didn't change the main thing the Chinese thought about itself: This is the vast Celestial Country, the state situated right in the centre of the world. It is



Forbidden City: residence of the Chinese emperors for 500 years.





Millions of people from all over the world come to Xi'an, ancient capital of China, to see the "eighth wonder of the world" — Terra-cotta Warriors defending the mausoleum of the first emperor of China Qin Shi Huang.

exactly how the name of the country is translated — the Middle Kingdom.

The state became united for the first time during the rule of Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BC). Literally, Qin Shi Huang means "the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty." He spent nine years conquering (he preferred to think — uniting) six independent kingdoms. He personally appointed and dismissed his representatives in the provinces. Qin Shi Huang's tomb with the terra-cotta army is still impressive and justly regarded as one of the world's wonders. There are around 7,500 full-length warriors, all with unique facial expressions. So, you can imagine the ambitious nature of the ruler. No wonder he initiated the construc-





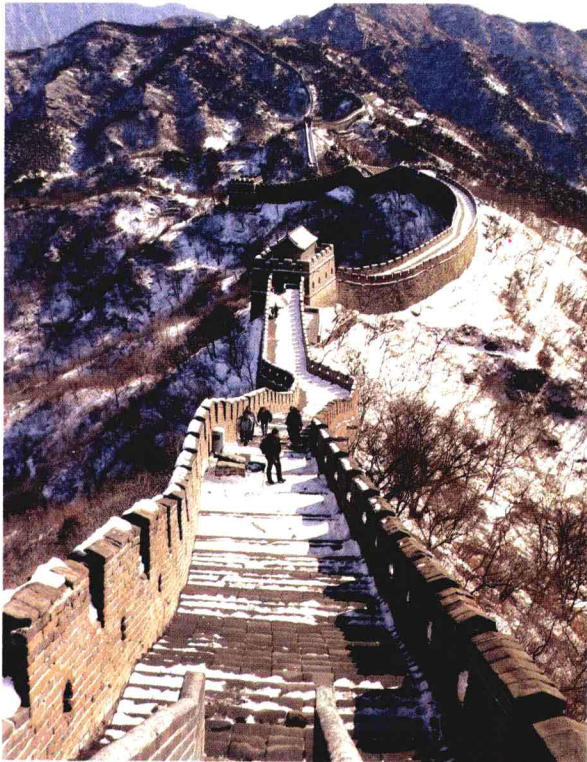
tion of the biggest engineering project in the ancient history, the Great Wall. The Wall was declared mainly for the purpose of guarding against nomadic tribes from north. Actually the Great Wall didn't provide necessary protection but it strengthened territorial unanimity of the country and promoted the unique Chinese civilization.

Experts are unanimous that this civilization got its main distinctive features during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) when the state adopted the Confucius' doctrine as its official ideology. Great attention was paid to education and the first university was

established in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Education is very important in modern China and Confucius is still regarded as the greatest teacher. Other important steps made during the Han Dynasty were: taxes decreased as incentive for economic development, free trade encouraged, single currency and standardized weights and measures system introduced for the first time in history. People of the country called themselves Hans and it is the name of the biggest ethnic group of the modern China.

Ancient China saw flourishing

The Great Wall of China today is one of the main attractions.



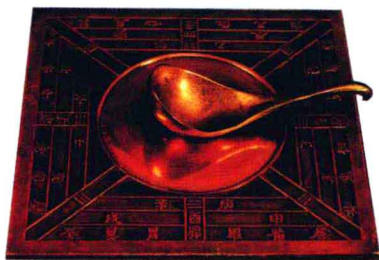


science and technology. The Chinese acquired ac-  
knowledge of iron smelting 1,500 years before  
Europeans; they invented gun-powder that was in-  
troduced to Europe 300 years later; book-printing was  
spreading all over China since the 11<sup>th</sup> century.\* By  
the 13<sup>th</sup> century a simple loom was invented; math-  
ematicians deduced algebra and trigonometry theo-  
rems unknown to Europeans during the next 300  
years. Moreover, don't forget the compass invented  
in China in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Do you know when  
Europe managed to know it? 1,500 years later! People  
in China widely used paper in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC al-  
ready and it was in China that the paper money was first  
introduced. Paper appeared in Europe 14 centuries later.  
The Chinese built first oil derricks in the 1<sup>st</sup> century  
BC — 1,900 years earlier than in Europe. The an-  
cient country used oil and gas as fuel in the 4<sup>th</sup> cen-  
tury BC, again, 14 centuries earlier than in Europe. I  
didn't even mention yet such usual domestic devices  
as a spinning-rod (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in China, 14 cen-  
turies later in Europe), an umbrella (4<sup>th</sup> century  
BC and 1,200 years later in Europe) and matches  
(577 and millennia later in Europe). As economists  
estimated, the medieval China was the richest state  
of the time; per capita GDP in the Europe was just a  
quarter from that of China's.

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century China was a stable



Painted clay figurine, Han Dynasty.



Compass, Han Dynasty.



society with a sufficient economy and a population of more than 300 million people — more than that of the whole Europe. Many modern Western historians agree that during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1796) China was the richest and the most prosperous country of the world.

The Chinese executive system was as before strongly influenced by the Confucius' ideas such as that power and high official status must belong not to the rich and noble but to cultural and intellectual elite. Word *shenshi* meant both official and intelligent person. Humanitarian knowledge was valued much more than technical abilities; for getting an assignment it was necessary to pass difficult

exams and demonstrate knowledge of classical, historical and philosophical works, poetry and calligraphy. The names of those emerged top in the imperial examinations can be seen today in the Beijing's Temple of Confucius, some of the inscriptions are of 1,300-1,400 years old. After retirement officials usually returned to their hometowns teaching children and working in the interests of the

community. For the China's 300 million people there were 27,000 officials.

It seems that as early as in the 14<sup>th</sup> century China was at the verge of the industrial revolution like the one that took



Earthquake Sensor invented by Zhang Heng, Han Dynasty.



Confucius giving a lecture.

place in England 400 years later. But the development was suspended and historians are still discussing the reasons. There are actually several of them. Population increased rapidly and great number of cheap labor force didn't promote inventions of new machines and other technical improvements. Another factor of no small importance is that the nearly perfect bureaucratic system absorbed the best human resources thus depriving other fields including science off lucid minds. And finally, there came the Mongol invasion. However, that period of time was not exclusively negative for the development of China. Under the Mongolian emperors (they ruled in China as the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368), construction of the Grand Canal connecting the North and the South was



Confucius.





Peking Opera performance staged by students and teachers of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts.

completed, foreign trade was active. Famous Venetian merchant and traveler Marco Polo lived in China during the reign of Khublai Khan and described the country as highly developed and a rich state.



Before the premiere.

Meanwhile Europe approached. Goods from the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e., China, such as silk, porcelain and tea were in high demand in the West. Europeans were greatly attracted by China's huge market. But it was not that easy to get into the desired market for the Western countries as China had stringent restrictions for contacts with the outside world. Foreign trade was carried out through just one port, Canton (Guangzhou), and the foreign merchants suffered a lot from despotism of the local officials.

First attempts of the British delegations to establish diplomatic rela-

tions with China and to carry out commercial activities failed. The emperor gave a cordial welcome to the Ambassador George McCartney but refused his proposals by saying that China possessed everything it actually needed and that the country was not interested in imported goods. Thus it is natural that Chinese export prevailed over import. The British Parliament in 1784 approved tax decrease on tea import thus making it the Albion's national drink. It virtually drained the country's supply of silver as it was the main currency for payments in the China-UK trade.

The experienced British merchants didn't waste their time looking for a product that could be in a great demand in China. That was opium. For many centuries it had been used in China as medicine but since the 18<sup>th</sup> century its narcotic characteristics has been made widely known. Ruinous habit spread quickly starting from the upper class — officials and the elite.

Narco cartels? Columbian barons, the “golden triangle” and Afghan opium? All this appeared

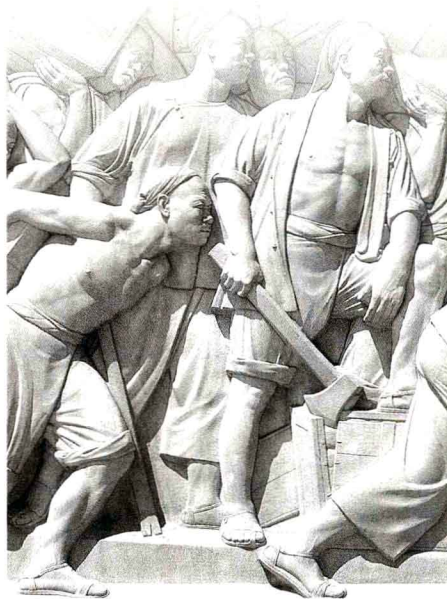
Old Town of Pingyao included into the UNESCO World Heritage. It is the only city of China with intact Ming-dynasty city wall. Time seems to stand still here — you can experience old China in all its brilliance.





later but the world's first narcotic business was created by the famous Ost-Indian Company which monopolized poppy production in India. More than 10 percent of the company's profit was made from opium trade. Because of the narcotic the trade balance changed quickly, this time in favor of Britain — despite China's increasing export. Profits of Britons taken from the opium trade surpassed its total import of silk and tea. In 1820-1840 China exported goods worth in total 10 million *liang* (= 50 grams) of silver and imported goods worth of 60 million *liang*, most of them were drugs.

By 1840s the number of drug addicts in China reached an incredible figure of two million and the authorities sounded the alarm. In 1839 Lin Zexu, the representative of the central government in Guanzhou, declared state of war to opium traders by emptying their warehouses and destroying goods worth in total of 10 million *liangs* of silver. The Britain's reply was fast and violent — military squadron. This is how the First Opium War started. The Chinese troops were defeated and in 1842 the Treaty of Nanjing was signed. China actually partly lost its sovereignty as a huge indemnity was imposed on Beijing, four ports were opened for foreign trade and Hong Kong Island was handed over to Britain to stay under the British administration for more than 150 years. The foreign juris-





diction was established over the Chinese customs system.

The results of the Second Opium War (1856-1860) were even worse for China. Besides Britain, France, the USA, Russia and later Germany and Japan struggled for their shares thus dividing China into zones of interests.

Soon after those dramatic events, part of the Chinese elite called for in-depth study of the Western experience and mastering it on the local soil, they demanded wide reforms and the country's modernization.

Under the influence of these movements in 1860-1890 the authorities implemented "self-enhancement practice" targeted on fortifying the defensive potential; they built arsenals for pro-

Carvings in relief of the Monument of the People's Heroes on Tiananmen Square, describing the ban of opium.

