Lingnan (simplified Chinese: 岭南; traditional Chinese: 嶺南; pinyin: *Língnán*) is a geographic area referring to lands in the south of China's "Five Ranges" which are Tayu, Qitian, Dupang, Mengzhu, Yuecheng. The region covers the modern Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Jiangxi and Hainan as well as northern Vietnam.
Dongting Lake, China's second-largest freshwater lake, is located in northeastern Hunan Province. It is a large, shallow body of water surrounded by mountain chains. It is also known as 'eight-hundred Li Dong Ting Lake' (The Li is a Chinese length unit equal to 500 meters or about 1,640 feet). An impressive characteristic of the lake is it is inter-nested. Depending on the season, concentric ridges of land appear in the lake in many areas. This is because the lake acts as a flood basin for the Yangtze River. The appearance of the lake changes throughout the different seasons, sometimes even during the same day. Many ancient Chinese poems and stories were written about the beauty of the lake.

The climate here is between middle and northern subtropical, so it is warm and humid, but there is also a 'draught window' from which cold air from the north sometimes enters. So in spring and summer, the temperature is variable, while in late summer and autumn, it's sunny and hot with a little rain. Occasionally in autumn, it's a little bit cold and windy. The area around the lake has tremendous agricultural production ability with a long history of development. Since the plain is graced with fertile soil, proper temperature and plentiful rain, Dongting Lake is also called 'a land flowing with milk and honey'.

Four streams including the Xiangjiang River, the Zishui River, the Yuanjiang River, and the Lishui River, all flow into Dongting Lake, and the lake is sometimes known as 'the holder of the four streams'. Because it acts as a tremendous natural reservoir or flood-basin, it plays an important role in adjusting the flow of the Yangtze River. The Lake is sometimes known as 'the taker and sender of the Yangtze River'.

Dongting Lake is divided into 5 parts: East, South, West, North, and Datong Lake.

East Dongting Lake
East Dongting is the biggest part. The District has abundant animal and plant life, especially birds and waterfowl. It has become one of China's major natural habitats for birds. According to scientists, there are 1,086 kinds of plants, 114 kinds of fresh water fish, and 207 kinds of birds living in the district, and the total number of animals and birds reaches 10 million every year. The large water area, beach, and rich natural resources here provide protected living conditions for many animals that are in danger of extinction. East Dongting Lake is recognized as "a zoology pearl on the middle part of the Yangtze River", and "a hopeful place to save the animals in danger". Besides experiencing the cultural history of the region by visiting Yueyang Pavilion, watching dragon boat races, or tasting Junshan Island Tea, you can enjoy the region's natural abundance by watching the birds. The best time is from October to March. In addition, one can dine on delicious fish as well.

South Dongting Lake
Near Yuanjiang City, it is famous for the picturesque beauty of fishing villages: the mist and fog rising from the surface of the lake, making the sky and the water the same color; the light reflecting from the water captivates the viewer. Furthermore, South Dongting Lake is also an important international marsh, and it has been ranked as a provincial natural protective district for marsh waterfowl. Because this part of lake is next to Yuanjiang City, which is easy to reach by land or water, the lake is being developed as a scenic spot for tourism.

San Jiang Kou Entrance
Where West Dongting Lake and the Yangtze River meet, there is a place called San Jiang Kou Entrance, where one can see the Xiangjiang River surging to the north and the Yangtze River rolling to the east. Above, water birds soar freely, and on the water, hundreds of barges ply their trade. It's a grand and
sublime scene. Many folk legends are rooted here, including 'the two concubines of the emperor Shun looking for their husband for hundreds of miles'.

**The Hills of Junshan**
The most famous scene in the lake is an island called Junshan, a lone, mountainous island on Dongting Lake. Junshan Island contains 72 peaks. There are ferries to take the passengers back and forth. The ferry ride takes about an hour, but plan to spend the whole day exploring the island. The original name of the Junshan Island was Dongting Island, which means the cavity for the immortals to live in. It is said that 4,000 years ago, after the emperor Shun went south to go on a tour of inspection, two of his concubines tried to find him but failed, and they began to cry while grasping bamboo. Their tears dropped onto the bamboo, and the bamboo became mottled from then on. After their death, people built a tomb for them, which is called 'two concubines' tomb'. To commemorate them, people changed the name of the island from Dongting Island to Junshan Island. The bamboo on the island is well known for its many varieties such as mottled bamboo, arhat bamboo, square bamboo, sincere bamboo, and purple bamboo. In addition, the island holds a large-scale dragon-boat festival, a lotus festival, and various sporting events on the water every year.

Dongting Lake attracts people from all over the world with its vast historical heritage, places of interest, and its convenient location. If you want to sail, go birdwatching, fish, or pick lotus flowers, this lake is a perfect place.

In 2007 fears were expressed that China's Finless Porpoise, a native of the lake, might follow the baiji, the Yangtze river dolphin, into extinction. There have been calls for action to save the finless porpoise, of which there are about 1400 left living, with approximately 700 to 900 in the Yangtze, and approximately another 500 in Poyang and Dongting Lakes. The 2007 population levels were less than half the 1997 levels, and the population continues to drop at a rate of 7.3 per cent per year.

Pressure on the finless porpoise population on Poyang Lake comes from the high numbers of ships passing through, as well as sand dredging. After flooding of the Yangtze River in late June 2007, approximately 2 billion mice were displaced from the islands of the lake. The mice invaded surrounding communities, damaging crops and dikes and forcing the government to construct walls and ditches to control the population. The lake was also featured on news services as having a problem with schistosoma and malaria infected mosquitoes.

Billions of mice were forced from their holes and were sent scurrying into local villages when officials opened the sluice gates on Dongting Lake in June 2007 to relieve flooding. Villagers killed an estimated 2 billion mice by beating them with shovels or using poison. The rotting mouse corpses should have been properly disposed of, and other animals—such as cats and dogs—were the unintended victims of the poisons. A restoration project, the Sino-Norwegian Project of Biodiversity Protection Management（a joint Norwegian-Chinese endeavor）, began in 2005. According to a 2007 article in the China Daily, "[The Dongting Lake area] will be restored to a sustainable biodiversity environment within five to 10 years". 
Su Shi 蘇軾 (January 8, 1037 – August 24, 1101), also known as Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, was a Chinese writer, poet, painter, calligrapher, pharmacologist, gastronome, and a statesman of the Song dynasty. A major personality of the Song era, Su was an important figure in Song Dynasty politics, aligning himself with Sima Guang and others, against the New Policy party lead by Wang Anshi. Su Shi was famed as an essayist, and his prose writings lucidly contribute to the understanding of topics such as 11th-century Chinese travel literature or detailed information on the contemporary Chinese iron industry. His poetry has a long history of popularity and influence in China, Japan, and other areas in the near vicinity and is well known in the English speaking parts of the world through the translations by Arthur Waley, among others. In terms of the arts, Su Shi has some claim to being "the pre-eminent personality of the eleventh century."[1] He is credited with creating dongpo pork, a prominent dish in Hangzhou cuisine.

Su Shi was born in Meishan, near Mount Emei in what is now Sichuan province. His brother Su Zhe (蘇轍) and his father Su Xun (蘇洵) were both famous literati. Su's early education was conducted under a Taoist priest at a local village school. Later in his childhood, his mother a highly educated woman conducted his education. Su married at age 17. Su and his younger brother (Zhe) had a close relationship,[3] and in 1057, when Su was 19, he and his brother both passed the (highest-level) civil service examinations to attain the degree of jinshi, a prerequisite for high government office.[4] His accomplishments at such a young age attracted the attention of Emperor Renzong, and also that of Ouyang Xiu, who became Su's patron thereafter. Ouyang had already been known as an admirer of Su Xun, sanctioning his literary style at court and stating that no other pleased him more.[5] When the 1057 jinshi examinations were given, Ouyang Xiu required—without prior notice—that candidates were to write in the ancient prose style when answering questions on the Confucian classics.[4] The Su brothers gained high honors for what were deemed impeccable answers and achieved celebrity status,[6] especially in the case of Su Shi's exceptional performance in the subsequent 1061 decree examinations.

Beginning in 1060 and throughout the following twenty years, Su held a variety of government positions throughout China; most notably in Hangzhou, where he was responsible for constructing a pedestrian causeway across the West Lake that still bears his name: suti (蘇堤, Su causeway). He had served as a magistrate in Mizhou, which is located in modern day Zhucheng County of Shandong province. Later, when he was governor of Xuzhou, he wrote a memorial to the throne in 1078 complaining about the troubling economic conditions and potential for armed rebellion in Liguo Industrial Prefecture, where a large part of the Chinese iron industry was located.[6][7]

Su Shi was often at odds with a political faction headed by Wang Anshi. Su Shi once wrote a poem criticizing Wang Anshi's reforms, especially the government monopoly imposed on the salt industry.[8] The dominance of the reformist faction at court allowed the New Policy Group greater ability to have Su Shi exiled for political crimes. The claim was that Su was criticizing the emperor, when in fact Su Shi's poetry was aimed at criticizing Wang's reforms. It should be said that Wang Anshi played no part in this action against Su, for he had retired from public life in 1076 and established a cordial relationship with Su Shi.[8] Su Shi's first remote trip of exile (1080–1086) was to Huangzhou, Hubei. This post carried a nominal title, but no stipend, leaving Su in poverty. During this period, he began Buddhist meditation. With help from a friend, Su built a small residence on a parcel of land in 1081. Su Shi lived at a farm called Dongpo ('Eastern Slope'), from which he took his literary pseudonym. While banished to Hubei province, he grew fond of the area he lived in; many of the poems considered his best were written in this period.[8] His most famous piece of calligraphy, Han Shi Tie, was also written there. In 1086, Su and all other banished statesmen were recalled to the capital due to the ascension of a new government.[9] However, Su was banished a second time (1094–1100) to Huizhou (now in Guangdong province) and Hainan island.[10] In 1098 the Dongpo Academy in Hainan was built on the site of the residence that he lived in whilst in exile.

Although political bickering and opposition usually split ministers of court into rivaling groups, there were moments of non-partisanship and cooperation from both sides. For example, although the prominent scientist and statesman Shen Kuo (1031–1095) was one of Wang Anshi's most trusted
associates and political allies, Shen nonetheless befriended Su Shi. It should be noted, however, that Su Shi was aware that it was Shen Kuo who, as regional inspector of Zhejiang, presented Su Shi's poetry to the court sometime between 1073 to 1075 with concern that it expressed abusive and hateful sentiments against the Song court. It was these poetry pieces that Li Ding and Shu Dan later utilized in order to instigate a law case against Su Shi, although until that point Su Shi did not think much of Shen Kuo's actions in bringing the poetry to light.

After a long period of political exile, Su received a pardon in 1100 and was posted to Chengdu. However, he died in Changzhou, Jiangsu province after his period of exile and while he was en route to his new assignment in the year 1101. Su Shi was 64 years old. After his death he gained even greater popularity, as people sought to collect his calligraphy, paintings depicting him, stone inscriptions marking his visit to numerous places, and built shrines in his honor. He was also depicted in artwork made posthumously, such as in Li Song's (1190–1225) painting of Su traveling in a boat, known as Su Dongpo at Red Cliff, after Su Song's poem written about a 3rd-century Chinese battle. Poetry Around 2,700 of Su Song's poems have survived, along with 800 written letters. Su Dongpo excelled in the shi, ci and fu forms of poetry, as well as prose, calligraphy and painting. Some of his notable works include the First and Second Chibifu (The Red Cliffs, written during his first exile), Nian Nu Jiao: Chibi Huai Gu (Remembering Chibi, to the tune of Nian Nu Jiao) and Shui diao ge tou (Remembering Su Zhe on the Mid-Autumn Festival). The two former poems were inspired by the 3rd century naval battle of the Three Kingdoms era, the Battle of Chibi in the year 208. The bulk of his poems are in the shi style, but his poetic fame rests largely on his 350 ci style poems. Su Shi also founded the haofang school, which cultivated an attitude of heroic abandon. In both his written works and his visual art, he combined spontaneity, objectivity and vivid descriptions of natural phenomena. Su Shi wrote essays as well, many of which are on politics and governance, including his Liuhoulun (留侯論). His popular politically charged poetry was often the reason for the wrath of Wang Anshi's supporters towards him, culminating with the Crow Terrace Poetry Trial of 1079. Travel record literature Su Shi also wrote of his travel experiences in 'daytrip essays', which belonged in part to the popular Song era literary category of 'travel record literature' (youji wenxue) that employed the use of narrative, diary, and prose styles of writing. Although other works in Chinese travel literature contained a wealth of cultural, geographical, topographical, and technical information, the central purpose of the daytrip essay was to use a setting and event in order to convey a philosophical or moral argument, which often employed persuasive writing. For example, Su Shi's daytrip essay known as Record of Stone Bell Mountain investigates and then judges whether or not ancient texts on 'stone bells' were factually accurate.

While acting as Governor of Xuzhou, Su Shi in 1078 AD wrote a memorial to the imperial court about problems faced in the Liguo Industrial Prefecture which was under his watch and administration. In an interesting and revealing passage about the Chinese iron industry during the latter half of the 11th century, Su Shi wrote about the enormous size of the workforce employed in the iron industry, competing provinces that had rival iron manufacturers seeking favor from the central government, as well as the danger or rising local strongmen who had the capability of raiding the industry and threatening the government with effectively armed rebellion. It also becomes clear in reading the text that prefectural government officials in Su's time often had to negotiate with the central government in order to meet the demands of local conditions.
Technical issues of hydraulic engineering During the ancient Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD) of China, the sluice gate and canal lock of the flash lock had been known.\textsuperscript{[20]} By the 10th century the latter design was improved upon in China with the invention of the canal pound lock, allowing different adjusted levels of water along separated and gated segments of a canal.\textsuperscript{[21]} This innovation allowed for larger transport barges to pass safely without danger of wrecking upon the embankments, and was an innovation praised by those such as Shen Kuo (1031–1095).\textsuperscript{[22]} Shen also wrote in his Dream Pool Essays of the year 1088 that, if properly used, sluice gates positioned along irrigation canals were most effective in depositing silt for fertilization.\textsuperscript{[23]} Writing earlier in his Dongpo Zhilin of 1060, Su Shi came to a different conclusion, writing that the Chinese of a few centuries past had perfected this method and noted that it was ineffective in use by his own time. Although Su Shi made no note of it in his writing, the root of this problem was merely the needs of agriculture and transportation conflicting with one another.\textsuperscript{[24]} Gastronome Su is called one of the four classical gastronomes.\textsuperscript{[25]} There is a legend, for which unfortunately there is no other evidence, that by accident he invented Dongpo pork (東坡肉), a famous dish in Chinese cuisine. The story runs that once during his free time, Su Dongpo decided to make stewed pork. Then an old friend visited him in the middle of the cooking and challenged him to a game of Chinese chess. Su had totally forgotten the stew, which in the meantime had now become extremely thick-cooked, until its very fragrant smell reminded him of it. Lin Hsiang Ju and Lin Tsuifeng in their scholarly Chinese Gastronomy give a recipe, “The Fragrance of Pork: Tungpo Pork,” and remark that the “square of fat is named after Su Tungpo, the poet, for unknown reasons. Perhaps it is just because he would have liked it.” Su, to explain his vegetarian inclinations, said that he never had been comfortable with killing animals for his dinner table, but had a craving for certain foods, such as clams, so he couldn’t desist. When he was imprisoned his views changed. “Since my imprisonment I have not killed a single thing... having experienced such worry and danger myself, when I felt just like a fowl waiting in the kitchen, I can no longer bear to cause any living creature to suffer immeasurable fright and pain simply to please my palate.”\textsuperscript{[27]}

An illustration of a blast furnace melting cast iron, with bellows operated by a waterwheel and mechanical device, from the Nong Shu, by Wang Zhen, 1313 AD

Being a government official in a family of officials, Su was often separated from his loved ones depending on his posting. In 1078, he was serving as prefect of Suzhuo. His beloved younger brother was able to join him for the mid-autumn festival, which inspired the poem "Mid-Autumn Moon" reflecting on the preciousness of time with family. It was written to be sung to the tune of "Yang Pass."\textsuperscript{[3]}

As evening clouds withdraw a clear cool air floods in,
The jade wheel passes silently across the Silver River.
This life this night has rarely been kind.
Where will we see this moon next year?

China bans wordplay in attempt at pun control
Officials say casual alteration of idioms risks nothing less than ‘cultural and linguistic chaos’, despite their common usage.

From online discussions to adverts, Chinese culture is full of puns. But the country’s print and broadcast watchdog has ruled that there is nothing funny about them.

It has banned wordplay on the grounds that it breaches the law on standard spoken and written Chinese, makes promoting cultural heritage harder and may mislead the public – especially children.

The casual alteration of idioms risks nothing less than “cultural and linguistic chaos”, it warns.

Chinese is perfectly suited to puns because it has so many homophones. Popular sayings and even customs, as well as jokes, rely on wordplay.

But the order from the State Administration for Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television says: “Radio and television authorities at all levels must tighten up their regulations and crack down on the irregular and inaccurate use of the Chinese language, especially the misuse of idioms.”

Programmes and adverts should strictly comply with the standard spelling and use of characters, words, phrases and idioms – and avoid changing the characters, phrasing and meanings, the order said.

“Idioms are one of the great features of the Chinese language and contain profound cultural heritage and historical resources and great aesthetic, ideological and moral values,” it added.

“That’s the most ridiculous part of this: [wordplay] is so much part and parcel of Chinese heritage,” said David Moser, academic director for CET Chinese studies at Beijing Capital Normal University.

When couples marry, people will give them dates and peanuts – a reference to the wish Zaosheng guizi or “May you soon give birth to a son”. The word for dates is also zao and peanuts are huasheng.

The notice cites complaints from viewers, but the examples it gives appear utterly innocuous. In a tourism promotion campaign, tweaking the characters used in the phrase jin shan jin mei – perfection – has turned it into a slogan translated as “Shanxi, a land of splendours”. In another case, replacing a single character in ke bu rong huan has turned “brook no delay” into “coughing must not linger” for a medicine advert.

“It could just be a small group of people, or even one person, who are conservative, humourless, priggish and arbitrarily purist, so that everyone has to fall in line,” said Moser.

“But I wonder if this is not a preemptive move, an excuse to crack down for supposed ‘linguistic purity reasons’ on the cute language people use to crack jokes about the leadership or policies. It sounds too convenient.”

Internet users have been particularly inventive in finding alternative ways to discuss subjects or people whose names have been blocked by censors.

Moves to block such creativity have a long history too. Moser said Yuan Shikai, president of the Republic of China from 1912 to 1915, reportedly wanted to rename the Lantern Festival, Yuan Xiao Jie, because it sounded like “cancel Yuan day”.

Q. and A.: John Osburg on China’s Wealthy Turning to Spiritualism By IAN JOHNSON
DECEMBER 18, 2014 1:00 AM December 18, 2014

Devotees burn incense sticks while at prayer at Yonghegong, a Tibetan Buddhist temple and monastery in Beijing
John Osburg, 39, an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Rochester, is the author of “Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China’s New Rich,” based on his research in the southwestern Chinese city of Chengdu. His book paints a rich picture of the complex ways in which men and women try to buy favors and get ahead in business ventures, often by courting government officials at night clubs and often over drinking and sex. And it describes a milieu beset by anxiety over whether their gains can last.

You would think that as people get richer they’d get more sophisticated. But you found this isn’t the case.

I saw that many people do aspire to sophisticated tastes and a more fulfilling lifestyle than banqueting and drinking in nightclubs, but often they were doing business with those who didn’t share their tastes. You might try to serve a relatively obscure California wine that might be one hundred times better than some Bordeaux, but you run the risk of having the government official you’re hosting think you’re being cheap and not respecting his position. So to play it safe you’ve got to serve Lafitte or Mouton or some winery he’s heard of.

But there’s no question that tastes are evolving, albeit somewhat slowly. Now that every Shanxi coal baron’s mistress can afford Louis Vuitton, in order to differentiate themselves, other new rich are moving on to other pursuits and tastes.

I think this is part of what’s driving this interest in spiritual and moral cultivation. Some people are genuinely interested in spiritual transformation and in becoming better, more moral people.
But there’s also an element of social distinction that’s feeding this trend. If even the Shanxi coal baron’s mistress can afford to buy anything, then how do you distinguish yourself from the herd? If you can’t do it in the realm of luxury consumption, then you look elsewhere.

**Your personal spiritual guide.**

Right, but there’s still often an element of status competition in their spiritual pursuits. In the past it was who knew the highest-level official. But now the wealthy are competing over who patronizes the most powerful monk.

**Were other factors at play, as well? For example the idea that once you have everything you wonder what else there is? Or the idea that you’re buying protection in the next life?**

Among some there’s a sense of guilt as they get older, fed by their past misdeeds. There’s a health component, too. The nightly binge drinking, which sometimes includes other substances, is taking a toll on a lot of them. When they retreat from that lifestyle they wonder how to fill their time.

**Are there any generalizations about what kind of spiritual answer they find? Some seem to like the idea that you can clear yourself by donating money to a temple, without any real reflection or familiarity with the teachings.**

There’s definitely an element of that. The idea that you can give money to lamas or temples, that you can absolve yourself of past misdeeds and protect yourself from future misfortunes. Some see it as a way of continuing their worldly success, a way of ensuring that their business runs smoothly or that they aren’t investigated by the authorities. I even heard that some refer to their donations to temples and lamas as “spiritual protection money.”

But others take it more seriously and try to apply Buddhist teachings to their daily lives and even businesses, and I’ve encountered several people whose lives have been radically transformed by Buddhism.

**Why Tibetan Buddhism and not Chinese Buddhism?**

There’s a sense among Han Chinese that it’s been less corrupted by the cultural and political upheavals of the past 60 years. Their ideas about Tibetan Buddhism also mirror many of their images of Tibet itself as being pre-modern, spiritualistic, happy. I get told that a lot. There’s a perception among Han that Tibetans are “happy” people and that belief in Buddhism is a key enabler of their happiness.

Also, Tibetan Buddhism is seen as more mysterious, powerful and efficacious than Chinese Buddhism. I’m just beginning to research this, but I think the practice draws them in as well. I don’t think Chinese Buddhism puts as much emphasis on practices like repetition of sutras and ritual prostrations for lay followers. Han Chinese often call it their gongke — their homework — this set of rituals and practices to follow in their daily lives.

**What’s your view on whether they’re more sympathetic to the Tibetan cause?**

Given the sensitivity of this issue, I usually just ask about their views of Tibetans in general. And it seems that it’s led some people to overturn some negative stereotypes they had of Tibetans, such as being backward or uncivilized. But it’s unclear to me that this religious encounter is
going to alter their attitudes toward the Tibetan issue. I’m reluctant to say anything definitive, because I don’t have enough data.

You’ve mentioned how this has warped some aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, by giving money and prestige to religious figures who otherwise would have a fairly low status. They just happened to somehow attract the fancy of a rich Han Chinese and get showered with money. How are they discovered?

Some young monks go to Han areas with the specific aim of attracting Han followers, hoping to encounter wealthy patrons. But sometimes it’s just random. But these random encounters are usually interpreted according to notions of fate. You might have a rich entrepreneur who just happens to sit next to an ordinary monk on an airplane. Maybe he’s having a spiritual crisis and believes that he was fated to sit next to this monk and become his disciple. Even if the monk doesn’t see it that way, as a monk it’s his duty to help someone who is suffering, so he likely won’t refuse the person.

Is it just a coincidence that a number of wealthy Westerners also follow Tibetan Buddhism? Is there something in Tibetan Buddhism that wealthy people like?

Its rise in China is clearly connected to the global popularity of Tibetan Buddhism, which arose in the West in the 1960s and ‘70s and slightly later became popular in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Lay Buddhists in the mainland read Chinese translations of many of the same pop Buddhist philosophy books read around the world. As in the West, they view Tibetan Buddhism as offering a cure to many of the ills of modernity. So it’s linked up with the global trend, but also “reimported” in a sense.

But some aspects are unique to the People’s Republic. Take the rise of the Wuming Buddhist Institute. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, the founder of the Larung Wuming Buddhist Study Institute in Serthar County [in the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province], had a vision that Tibetan Buddhism should spread to Han areas. That development was autonomous from the global rise of Tibetan Buddhism as a form of spiritual self-help, but many Chinese who started reading pop Buddhist philosophy eventually ended up at Serthar.

Now there are over 10,000 monks and lay Buddhists studying there, and many are Han Chinese. The Wuming Buddhist Institute even streams Buddhist sermons and has set up online courses.

Why hasn’t Daoism become more popular?

It seems to me that the majority of the people I talk to are interested in spirituality in general. Some dabble in Christianity before turning to Buddhism. Others might start with Buddhism, but then move on to other religious traditions.

One guy I interviewed first encountered Tibetan Buddhism and thought it was the answer. But then he went to a lecture on Confucianism, and decided it was really what he had been seeking. Now he’s discovered Daoism. He told me he’s rich enough that he doesn’t have to work and now his mission in life is simply to promote Chinese cultural traditions. He now has a tea shop where he wants to revive traditional arts like flower-arranging and incense and tea.

He doesn’t view himself as exclusively a Buddhist, Confucian or Daoist, but incorporates elements of all three into his life, which in fact was the case with most religious practitioners throughout China’s history.
Western capitalism is looking for inspiration in eastern mysticism

The Economist, UK

IN HIS 1905 book, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”, Max Weber credited the Protestant ethic with giving rise to capitalism. Now it sometimes seems as if it is the Buddhist ethic that is keeping capitalism going.

The Protestants stressed rational calculation and self-restraint. The Buddhists stress the importance of “mindfulness” — taking time out from the hurly-burly of daily activities to relax and meditate.

In today’s corporate world you are more likely to hear about mindfulness than self-restraint.

Google offers an internal course called “search inside yourself” that has proved so popular that the company has created entry-level versions such as “neural self-hacking” and “managing your energy”.

The search giant has also built a labyrinth for walking meditation.

EBay has meditation rooms equipped with pillows and flowers.

Twitter and Facebook are doing all they can to stay ahead in the mindfulness race.

Evan Williams, one of Twitter’s founders, has introduced regular meditation sessions in his new venture, the Obvious Corporation, a start-up incubator and investment vehicle.

The fashion is not confined to Silicon Valley: the mindfulness movement can be found in every corner of the corporate world.

Rupert Murdoch has a well-developed bull**it detector. But earlier this year he tweeted about his interest in transcendental meditation (which he said “everyone recommends”).

Ray Dalio of Bridgewater Associates and Bill Gross of PIMCO are two of the biggest names in the money-management business, and both are regular meditators. Mr Dalio says it has had more impact on his success than anything else.

What got the mindfulness wagon rolling was the 1960s counter-culture, which injected a shot of bohemianism into the bloodstream of capitalism:

witness the rise of companies such as Virgin, Ben & Jerry’s and Apple, whose co-founder, Steve Jobs, had visited India on a meditation break as a young man, and who often talked about how Zen had influenced the design of his products.

But three things are making the wheels roll ever faster.
The most obvious is omni-connectivity. The constant pinging of electronic devices is driving many people to the end of their tether.

Electronic devices not only overload the senses and invade leisure time. They feed on themselves: the more people tweet the more they are rewarded with followers and retweets.

Mindfulness provides a good excuse to unplug and chill out — or “disconnect to connect”, as mindfulness advocates put it.

A second reason is the rat race. The single-minded pursuit of material success has produced an epidemic of corporate scandals and a widespread feeling of angst.

Mindfulness emphasises that there is more to success than material prosperity. The third is that selling mindfulness has become a business in its own right.

The movement has a growing, and strikingly eclectic, cohort of gurus.

Chade-Meng Tan of Google, who glories in the job title of “jolly good fellow”, is the inspiration behind “search inside yourself”.

Soren Gordhamer, a yoga and meditation instructor, and an enthusiastic tweeter, founded Wisdom 2.0, a popular series of mindfulness conferences.

Bill George, a former boss of Medtronic, a medical-equipment company, and a board member at Goldman Sachs, is introducing mindfulness at Harvard Business School in an attempt to develop leaders who are “self-aware and self-compassionate”.

Many other business schools are embracing mindfulness. Jeremy Hunter of the Drucker management school at Claremont university teaches it to his students, as does Ben Bryant at Switzerland’s IMD.

Donde Plowman of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s business school has even tried to quantify the mindfulness of management schools themselves.

The flow of wisdom is not one-way: Keisuke Matsumoto, a Japanese Buddhist monk, took an MBA at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad and is now applying its lessons to revitalise temples back home.

As for its exploitation as a business, Arianna Huffington runs a mindfulness conference, a “GPS for the soul” app and a mindfulness corner of her Huffington Post.

Chip Wilson, the boss of lululemon, a seller of yoga gear, has set up a website, whil.com, that urges people to turn off their brains for 60 seconds by visualising a dot. (“Power down, power up, and power forward.”)

A walk in the countryside
Does all this mindfulness do any good? There is a body of evidence that suggests that some of its techniques can provide significant psychological and physiological benefits.

The Duke University School of Medicine has produced research that shows that, in America, an hour of yoga a week reduces stress levels in employees by a third and cuts health-care costs by an average of $2,000 a year.

Cynics might point to the evidence that a walk in the countryside has similar benefits.

They might also worry that Aetna, an insurer which wants to sell yoga and other mindfulness techniques as part of its health plans, is sponsoring some of the research that supports them.

But it seems not unreasonable to suppose that, in a world of constant stress and distraction, simply sitting still and relaxing for a while might do you some good.

The biggest problem with mindfulness is that it is becoming part of the self-help movement — and hence part of the disease that it is supposed to cure.

Gurus talk about “the competitive advantage of meditation”. Pupils come to see it as a way to get ahead in life. And the point of the whole exercise is lost.

What has parading around in pricey lululemon outfits got to do with the Buddhist ethic of non-attachment to material goods? And what has staring at a computer-generated dot got to do with the ancient art of meditation?

Western capitalism seems to be doing rather more to change eastern religion than eastern religion is doing to change Western capitalism.

The Matrix of Buddhist Capitalism in East Asia: Religious Agency, Social Dynamics, and Intellectual Practice

The process of transmission and assimilation of Western ideas in East Asia started in the pre-modern time and resulted in a constructive but also conflictive rethinking of traditional cultures and knowledge. The Meiji period marked the beginning of a second phase of active engagement with Western intellectual projects for Japan, a phenomenon that also became important in China a few decades later. On the intellectual, social, and political levels, theories of Capitalism and Marxism have been filtered and adapted to East Asia. Buddhists also participated in the reception of these discourses and in their assimilation within the religious and social contexts. The ways Buddhists intervened in framing the relations between religious theories, social dynamics, and intellectual practice led to the formation of local ‘Buddhist socialism(s)’ and also to the matrix of a Buddhist discourse on capitalism.

Capitalism did not reach East Asia as a unified and self-conscious package, but as a set of different, and at times conflicting discourses, attitudes, and behaviors, ranging from modes of production (centered on large industrial complexes), new social relations, patterns of consumption, ideas of individualism, cultural stereotypes about Asia vs the West, statecraft, and religious attitudes (and critiques thereof).

This panel aims to discuss the agency of Buddhism (individuals and institutions) in drawing a discursive narrative of global capitalism in East Asia, and therefore to assess the role that Buddhists played in transforming local history of ideas and reshaping social knowledge. This panel looks at case studies from Japan and China - with the possibility to open it up to other areas in Asia as well - in both their early engagement with capitalism and their contemporary approach to it, and thus proposes diachronic parallels as well as a cross-regional analysis.

The panel - that has been already accepted for the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) Conference in May 2014 - welcome papers that address the following questions: What level of agency did Japanese and Chinese Sangha have in circulating theories of capitalism among local societies? What did obstruct or facilitate East Asian Buddhists in the creation of a Buddhist capitalist discourse in East Asia? Is the matrix of Buddhist capitalism rooted only in external Western ideas or is it also grounded in local discourses and as such also results from East Asian inner dynamics? How did capitalism and Marxism interact—and in certain instances co-exist—within Buddhism in modern East Asia?