

Religion in China

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"Three laughs at Tiger Brook", *Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are one*, a *litang* style painting portraying three men laughing by a river stream, 12th century, Song Dynasty.



The imposing stupa enshrining the relic of Shakyamuni Buddha's finger bone, at Famen Temple, a Buddhist complex in Baoji, Shaanxi. (2010)



Statue of Mazu in Meizhou Island, Fujian. Mazu is perhaps the most popular goddess in Southern Chinese provinces and Taiwan.

Religion in China has been characterized by pluralism since the beginning of Chinese history. The Chinese religions are family-oriented and do not demand the exclusive adherence of members. Some scholars doubt the use of the term "religion" in reference to Buddhism and Taoism, and suggest "cultural practices", "thought systems" or "philosophies" as more appropriate names.^[1] The questions of what should be called religion and who should be called religious in China is up for debate.^[2]

Buddhism remains a main popular religion in China since its introduction in the 1st century. One of the largest group of religious traditions is the Chinese folk religion or "Shenism", a term coined by A.J. Elliot,^[3] which he used to collectively name Chinese folk religions, as the ethnic religion of the Hans, which encompasses Taoism, and the worship of the shens, a collection of various local ethnic deities, heroes and ancestors, and figures from Chinese mythology, among which the most popular ones in recent years have been Mazu (goddess of the seas, patron of Southern China), Huangdi (divine patriarch of all the Chinese, "Volksgeist" of the Chinese nation),^{[4][5][6]} the Black Dragon,^{[7][8][9]} Caishen (god of prosperity and richness),^[10] and others.

Although an established presence since the 7th century, Christianity in China declined as a result of persecution during the 10th through 14th centuries.^[11] It was reintroduced in the 16th century by Jesuit missionaries.^[citation needed] In the 18th and 19th centuries, with the widespread influx of European ideology into China, Western Religions gained a foothold, notably causing the Taiping Rebellion. While the Communist Party of China came to power in 1949, it was regarded as an atheist faction which viewed traditional religions as backwards, and Western religions such as Christianity as the tool of Western colonialism, and has steadfastly maintained separation of church from state affairs^[12] in order to prevent recurrence of situations like the Taiping Rebellion. After the "opening up" of the 1980s, more religious freedoms were granted,^[citation needed] and traditional beliefs like Taoism and Buddhism were supported as an integral part of the Chinese culture.

Nowadays Shenism-Taoism and Buddhism are the largest religions in China with respectively over 30%^{[13][14][15]} (of which 160 million, or 11% of the total population of the country, are Mazuists^[16]) and 18–20%^{[17][18][19]} of the population adhering to them, thriving throughout the country as the government is allowing them to spread.^[20] Almost 10% of the population is composed of those regarded as non-Han ethnicities who following their traditional tribal religions.^{[21][22]} Christians are 3–4% of the population according to various detailed surveys,^{[23][24][25][26]} although American press states there

might be more due to the house church movement;^[27] Muslims are 1–2%.^[28] However, the biggest part of the population, ranging between 60% and 70%, is mostly agnostic or atheist.^{[25][29][30]} Various new religious movements, both indigenous and exogenous, are scattered across the country.^[31] Confucianism as a religion is popular among intellectuals.^[32]

China has many of the world's tallest statues, including the tallest of all. Most of them represent buddhas, deities and religious personalities and have been built in the 2000s. The world's tallest statue is the Spring Temple Buddha, located in Henan. Recently built in the country are also the world's tallest pagoda^[33] and the world's tallest stupa.^[34]

Ancient and Pre-historic

Prior to the advent of Chinese civilization and World religion in the region generally known today as East Asia including the territorial boundaries of modern-day China; tribal or primal religious practices were the way in which prayers, sacrifices or offerings were communicated to the spiritual world by groups or mediatory individuals such as shamans.^[35] Following the dawn of Chinese civilization, an early indigenous form of religious practice in Chinese history began to develop from the more primitive elements of animism, folk religions and Shamanism; known as Taoism,^[36] and is considered a Traditional Chinese Religion along with Confucianism and other Chinese folk religions with a constituency of almost 400 million followers in China alone. Animism in China and Shamanism which has the longest recorded history in China,^[37] is still practiced formally by numerous ethnic groups around China, including the Han Chinese, but whose historic text and literature usually neglect this religious aspect of the Han people's history.^{[38][39][40][41][42][43]}

Modern history

Temple economy

Scholars have studied how Chinese folk religion-based society, elastic and polytheistic in spirit, provided the groundwork for the development of dynamic grassroots capitalism with Chinese characteristics in Song ynasty China and modern capitalism in contemporary Taiwan.^{[50][51][52][53]} The revival of Chinese folk religion with

its *ritual economy* or *temple economy*, studied by on-ground researches,^[54] is also the key of the contemporary economic development in rural Mainland China.^{[55][56]}

Demographics



Anshan Jade Buddha, the largest jade statue in the world, in the interior of Jade Buddha Temple in Anshan City, Liaoning.



A variety of Chinese priests and monks seen by Johan Nieuhof between 1655 and 1658.

Chinese Buddhists are evenly distributed across the whole country.

Southern provinces are the stronghold of ethno-national Han Shenism thickly mingled with Zhengyi "Southern" Taoism. Chinese folk religion can also be found up through central provinces until it becomes sparse in the north-eastern zones (where Beijing is situated), which are largely secularized, the vast majority of their population being atheist and agnostic with significant proportions of Buddhists and Quanzhen "Northern" Taoists.

Sichuan is a stronghold of Taoism in its various brands, covering the area where Tianshi Taoism developed and the Celestial Masters had their main seat. Christians are mostly concentrated in easternmost provinces and coastal areas, particularly in Zhejiang, Anhui, and generally in the Wu-speaking zone, curiously the areas which were most affected by the Taiping regime. Tibetan Buddhism is the

dominant religion in Tibet, other westernmost provinces where ethnic Tibetans constitute a significant amount of the population, and Inner Mongolia in the north; it is also having a growing influence among ethnic Hans.^{[57][58]} Islam is the majority religion in the ethnic Hui areas, particularly Ningxia, and in the Uyghur province of Xinjiang. Many non-Han minority ethnic groups follow their own traditional ethnic religions (for example, Dongbaism). Confucianism as a religion is popular among intellectuals.^[32]

A great diversity of new religious movements are thriving across China.^[59] The majority are indigenous, and into this group some are totally new whilst others were already active before the communist revolution in 1949, and are being re-introduced from Taiwan. The most relevant among these last are Yiguandao (and other sects within the Xiantianism category),^[60] Tiendery-Tientism,^[61] Yaochidao and Zailiism;^[31] among the very new ones the most notable are the various Qigong-inspired groups, such as Falun Gong, Zhong Gong, Yuanji Gong and Wang Gong, and Christian-inspired Taiping-style sects such as Zhushenism, Linglingism, Fuhuodao, Mentuhui and Lightning from the East.^{[62][63]} Other movements are alien in origin, for example the Bahá'í Faith.^[64] All these movements are not recognised by the government, and most of them are regarded as cults; some are also banned and harshly repressed.^[65]



Altar to Zhuge Liang inside an ancestral temple in his hometown Yinan, Shandong.



Modern-style Buddhist temple in Qibao, Shanghai.

Statistics

Communist governments often suppress religious freedom and officially (often forcibly) endorse atheism. Due to this the relation between the Government and religions was

not smooth in the past.^[30] In recent years, the Chinese government has opened up to religion, especially traditional religions such as Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Shenism because the Government also continued to emphasize the role of religion in building a "Harmonious Society," which was a positive development with regard to the Government's respect for religious freedom.^[66]

According to an old Chinese government estimate, there were "over 100 million followers of various faiths" in China.^[67] Other estimates put about 100 million or about 8% Chinese who follow Buddhism, with the second largest religion as Taoism (no data), Islam (19 million or 1.5%) and Christianity (14 million or 1%; 4 million Roman Catholics and 10 million Protestants).^[68] According to the 1993 edition of *The Atlas of Religion*, the number of atheists in China is between 10 and 14 percent.^[69]

The accuracy of the religious data in China from census sources is questionable. While official data estimated 100 million religious believers in China, a survey taken by Shanghai University found that 31.4% of people above the age of 16, or about 300 million people, considered themselves religious. The survey also found that the major religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and Christianity, accounting for 67.4 percent of believers. About 200 million people are Buddhists, Taoists or worshippers of legendary figures such as the Dragon King and God of Fortune, accounting for 66.1 per cent of all believers, while Christianity accounted for 12% of believers, or 40 million people.^{[70][71]} The official *China Daily* called the Shanghai professors' research "the country's first major survey on religious beliefs".^[72] The Chinese government have accepted these new numbers. The wide disparity among these estimates underscores the difficulty of accurately surveying the religious view of a nation of over a billion people and the lack of reliable data.

Average data from various surveys put the total number of Chinese Buddhists at a growing 18% to 20% of the total population, or around 300 million people.^{[17][18][19]} However, some estimates suggest that the cultural adherents or even outright religious adherents of Buddhism could number as high as 50%, or about 660 million.^{[73][74]} Estimates for Shenism and Taoism put their intermingled membership at 300 to 400 million, or 20% to 30% of the total population.^{[14][75]}

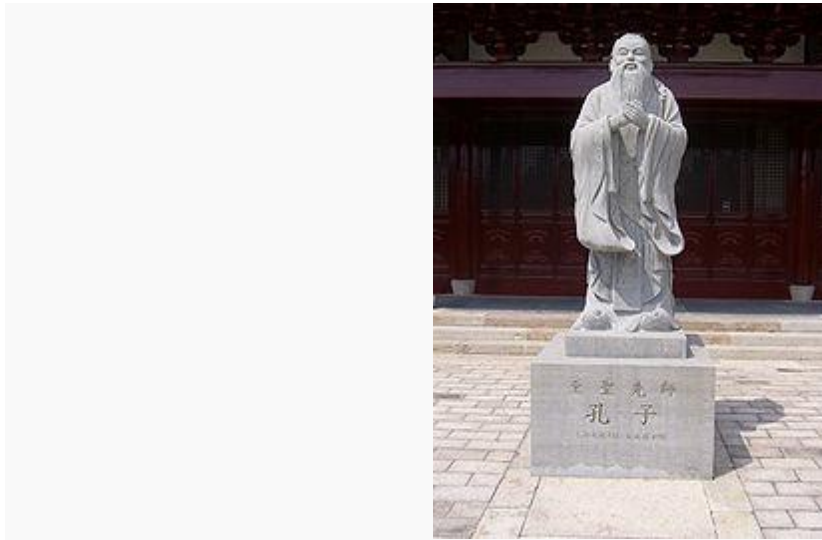
The number of adherents of Buddhism and Chinese ethnic religions can also be overlaid in percentage because many Chinese consider themselves both Buddhist and Shenist-Taoist.^{[76][77][78][79][80]} The minority religions are Christianity (between 40 million, 3%,^[23] and 54 million, 4%^[24]), Islam (20–30 million, 1.5%–2%), the traditional tribal

religions of the non-Han ethnic groups (Moz, White Stone Religion, Dongbaism, Bön),^[22] Judaism, Hinduism, and a number of new religions and sects (particularly Xiantianism and Falun Gong).

According to the surveys of Phil Zuckerman on Adherents.com in 1993; there was 59% (over 700 million)^[29] of the Chinese population was irreligious and 8% – 14% was atheist (from over 100 to 180 million) as of 2005.^[30] There are intrinsic logistical difficulties in trying to count the number of religious people anywhere, as well as difficulties peculiar to China. According to Phil Zuckerman, "low response rates," "non-random samples," and "adverse political/cultural climates" are all persistent problems in establishing accurate numbers of religious believers in a given locality.^[81] Similar difficulties arise in attempting to subdivide religious people into sects. These issues are especially pertinent in China for two reasons. First, it is a matter of current debate whether some several important belief systems in China constitute "religions." As Daniel L. Overmeyer writes, in recent years there has been a "new appreciation...of the religious dimensions of Confucianism, both in its ritual activities and in the inward search for an ultimate source of moral order".^[82] Many Chinese belief systems have concepts of a sacred and sometimes spiritual natural world yet do not always invoke a concept of personal god (with the exception of Heaven worship).^[83]

In 2010, according to an official survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and published in the 2010 Bluebook Annual Report on China's Religions, the number of Protestants in China is 23.05 million, or 1.8% of the total population.^{[84][85][86]} At the same time, a survey conducted by sociologist Fenggang Yang (specialised in the study of religion in Chinese societies) and the Purdue's Center on Religion and Chinese Society, revealed that 18% of the Chinese are Buddhist, 15% are non-religious and 3.2% are Christian.^[25] These statistics are fairly similar to those reported by the 2008 Pew Forum survey.^[26]

Cultural background



Statue of Confucius at a temple in Chongming, Shanghai.

Confucius mores and morals

The mores background of the Chinese people is deeply shaped by the Confucian philosophy (儒家; *Rujia*). Confucius' thought stresses ethical, moral and social values. This system of values is sometimes considered as the proper culture of the Chinese; consequently, for centuries it has targeted religious tendencies. According to the Confucian thought every culture should carry on its own primordial ethnic religion, which two main aspects are reverence for nature and for the ancient fathers; in the case of the Chinese it is the Chinese folk religion and Taoism compound, which pivotal element is the worship of ancestor gods. Confucianism arose during the 5th century BCE from the teachings of Confucius, collected under the name of the Analects. The Han Dynasty eventually made Confucianism the official state culture, along with Taoism which was the official religion.

Confucian social and political system remained established until 1912, when it was rejected by the new Republic of China and subsequently by the People's Republic of China. Since the 2000s^[87] Confucianism has been experiencing a great revival in China, as it is supported by the central government. The People's Republic of China is establishing institutes for Confucian education all over the world.^[87] The headquarter of all Confucius Institutes around the world locates in Beijing.^[88] China has established 300 of such institutes as of 2010.^[89] With the recent rise of nationalism and cultural conservatism among Chinese intellectuals, a growing number of

them are converting to Confucianism and working to make it an institutional religion (see the relative section).^[90]

Veneration of Ancestors

Chinese veneration of ancestors (拜祖, *baizu*; or 敬祖, *jingzu*) dates back to the prehistory and is considered an integrant part of Chinese folk religion, and a mandatory practice in Confucianism. Chinese culture and religions all value filial piety as a top virtue and De, and the act is a continued display of piety and respect towards departed ancestors. The veneration of ancestors can even extend to legendary figures or historical, such as the founder of one's Chinese surname, virtuous individuals such as Confucius or Guan Yu, or the mythological figures like Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, considered the patriarch of all Han Chinese.

The two major festivals involving ancestor veneration are the Qingming Festival and the Double Ninth Festival, but veneration of ancestors is conducted in many other ceremonies, including weddings, funerals, and triad initiations. Worshipers generally offer prayers in a Jingxiang rite, with food, light incense and candles, and burn offerings of joss paper. These activities are typically conducted at the site of ancestral graves or tombs, at an ancestral temple, or at a household shrine.

Notable religions



Altar to Guandi at the Temple of Guandi of Jinan, Shandong.



Statues inside the temple of a Taizu deity (deified important ancestor) in Maoming, Guangdong.

Chinese ethnic religion

Chinese folk religion (simplified Chinese: 中国民间宗教 or 中国民间信仰

, pinyin: *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao* or *Zhongguo minjian xinyang*) or Shenism (*Shenjiao*, 神教)^{[91][92][93]} are labels used to describe the collection of ethnic religious traditions which have been the majority belief system in China and among Han Chinese ethnic groups for the most part of the civilization's history till today. Shenism comprises Chinese mythology and includes the worship of shens (神, shén; "deities", "spirits", "awarenesses", "consciousnesses", "archetypes") which can be nature deities, clan deities, city deities, national deities, cultural heroes and demigods, dragons and ancestors.

It is sometimes considered a brand of Taoism, a Folk Taoism, since over the centuries institutional Taoism has been attempting to assimilate or administrate local religions; actually and more accurately Taoism can be defined as a branch of Shenism, since it sprang out of folk religion and Chinese philosophy. Chinese folk religion is sometimes seen as a constituent part of Chinese traditional religion, but more often, the two are regarded as synonymous. Unlike Taoism, the religious aspects found in Confucianism (worship of Confucius and his disciples, worship of Tian, rituals and sacrifices) never took independent form and have thus remained for centuries part of Shenism.

With around 400 million adherents Chinese folk religion is one of the major religions in the world, comprising about 6% of world population.^{[13][15]} In China over 30% of the population adheres to Shenism or Taoism.^[14]

Despite being heavily suppressed during the last two centuries of the history of China, from the Taiping Movement to the Cultural Revolution, it is now experiencing a revival^{[94][95]} and is supported by the Government of the People's Republic of China,

particularly in the forms of Mazuism in southern China (officially, about 160 million Chinese are Mazuists),^[16] Huangdi worship,^{[4][5][6]} Black Dragon worship in Shaanxi,^{[7][8][9]} and Caishen worship.^[10]

Scholars have studied how Chinese folk religion-inspired society, elastic and polytheistic in spirit, provided the groundwork for the development of dynamic grassroots Chinese-style pre-modern capitalism in Song Dynasty China and modern capitalism in contemporary Taiwan.^{[50][51][52][53]} Chinese folk religion with its *ritual economy* is also the key of the contemporary economic development in rural Mainland China.^{[55][56]}



Prayer plaques in a Confucian temple.

Religious Confucianism

Religious Confucianism (儒教 *Rujiao*, "Religion of the Scholars"; or 孔教 *Kongjiao*, "Religion of Confucius") is a relatively new and still numerically small phenomenon, limited to the Chinese intelligentsia. Nevertheless, being well embedded in the Chinese academia, in recent years it has become very influential.

Whether Confucianism is a religion or not has been debated for more than one hundred years.^[90] Religious aspects promoted by Confucianism include the establishment of temples for ancestral worship of Confucius and his disciples, knowledge and worship of Tian, ritual and sacrifice; however, over the centuries Confucianism never developed an official institutional structure as Taoism did, and its religious aspects never completely detached from Chinese folk religion.

Since 2003 the debate seems to have taken a turn.^[90] Large numbers of intellectuals and students are converting to Confucianism,^[90] making it a strong intellectual force.^[32] A more and more influent movement among them is working to turn Confucianism into a religion (and a movement of its own, independent from the Chinese

folk religion), to obtain recognition by the Chinese government, and even make Confucianism the official state religion of China. Scholar Fenggang Yang calls this movement *Confucian Fundamentalism*.^[90]

In 2003 the Confucian intellectual Kang Xiaoguang published a cultural nationalist manifesto in which he made four suggestions: Confucian education must enter official education at any level, from elementary to high school; the state must establish Confucianism as the state religion by law; Confucian religion must enter the daily life of ordinary people through standardization and development of doctrines, rituals, organisations, churches and activity sites; the Confucian religion must be spread through NGOs.^[90]

All the suggestions appear to be being gradually implemented. Since the *Jiashen Manifesto* published in 2004, intellectuals are calling for a return to the Chinese traditional culture. The Government has since then supported the revival of the Chinese traditional religions, holidays and celebrations. In 2005 the Center for the Study of Confucian Religion was established, and scholars who criticised Confucianism as a religion lost their influence.^[90] Also in 2005 Guoxue education started to be implemented in schools of any level. Being well received by the population, even Confucian "televangelists" started to appear on television since 2006.^[90]

The most enthusiast and cultural nationalist and conservatist *Confucian Fundamentalists* proclaim the uniqueness and superiority of Confucian Chinese culture, and have generated some popular sentiment against Western cultural influences in China.^[90] In January 2011 a statue of Confucius was unveiled on Tiananmen Square.^{[96][97]}

Taoism



Xuanmiao Temple, a Taoist complex in Suzhou, Jiangsu.



Altar to Laozi as *Daode Tianjun* ("Lord of the Way and the Virtue") and the Three Pure Ones at Changchun Temple, Wuhan, Hubei.

Taoism (道教; *Daojiao* in Chinese) refers to a variety of related philosophical and religious traditions and concepts, born in China itself in the 6th century BCE and it's traditionally traced to the composition of the *Tao Te Ching* attributed to the sage Laozi, a person who subsequently came to be venerated by Taoist as *Daode Tianjun* in the Three Pure Ones. Taoist thought focuses on health, longevity, immortality, wu wei (non-action) and spontaneity. These traditions have influenced East Asia for over two thousand years and some have spread internationally.^[98]

Reverence for nature and ancestor spirits is common in popular Taoism. Organized Taoism distinguishes its ritual activity from that of the folk religion, which some professional Taoists (*Daoshi*) view as debased. Chinese alchemy, astrology, cuisine, several Chinese martial arts, Chinese traditional medicine, fengshui, and many styles of qigong breath training disciplines are intertwined with Taoism throughout history.

Taoism was established as a religion in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220). During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–589), Neo-Taoism adopted concepts and methods from its rival, Buddhism. Some emperors supported it for political reasons while many educated men and women were attracted by its beauty and power. Taoism experienced its silver age from the Tang Dynasty (618–907) to the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). Many sects arose during this period. Taoist temples and Taoist masters spread throughout China. After the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Taoism divided into two main sects: Quanzhen and Zhengyi Dao.^[99]

Taoism gradually developed with the support of the rulers. However, during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), national conflicts sapped the energy and support for Taoism. In the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the Manchu rulers adopted Tibetan Buddhism and lost interest in Taoism.^[99] After 1949, The People's Republic of China found Taoism detrimental to socialist reconstruction while permitting some practical arts linked to Taoism, such as the use of traditional herbal medicines.^[100] In 1956 a national organization, the Chinese Taoist Association (with chapters in every province and city) was set up to administer Taoist activities.

Banned during the Cultural Revolution (along with all other religions), Taoism is undergoing a major revival today.^[101] Both the Beijing Taoist Association and the Shanghai Taoist Association (local chapters of the Chinese Taoist Association) report their own membership to number over 100 million individuals.^[102] Shenism, which includes Taoism, is estimated to be the largest religion in China with 20–30%^{[13][15]} of the total population worshipping Shenist ethnic deities or adhering to Taoist institutions.

In April 2007, China took place the International Forum on the Daodejing, during which celebrities and government officials expressed will to support Taoism as one of the foundations of Chinese culture.^[103] Chinese Taoist clergy is organizing missionary systems to spread the spirituality around the world.^{[101][104]}

Buddhism



Golden Temple at the summit of Emei Shan, in Sichuan. Emei Shan is one of the Four Sacred Mountains of Chinese Buddhism.



Altar inside Litang Monastery, a Tibetan Buddhist complex in Tibet.

Buddhism (called 佛教, *Fojiao*) was introduced from India during the Han Dynasty, traditionally in the 1st century. It became very popular among Chinese of all walks of life, admired by commoners, and sponsored by emperors in certain dynasties. It is estimated that by the 9th century Buddhist institutions had become the most powerful of China, surpassing the Taoist ones and challenging the authority of the government.

This led to the so called Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution, which saw Buddhism repressed. Although the persecution was heavy, Buddhism survived and reflourished in the following centuries. It experienced important developments at the time of some Chinese dynasties, such as Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui Dynasty, Tang Dynasty, Song Dynasty, and others. Buddhism is deeply embedded in the culture of China, Chinese philosophy, and in Chinese pop culture today.

The entry of Buddhism into China was marked by interaction and syncretism with Taoism in particular.^[105] Originally seen as a kind of "foreign Taoism", Buddhism's scriptures were translated into Chinese using the Taoist vocabulary.^[106] Chan Buddhism was particularly shaped by Taoism, integrating distrust of scripture, text and even language, as well as the Taoist views of embracing "this life", dedicated practice and the "every-moment".^[107] In the Tang period Taoism incorporated such Buddhist elements as monasteries, vegetarianism, prohibition of alcohol, the doctrine of emptiness, and collecting scripture into tripartite organisation. During the same time, Chan Buddhism grew to become the largest sect in Chinese Buddhism.^[108]

Buddhism was not universally welcomed, particularly among the gentry. The Buddha's Dharma seemed alien and amoral to conservative and Confucian sensibilities.^[109] Confucianism promoted social stability, order, strong families, and practical living, and Chinese officials questioned how a monk's monasticism and

personal attainment of nirvana benefited the empire.^[106] However, Buddhism and Confucianism eventually reconciled after centuries of conflict and assimilation.^[110]

With the rise of People's Republic of China in 1949 Buddhism was banned and many temples and monasteries destroyed. Restrictions lasted until the 1980s. The Buddhist Association of China was founded in 1953. In recent times, Buddhism has recovered popularity and it is returned to be the largest organized faith in the country. While estimates of the number of Buddhists in China range widely, Chinese government statistics estimates the number of Buddhists at 100 million.^[111]

Today the most popular form of Buddhism in China is a mix of the Pure Land and Chán schools. The most recent surveys put the total number of Chinese Buddhists at a growing 18% to 20% of the total population, or around 300 million people,^{[17][18][19]} thus making China the country with the most Buddhist adherents in the world, followed by Japan. Other sources claim the Chinese Buddhists to be over 660 million people (50%).^{[73][73][74][112]} However, it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because many Chinese Mahayanists identify themselves as Taoist (Taoism is a major branch of Chinese traditional religion) and Buddhist at the same time.

Buddhism is growing fast among successful urban professional people.^[113] The vast majority of Chinese Buddhists are Mahayana; while minority are Vajrayana, among them Tibetans, Mongols, and Manchu who traditionally follow their Tibetan Buddhism, and small communities of Theravada also exist among the minority ethnic groups live in southern provinces as Yunnan and Guangxi which border Burma, Thailand and Laos.

Buddhism is supported by the government. The 108-metre-high Guanyin Statue of Hainan was enshrined on 24 April 2005 with the participation of 108 eminent monks from various Buddhist groups in Hong Kong, Macao and Mainland China, and tens of thousands of pilgrims. The delegation also included monks from the Theravada and Vajrayana traditions.^{[114][115]} China is one of the countries which own many of the world's highest Buddhist statues.

In April 2006 China organized the World Buddhist Forum and in March 2007 the government banned mining on Buddhist sacred mountains.^[116] In May of the same year, in Changzhou, world's tallest pagoda was built and opened.^{[117][118][119]} In March 2008 the Taiwan-based Tzu Chi Foundation was approved to open a branch in China.^[120]

In 2010 remains of the skull of Gautama Buddha have been unveiled and enshrined as relics (sarira) at Qixia Temple in Nanjing.^{[121][122]} A famed historical pagoda-tower

destroyed a century and a half ago is being rebuilt to host the relic.^[123] Yet in 2009 Gautama Buddha's fingerbone relic was enshrined in a world tallest stupa recently built within the domains of Famen Temple, in Shaanxi.^[34]

However, some restrictions of Tibetan Buddhism are due to controversies about its hierarchy, and the issue of the succession of Tenzin Gyatso the current 14th Dalai Lama (who wasn't invited to the World Buddhist Forum). Tenzin Gyatso – who was not only the spiritual leader of Gelug Buddhism, the major branch of Tibetan Buddhism, but also the sovereign of Tibet – is in exile, and China currently intends to elect its own 15th Dalai Lama. In August 2007 China has prohibited the reincarnation of Tibetan living buddhas without permission of the government, thus limiting the influence of Tenzin Gyatso on new Gelug Buddhist monks.^[124]

Non-Han indigenous religions



The Narshi Gomba, a Bönpo monastery in Aba, Sichuan.

Besides Han Chinese practicing their ethnic Shenism, various Chinese non-Han minority ethnicities have retained their own ethnic religions. An estimate puts the number of followers of these tribal religions at roughly 60 million, or 4% of the whole Mainland Chinese population (it's not clear whether the figure includes Tibetan and Theravada Buddhists).^[22] The Government of the People's Republic of China promotes and protects the tribal religions of minority nations as pivotal expression of their cultural identity.

Numerically, the most significant tribal religion is that of the Zhuang, a people inhabiting the Zhuang Autonomous Region of Guangxi. About 80–90% out of 18 million of the Zhuang follow their ethnic faith, Moz (Chinese: 摩教, *Mojiao*).^[125] It is a polytheistic, animistic and shamanic system codified into a mythology and a sacred scripture, the Buluotuo Epic. A very similar religion of the same name is adhered to by the Zhuang-related Buyei people.

Bön (Tibetan): བོན་; called 苯教, *Benjiao* by the Chinese) is the oldest spiritual tradition of Tibet, dominant before the introduction of Buddhism. The Bönpo religion is traditionally considered founded by the mythical figure of Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche. With the spread of Buddhism, Bön incorporated styles, iconography and clergy system of the new religion, whereas remaining a distinguished tradition. Simultaneously, Bönpo elements combined with original Buddhism gave origin to Tibetan Buddhism. An estimated 10% of Tibetans follow Bön.

The traditional religion of the Qiang people (200.000, most residing in north-western Sichuan) has been recently systematised into the so-called White Stone Religion following competition by institutional Taoism and Buddhism. Nowadays most of the Qiang follow it, a system which is mainly animistic and pantheistic, focusing on the worship of nature.^[126] In the White Stone Religion white stones are symbols of the Qiang gods, particularly the God of Heaven, the God of Earth, the God of the Mountains, the God of the Trees and the Goddess of the Mountains.^[127]

Dongbaism (東巴教, *Dongbajiao* in Chinese) is the primary religion of the Nakhi people. About two-thirds of today Nakhis (200.000 on 300.000) are Dongbaists. Although it has remained exclusive to the Nakhis, the Dongbaist religion is not considered native by scholars. Deep similarities between Dongbaist practices and the Bönpo ones seem to prove that Dongbaism arose roughly during the 11th or 12th century. Bönpos are considered to have settled among the Nakhis spreading their religion; Dongbaism eventually originated by the combination of Bön with Nakhi native beliefs. Dongbaists worship nature, personified by human-snake-chimera creatures called *Shv* or *Shu*.

In the Moz, Qiang and Dongbaist religions, as well as in the tribal religions of other minorities, structures similar to those of Taoism are identifiable, particularly in the clergy system. Ritual specialists of these religions are very similar in social function to Taoist masters. This is because in imperial times, the Chinese central governments sent Taoist missionaries to national minorities in Southern China in order to incorporate their religions into official institutional Taoism, expanding and establishing governmental power.

Abrahamic religions

Christianity



St. Ignatius Cathedral of Shanghai.



A Protestant church in Harbin, Heilongjiang.

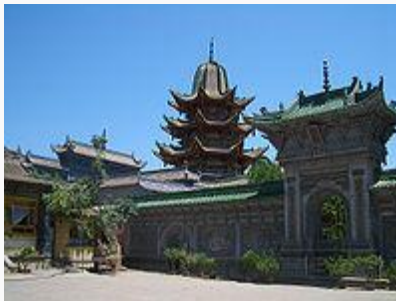


The Lord's Prayer in Classical Chinese, 1889.

Islam



Taizi Mosque in Yinchuan, Ningxia.



The *gongbei* (shrine) of the Sufi master Yu Baba in Linxia City, Gansu.

Islam (called 伊斯兰教, *Yisilanjiao* or 回教 *Huijiao*) dates to a mission in 651, only eighteen years after Prophet Muhammad's death, by an envoy led by Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, the uncle of Muhammad himself.^[140] The Gaozong Emperor showed esteem for Islam and established the Huaisheng Mosque, or Memorial Mosque, in memory of the Prophet.^[140] While modern historians say that there is no evidence for Waqqās himself ever coming to China,^[141] they do believe that Muslim diplomats and merchants arrived to Tang China within a few decades from the beginning of Muslim Era.^[141]

Muslims went to China to trade, virtually dominated the import and export industry by the time of the Song Dynasty, while the office of Director General of Shipping was consistently held by a Muslim.^{[140][142]} Larger immigration began when hundreds of thousands of Muslims were relocated to help to administer China during the Yuan Dynasty.^[143] A Muslim, Yeheidie'erdning led the construction of the Yuan capital of Khanbaliq, in present-day Beijing.^[144] During the Ming Dynasty, Muslims continued their influence on government. Six of the founder of Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang's

most trusted generals were Muslim, including Lan Yu who led a decisive victory over the Mongols, effectively ending the Mongol dream to re-conquer China. The Yongle Emperor hired Zheng He, China's foremost explorer, to lead seven expeditions to the Indian Ocean. Muslims who were descended from earlier immigration began to assimilate by speaking Chinese dialects and by adopting Chinese names and culture. This era, sometimes considered the Golden Age of Islam in China,^[142] also saw Nanjing become an important center of Islamic study.^[145]

The rise of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) saw numerous rebellions. The Qing rulers belonged to the Manchu, a minority in China. The Muslim revolt in the northwest occurred due to violent and bloody infighting between Muslim sects, the Gedimu, Khafiya, and Jahariyya, while the rebellion in Yunnan occurred because of repression by Qing officials. resulted in five bloody Hui rebellions, most notably the Panthay Rebellion, which occurred in Yunnan province from 1855 to 1873, and the Dungan revolt, which occurred mostly in Xinjiang, Shensi and Gansu, from 1862 to 1877. The Manchu government ordered the execution of all rebels killing a million people in the Panthay rebellion,^{[144][page needed]} several million in the Dungan revolt^[144]

However, many Muslims like Ma Zhan'ao, Ma Anliang, Dong Fuxiang, Ma Qianling, and Ma Julung defected to the Qing dynasty side, and helped the Qing general Zuo Zongtang exterminate the Muslim rebels. These Muslim generals belonged to the Khafiya sect, and they helped Qing massacre Jahariyya rebels. General Zuo moved the Han around Hezhou out of the area and relocated them as a reward for the Muslims there helping Qing kill other Muslim rebels.

In 1895, another Dungan Revolt (1895) broke out, and loyalist Muslims like Dong Fuxiang, Ma Anliang, Ma Guoliang, Ma Fulu, and Ma Fuxiang suppressed and massacred the rebel Muslims led by Ma Dahan, Ma Yonglin, and Ma Wanfu. A Muslim army called the Kansu Braves led by General Dong Fuxiang fought for the Qing dynasty against the foreigners during the Boxer Rebellion. They included well known Generals like Ma Anliang, Ma Fulu, and Ma Fuxiang.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, Sun Yat Sen, proclaimed that the country belonged equally to the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan and Hui people. In the 1920's the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu and Ningxia came under the control of Muslim Governors/Warlords known as the Ma clique. These Muslims served as Military Generals in the National Revolutionary Army and were members of the ruling Kuomintang party of the Republic of China.

During Maoist rule, in the Cultural Revolution, mosques were often defaced, destroyed or closed and copies of the Quran were destroyed along with temples, churches, monasteries, and cemeteries by the Red Guards.^{[146][147]}

Today Islam is experiencing a revival. There is an upsurge in Islamic expression and many nation-wide Islamic associations have organized to co-ordinate inter-ethnic activities among Muslims. Muslims are found in every province in China. Of China's 55 officially recognized minorities, ten groups are predominately Muslim. Statistics are hard to find, and the number of Muslims in China today is somewhere between 20 to 100 million by one source.^[140] But most estimates figures that there are 20 to 30 million Muslims (1.5% to 2% of the population).^{[135][148][149][150][151]} while according to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims (1.4%)^[140] with 35,000 Islamic places of worship, and more than 45,000 imams. In 2006 a record number of Chinese traveled to Mecca for the hajj, up 40 percent from the previous year.^[152]

Judaism

Judaism (called 犹太教, *Youtaijiao* in Chinese) was introduced during the Tang Dynasty (between the 7th and the 10th century) or earlier, by small groups of Jews settled in China. The most prominent early community was at Kaifeng, in Henan province (Kaifeng Jews). In the 20th century many Jews arrived in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Harbin during those cities' periods of economic expansion in the first decades of the century, as well as for the purpose of seeking refuge from anti-Semitic pogroms in Russian Empire (the early 1900s), the communist revolution and civic war in Russia (1917–1918), and anti-Semitic Nazi policy in Central Europe, chiefly in Germany and Austria (1937–1940), and the last wave from Poland and other Eastern European countries (the early 1940s).^[153]

Shanghai was particularly notable for its volume of Jewish refugees (Shanghai Ghetto), most of whom left after the war, the rest relocating prior to or immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic. Today, the Kaifeng Jewish community is functionally extinct. Many descendants of the Kaifeng community still live among the Chinese population, mostly unaware of their Jewish ancestry. Meanwhile, remnants of the later arrivals maintain communities in Shanghai and Hong Kong. In recent years a community has also developed in Beijing, especially by Chabad-Lubavitch.

More recently, since the late 20th century, along with the study of religion in general, the study of Judaism and Jews in China as an academic subject has begun to blossom (i.e. Institute of Jewish Studies (Nanjing), China Judaic Studies Association).^[154]

New religious movements



Han Dynasty era fragments representing Qigong practices.



The Round Mound Altar, the altar proper at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, where the Emperor communed with Heaven.

A great diversity of new religious movements are thriving across China.^[59] The majority are indigenous, and into this group some are totally new whilst others were already active before the communist revolution in 1949, and are being re-introduced from Taiwan. The most relevant among these last are Yiguandao (and other sects within the Xiantianism category),^[60] Tiendery-Tientism,^[61] Yaochidao and Zailiism.^[31]

Among the very new ones the most notable are the various Qigong-inspired groups, such as Falun Gong, Zhong Gong, Yuanji Gong and Wang Gong, and Christian-inspired Taiping-style sects such

as Zhushenism, Linglingism, Fuhuodao, Mentuhui and Lightning from the East.^{[62][63]} Other movements are allogeous in origin, for example the Bahá'í Faith.^[64]

Other religions

Heaven worship

The Heaven worship was the bureaucratic belief system subscribed to by most dynasties of China until the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty. It was a panentheistic system, centering on the worship of Tian (the "Heaven") as an omnipotent force. This religious system predated Taoism, Confucian thought and the introduction of Buddhism and Christianity; its dogmas supported the basements of the imperial hierarchy.

It had monotheistic features in that Heaven was seen as an omniscient entity, endowed with personality but no corporeal form. Heaven as a monotheistic god was variously referred to as *Shangdi* (literally "Lord Above"). Worship of Heaven included the erection of temples, the last and greatest being the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, and the offering of prayers. Heaven was believed to manifest itself through the powers of the weather and natural disasters. No iconographies were permitted in Heaven worship. Heaven was seen as a judge of humans. Especially evil people were believed to be killed by Heaven through lightning, with their crimes inscribed on their (burnt) spines.

From the writings of Confucius, we find that Confucius himself believed that Heaven cannot be deceived, Heaven guides people's lives and maintains a personal relationship with them, and that Heaven gives tasks for people to fulfill to teach them righteousness (*yi*, 義).^[22] However, this faith system was not truly monotheistic since other lesser gods and spirits, which varied with locality, were also worshiped along with *Shangdi*. Still, variants such as Mohism approached high monotheism, teaching that the function of lesser gods and ancestral spirits is merely to carry out the will of *Shangdi*, which included observing "universal love" (*jian'ai*, 兼爱) and shunning fatalism.

After the advent of Taoism and Buddhism, Heaven monotheism faded in popular belief. However, some of its concepts remained in use throughout the premodern period. These concepts, often influenced heavily by Confucian theory, include the Mandate of Heaven, the Emperor's role as Son of Heaven, and the legitimate overthrow of a dynasty when its "mandate" ended. These structures actually consolidated the authority of the Emperor.

Emperors who favoured Taoism and Buddhism neglecting the worship of Heaven were often seen as anomalous. Elements were also incorporated in Chinese folk religion. Execution by lightning, for example, became one of the roles of the thunder gods. The concept of the almighty Heaven remained in popular expressions. Where an Anglophone would say "Oh my God" or "Thank God", a Chinese person might say "Oh Heaven" ("老天！" or "天哪！") or "Thank the heavens and the earth" ("謝天謝地").

Manichaeism



A Manichaean inscription, dated 1445, at Temple Cao'an, in Jinjiang, Fujian. (Modern replica).^[155]

Manichaeism (called 摩尼教, *Monijiao*), an Iranian religion, entered China between the 6th century and the 8th century due to contacts between the Tang Dynasty and states of Central Asia, particularly Tokharistan.^[156] In 731, a Manichaean priest was asked by the Chinese Emperor to realize a summary of the religion's teachings. He wrote the *Compendium of the Teachings of Mani the Buddha of Light*. The Tang government approved Manichaeism to be practiced by foreigners but prohibited preaching among Chinese people.^[156]

A turning point occurred in 762 with the conversion of Bogu Khan of the Uyghurs.^[156] Since 755, the Chinese Empire had been weakened by the An Shi Rebellion, and the Uyghurs had become the only fighting force serving the Tang Dynasty. Bogu Khan encouraged Manichaeism to spread in China. Manichaean temples were established in the two capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, as well as in several other cities in the Northern and Central China.^[156]

The decay of Uyghur power in 840 brought the closure of many Manichaean institutions.^[156] Emperor Wuzong of Tang started the Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution, which was not exclusively against Buddhism but extended to all foreign religions. The religion was severely suppressed, but didn't die out. During the period of the Five

Dynasties, it re-emerged as a popular underground phenomenon, particularly in Southern China.^[156]

In 1120, a rebellion led by Fang Xi was believed to be caused by adherents of underground religious communities, whose meeting places were said to host political protests. This event brought crackdowns of unauthorized religious congregations and destruction of scriptures. In 1280, the Mongol rule gave a century of freedom to Manichaeism,^[156] but, in 1368, the Ming Dynasty started new persecutions.^[156] The religion gradually collapsed, eventually dying out during the following centuries.

Hinduism



An apsara from the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, China.

Hinduism is a minor religion in The People's Republic of China, with roughly about 130,000 followers and composing only of 0.01% of China's total population.

Some examples of influence by Hinduism on ancient Chinese religion included the belief of "Six Schools" or "Six Doctrines" as well as use of Yoga, stupas (later became pagoda in East Asia). However, in China, Hinduism has never gained much popularity, unlike the beliefs of Buddhism.

There was a small Hindu community in China, mostly situated in southeastern China. A late 13th-century bilingual Tamil and Chinese-language inscription has been found associated with the remains of a Shiva temple in Quanzhou. This was one of possibly two south Indian-style Hindu temples that were built in the southeastern sector of the old port, where the foreign traders' enclave was formerly located.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism (called 琐罗亚斯德教, *Suoluoyasidejiao*, or 祆教, *Xianjiao*) expanded in Northern China during the 6th century via the Silk Road. It gained the status of an official religion in some Chinese regions. Zoroastrian fire temples have been found in Kaifeng and Zhenjiang. According to some scholars, they remained active until the 12th century, when the religion started to fade from the Chinese landscape.

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