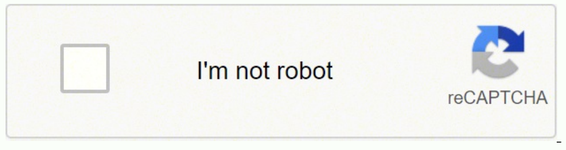

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What is the main religion china

Religious beliefs in China This article is about religion in the history of China and religion in the People's Republic of China. For religion in the Republic of China, see religion in Taiwan. Religion in China (CFPS 2014)[1][2][note 1]   Chinese folk religion / Not recognized as official religion and irreligious (73.56%) Buddhism (15.87%) Taoism, folk sects, and other religious organisations,[note 2] (7.6%) Protestantism (2.19%) Islam[note 3] (0.45%) Catholicism (0.34%) Three laughs at Tiger Brook, a Song dynasty (12th century) painting portraying three men representing Confucianism, Taoism (Daoism), and Buddhism laughing together White Horse Temple, a Buddhist Temple in Henan Province The imposing stupa enshrining the relic of Shakyamuni Buddha's finger bone, at Famen Temple, a Buddhist complex in Baoji, Shaanxi. Longhua Temple, Shanghai. Related to Buddhist practice. Grand Buddha at Ling Shan, Wuxi Religion by country Africa Algeria Angola Benin Botswana Burkina Faso Burundi Cameroon Cape Verde Central African Republic Chad Comoros Democratic Republic of the Congo Republic of the Congo Djibouti Egypt Equatorial Guinea Eritrea Eswatini Ethiopia Gabon Gambia Ghana Guinea Guinea-Bissau Ivory Coast Kenya Lesotho Liberia Libya Madagascar Malawi Mali Mauritania Mauritius Morocco Mozambique Namibia Niger Nigeria Rwanda São Tomé and Príncipe Senegal Seychelles Sierra Leone Somalia South Africa South Sudan Sudan Tanzania Togo Tunisia Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe Asia Afghanistan Armenia Azerbaijan Bahrain Bangladesh Bhutan Brunei Cambodia China Cyprus East Timor Hong Kong India Indonesia Iran Iraq Israel Japan Jordan Kazakhstan Kuwait Kyrgyzstan Laos Lebanon Macau Malaysia Maldives Mongolia Myanmar Nepal North Korea Oman Pakistan Palestine Philippines Qatar Russia Saudi Arabia Singapore South Korea Sri Lanka Syria Taiwan Tajikistan Thailand Turkey Turkmenistan United Arab Emirates Uzbekistan Vietnam Yemen Europe Albania Andorra Austria Belarus Belgium Bosnia and Herzegovina Bulgaria Croatia Czechia Denmark Estonia Finland France Georgia Germany Greece Hungary Iceland Ireland Italy Kosovo Latvia Liechtenstein Lithuania Luxembourg Malta Moldova Monaco Montenegro Netherlands North Macedonia Norway Poland Portugal Romania Russia San Marino Serbia Slovakia Slovenia Spain Sweden Switzerland Turkey Ukraine United Kingdom England Northern Ireland Scotland Wales North America Antigua and Barbuda Bahamas Barbados Belize Canada Costa Rica Cuba Dominica Dominican Republic El Salvador Grenada Guatemala Haiti Honduras Jamaica Mexico Nicaragua Panama Saint Kitts and Nevis Saint Lucia Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Trinidad and Tobago United States Oceania Australia Fiji Kiribati Marshall Islands Micronesia Nauru New Zealand Palau Papua New Guinea Samoa Solomon Islands Tonga Tuvalu Vanuatu South America Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Colombia Ecuador Guyana Paraguay Peru Suriname Uruguay Venezuela Religion portalvte The People's Republic of China espouses state atheism,[3] but many Chinese citizens, including Communist Party of China (CPC) members, practice some kind of Chinese folk religion. Chinese civilization has historically long been a cradle and host to a variety of the most enduring religio-philosophical traditions of the world. Confucianism and Taoism (Daoism), later joined by Buddhism, constitute the "three teachings" that have shaped Chinese culture. There are no clear boundaries between these intertwined religious systems, which do not claim to be exclusive, and elements of each enrich popular or folk religion. The emperors of China claimed the Mandate of Heaven and participated in Chinese religious practices. In the early 20th century, reform-minded officials and intellectuals attacked all religions as "superstitious"; since 1949, China has been governed by the CCP, a Marxist–Leninist atheist institution that prohibits party members from practicing religion while in office. In the culmination of a series of atheistic and anti-religious campaigns already underway since the late 19th century, the Cultural Revolution against old habits, ideas, customs, and culture, lasting from 1966 to 1976, destroyed or forced them underground.[4][5]:138 Under subsequent leaders, religious organisations were given more autonomy. The government formally recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. In the early 21st century, there has been increasing official recognition of Confucianism and Chinese folk religion as part of China's cultural inheritance. Folk or popular religion, the most widespread system of beliefs and practices, has evolved and adapted since at least the Shang and Zhou dynasties in the second millennium BCE. Fundamental elements of a theology and spiritual explanation for the nature of the universe harken back to this period and were further elaborated in the Axial Age. Basically, Chinese religion involves allegiance to the shen, often translated as "spirits", defining a variety of gods and immortals. These may be deities of the natural environment or ancestral principles of human groups, concepts of civility, culture heroes, many of whom feature in Chinese mythology and history.[6] Confucian philosophy and religious practice began their long evolution during the later Zhou; Taoist institutionalized religions developed by the Han dynasty; Chinese Buddhism became widely popular by the Tang dynasty, and in response Confucian thinkers developed neo-Confucian philosophies; and popular movements of salvation and local cults thrived. Christianity and Islam arrived in China in the 7th century. Christianity did not take root until it was reintroduced in the 16th century by Jesuit missionaries.[7] In the early 20th century Christian communities grew, but after 1949, foreign missionaries were expelled, and churches brought under government-controlled institutions. After the late 1970s, religious freedoms for Christians improved and new Chinese groups emerged.[8]:508,532 Islam has been practiced in Chinese society for 1,400 years.[9] Currently, Muslims are a minority group in China, representing between 0.45% to 1.8% of the total population according to the latest estimates.[1][10] Though Hui Muslims are the most numerous group,[11] the greatest concentration of Muslims is in Xinjiang, with a significant Uyghur population. China is also often considered a home to humanism and secularism, this-worldly ideologies beginning in the time of Confucius. Because many Han Chinese do not consider their spiritual beliefs and practices to be a "religion" and do not feel that they must practice any one of them exclusively, it is difficult to gather clear and reliable statistics. According to scholarly opinion, "the great majority of China's population of 1.4 billion" takes part in Chinese cosmological religion, its rituals and festivals of the lunar calendar, without belonging to any institutional teaching.[12] National surveys conducted in the early 21st century estimated that some 80% of the population of China, which is more than a billion people, practice some kind of Chinese folk religion; 13–16% are Buddhists; 10% are Taoist; 2.53% are Christians; and 0.83% are Muslims. Folk religious movements of salvation constitute 2–3% to 13% of the population, while many in the intellectual class adhere to Confucianism as a religious identity. In addition, ethnic minority groups practice distinctive religions, including Tibetan Buddhism, and Islam among the Hui and Uyghur peoples. History Proto-Chinese and Xia-Shang-Zhou culture Jade dragon of the Hongshan culture. The dragon, associated with the constellation Draco winding around the north ecliptic pole, represents the "protean" primordial power, which embodies yin and yang in unity.[13] Squared dǐng 鼎 (ritual cauldron) with tāotiè 饕餮 motif. According to Didier, both the cauldrons and the taotie symmetrical faces originate as symbols of Di as the squared north celestial pole, with four faces.[14] Tibetan chart for bloodletting based on the Luoshu square. The Luoshu, the Hetu, liubo boards, sundials, Han diviner's boards (shì 式) and luopan for fengshui, and the derived compass, as well as TLV mirrors, are all representations of Di as the north celestial pole.[15] See also: Shang-Zhou theology Further information: Chinese shamanism, Wu (shaman), and Sino-Babylonianism Prior to the formation of Chinese civilisation and the spread of world religions in the region known today as East Asia (which includes the territorial boundaries of modern-day China), local tribes shared animistic, shamanic and totemic worldviews. Mediatory individuals such as shamans communicated prayers, sacrifices or offerings directly to the spiritual world, a heritage that survives in some modern forms of Chinese religion.[16] Ancient shamanism is especially connected to ancient Neolithic cultures such as the Hongshan culture.[17] The Flemish philosopher Ulrich Libbrecht traces the origins of some features of Taoism to what Jan Jakob Maria de Groot called "Wuism",[18] that is Chinese shamanism.[19] Libbrecht distinguishes two layers in the development of the Chinese theology and religion that continues to this day, traditions derived respectively from the Shang (1600–1046 BCE) and subsequent Zhou dynasties (1046–256 BCE). The religion of the Shang was based on the worship of ancestors and god-kings, who survived as unseen divine forces after death. They were not transcendent entities, since the universe was "by itself so", not created by a force outside of it but generated by internal rhythms and cosmic powers. The royal ancestors were called di (帝), "deities", and the utmost progenitor was Shangdi (上帝 "Highest Deity"). Shangdi is identified with the dragon, symbol of the unlimited power (qi),[19] of the "protean" primordial power which embodies yin and yang in unity, associated to the constellation Draco which winds around the north ecliptic pole,[13] and slithers between the Little and Big Dipper (or Great Chariot). Already in Shang theology, the multiplicity of gods of nature and ancestors were viewed as parts of Di, and the four 方 fāng ("directions" or "sides") and their 風 fēng ("winds") as his cosmic will.[20] The Zhou dynasty, which overthrew the Shang, was more rooted in an agricultural worldview, and they emphasised a more universal idea of Tian (天 "Heaven").[19] The Shang dynasty's identification of Shangdi as their ancestor-god had asserted their claim to power by divine right; the Zhou transformed this claim into a legitimacy based on moral power, the Mandate of Heaven. In Zhou theology, Tian had no singular earthly progeny, but bestowed divine favour on virtuous rulers. Zhou kings declared that their victory over the Shang was because they were virtuous and loved their people, while the Shang were tyrants and thus were deprived of power by Tian.[21] John C. Didier and David Pankenier relate the shapes of both the ancient Chinese characters for Di and Tian to the patterns of stars in the northern skies, either drawn, in Didier's theory by connecting the constellations bracketing the north celestial pole as a square,[22] or in Pankenier's theory by connecting some of the stars which form the constellations of the Big Dipper and broader Ursa Major, and Ursa Minor (Little Dipper). [23] Cultures in other parts of the world have also conceived these stars or constellations as symbols of the origin of things, the supreme godhead, divinity and royal power.[24] Shang and Zhou graphemes for Di and Tian①②③④⑤⑥❶ One version of the Shang grapheme for the nominal Dì k:帝 ("Deity", "deities", "divinity"), which according to David W. Pankenier was drawn by connecting the stars of the "handle" of Ursa Major and the "scoop" of Ursa Minor determining the northern culmen (北极 Běijí).[25] Otherwise, according to John C. Didier this and all the other graphemes ultimately represent Dīng 口 (archaic of k:丁, which also signifies the square tool), the north celestial pole godhead as a square.[26] The bar on top, which is either present or not and one or two in Shang script, is the k:上 shàng to signify "highest".[27] The crossbar element in the middle represents a carpenter's square, and is present in other graphemes including 方 fāng, itself meaning "square", "direction", "phase", "way" and "power", which in Shang versions was alternately represented as a cross potent ☩, homographically to 巫 wū ("shaman").[28] Dì is equivalent to symbols like wàn 卍 ("all things")[29] and Mesopotamian Dingir/An ("Heaven").[30]❷ Another version of the Shang grapheme for the nominal Dì.[31]❸ One version of the Shang grapheme for the verbal dì k:禘, "to divine, to sacrifice (by fire)". The modern standard version is distinguished by the prefixion of the signifier for "cult" (礻 shì) to the nominal Dì.[32][33] It may represent a fish entering the square of the north celestial pole (Dīng 口),[34] or rather k:定 dìng, i.e. the Square of Pegasus or Celestial Temple, when aligning with Dì and thus framing true north.[23] Also dǐng k:鼎 ("cauldron", "thurible") may have derived from the verbal dì.[35]❹ Shang grapheme for Shàngjiǎ k:上甲, "Supreme Ancestor", an alternate name of Shangdi.[36]❺ The most common Zhou version of the grapheme Tiān ("Heaven") k:天, represented as a man with a squared (dīng 口) head.[37]❻ Another Zhou version of the grapheme for Tiān.[37] Latter Zhou and Warring States Further information: Hundred Schools of Thought By the 6th century BCE the power of Tian and the symbols that represented it on earth (architecture of cities, temples, altars and ritual cauldrons, and the Zhou ritual system) became "diffuse" and claimed by different potentates in the Zhou states to legitimise economic, political, and military ambitions. Divine right no longer was an exclusive privilege of the Zhou royal house, but might be bought by anyone able to afford the elaborate ceremonies and the old and new rites required to access the authority of Tian.[38] Besides the waning Zhou ritual system, what may be defined as "wild" (野 yě) traditions, or traditions "outside of the official system", developed as attempts to access the will of Tian. The population had lost faith in the official tradition, which was no longer perceived as an effective way to communicate with Heaven. The traditions of the "Nine Fields" (九野 Jiǔyě) and of the Yijing flourished.[39] Chinese thinkers, faced with this challenge to legitimacy, diverged in a "Hundred Schools of Thought", each proposing its own theories for the reconstruction of the Zhou moral order. Background of Confucian thought Large sealSmall sealOlden versions of the grapheme 儒 rú, meaning "scholar", "refined one", "Confucian". It is composed of 人 rén ("man") and 需 xū ("to await"), itself composed of 雨 yǔ ("rain", "instruction") and 而 ér ("sky"), graphically a "man under the rain". Its full meaning is "man receiving instruction from Heaven". According to Kang Youwei, Hu Shih, and Yao Xinzhong, they were the official shaman-priests experts in rites and astronomy of the Shang, and later Zhou, dynasty.[40] See also: Confucian theology Confucius (551–479 BCE) appeared in this period of political decadence and spiritual questioning. He was educated in Shang-Zhou theology, which he contributed to transmit and reformulate giving centrality to self-cultivation and human agency,[21] and the educational power of the self-established individual in assisting others to establish themselves (the principle of 愛人 àirén, "loving others").[41] As the Zhou reign collapsed, traditional values were abandoned resulting in a period of moral decline. Confucius saw an opportunity to reinforce values of compassion and tradition into society. Disillusioned with the widespread vulgarisation of the rituals to access Tian, he began to preach an ethical interpretation of traditional Zhou religion. In his view, the power of Tian is immanent, and responds positively to the sincere heart driven by humaneness and rightness, decency and altruism. Confucius conceived these qualities as the foundation needed to restore socio-political harmony. Like many contemporaries, Confucius saw ritual practices as efficacious ways to access Tian, but he thought that the crucial knot was the state of meditation that participants enter prior to engage in the ritual acts.[42] Confucius amended and recodified the classical books inherited from the Xia-Shang-Zhou dynasties, and composed the Spring and Autumn Annals.[43] Philosophers in the Warring States compiled in the Analects, and formulated the classical metaphysics which became the lash of Confucianism. In accordance with the Master, they identified mental tranquility as the state of Tian, or the One (一 Yī), which in each individual is the Heaven-bestowed divine power to rule one's own life and the world. Going beyond the Master, they theorised the oneness of production and reabsorption into the cosmic source, and the possibility to understand and therefore reattain it through meditation. This line of thought would have influenced all Chinese individual and collective-political mystical theories and practices thereafter.[44] According to Zhou Youguang, Confucianism's name in Chinese, basically 儒 rú, originally referred to shamanic methods of holding rites and existed before Confucius' times, but with Confucius it came to mean devotion to propagating such teachings to bring civilisation to the people. Confucianism was initiated by Confucius, developed by Mencius (~372–289 BCE) and inherited by later generations, undergoing constant transformations and restructuring since its establishment, but preserving the principles of humaneness and righteousness at its core.[43] Qin and Han dynasties Main hall of the Dai Temple (岱庙 Dàimiào) at Mount Tai. As the major one of the Eastern Peak Temples, dedicated to the Green (or Blue) Emperor (蒼帝 Cāngdì or 青帝 Qīngdì), the spring aspect of the Highest Deity identified with Jupiter,[45] it is a site of fire sacrifice to Di since prehistoric times.[46] Mount Tai is the holiest of the China's sacred mountains; according to mythology it formed from Pangu's head after his body's dissection. See also: Qin-Han theology The Qin (221–206 BCE), and especially Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), inherited the philosophical developments of the Warring States period molding them into a universalistic philosophy, cosmology and religion. It was in this period that religious focus shifted to the Earth (地 Dì), regarded as representative of Heaven's (celestial pole's) power. In the Han period, the philosophical concern was especially the crucial role of the human being on earth, completing the cosmological trinity of Heaven-Earth-humanity (天地人 Tiāndìrén). Han philosophers conceived the immanent virtue of Tian as working through earth and humanity to complete the 宇宙 yǔzhòu ("space-time").[47] The short-lived Qin dynasty, started by Qin Shi Huang (r. 247–220 BCE), who reunified the Warring States and was the first Chinese ruler to use the title of "emperor", chose Legalism as the state ideology, banning and persecuting all other schools of thought. Confucianism was harshly suppressed, with the burning of Confucian classics and killing of scholars who espoused the Confucian cause.[48][49] The state ritual of the Qin was indeed similar to that of the following Han dynasty.[50] Qin Shihuang personally held sacrifices to Di at Mount Tai, a site dedicated to the worship of the supreme God since pre-Xia times, and in the suburbs of the capital Xianyang.[51][52] The emperors of Qin also concentrated the cults of the five forms of God, previously held at different locations, in unified temple complexes.[53] The universal religion of the Han, which became connected at an early time with the proto-Taoist Huang–Lao movement, was focused on the idea of the incarnation of God as the Yellow Emperor, the central one of the "Five Forms of the Highest Deity" (五方上帝 Wǔfāng Shàngdì). The idea of the incarnation of God was not new, as already the Shang royal lineage regarded themselves as divine. Their progenitors were "sons of God", born by women who "stepped on the imprinting" of Di. This was also true for royal ancestors of the early Zhou dynasty.[54] The difference rests upon the fact that the Yellow Emperor was no longer an exclusive ancestor of some royal lineage, but rather a more universal archetype of the human being. The competing factions of the Confucians and the fāngshì (方士 "masters of directions"), regarded as representatives of the ancient religious tradition inherited from previous dynasties, concurred in the formulation of Han state religion, the former pushing for a centralisation of religio-political power around the worship of the God of Heaven by the emperor, while the latter emphasising the multiplicity of the local gods and the theology of the Yellow Emperor.[55] Besides these developments of common Chinese and Confucian state religion, the latter Han dynasty was characterised by new religious phenomena: the emergence of Taoism outside state orthodoxy, the rise of indigenous millenarian religious movements, and the introduction of the foreign religion of Buddhism. Yellow Emperor cult The eagle-faced Thunder God (雷神 Léishén), punisher of those who go against the order of Heaven (1923 drawing). In the oldest accounts, he is one and the same with the Yellow Emperor.[56][57] In other accounts, such as the Huangdi Neijing, Leishen is the Yellow Emperor's foremost pupil. See also: Yellow God theology By the Han dynasty, the universal God of early Shang-Zhou theology had found new expression by the names of Tàiyī (太乙 "Great Oneness"), "Supreme Oneness of the Central Yellow" (中黄太乙 Zhōnghuáng Tàiyī), or the "Yellow God of the Northern Dipper (i.e. Ursa Major)" (黄神北斗 Huángshén Běidǒu), other than by names inherited from the previous tradition. Although the name "Taiyi" became prominent in the Han, it harkens back to the Warring States, as attested in the poem The Supreme Oneness Gives Birth to Water, and possibly to the Shang dynasty as Dàyī (大一 "Big Oneness"), an alternative name for Shangs' (and universe's) greatest ancestor.[58] Han theology focalised on the Yellow Emperor, a culture hero and creator of civility, who, according to a definition in apocryphal texts related to the Hétú 河圖, "proceeds from the essence of the Yellow God of the Northern Dipper", is born to "a daughter of a chthonic deity", and as such he is "a cosmic product of the conflation of Heaven and Earth".[59] In the myth, the Yellow Emperor was conceived by a virgin mother, Fubao, who was impregnated by Taiyi's radiance (yuanqi, "primordial pneuma") from the Big Dipper after she gazed at it. Through his human side, he was a descendant of 有熊氏 Yǒuxióng, the lineage of the Bear (another reference to the Ursa Major). Didier has studied the parallels that the Yellow Emperor's mythology has in other cultures, deducing a plausible ancient origin of the myth in Siberia or in north Asia.[60] In latter Han-dynasty description of the cosmology of the five forms of God by Sima Qian, it is important that the Yellow Emperor was portrayed as the grandfather of the Black Emperor (黑帝 Hēidì) of the north who personifies as well the pole stars, and as the tamer of the Flaming Emperor (炎帝 Yándì, otherwise known as the "Red Emperor"), his half-brother, who is the spirit of the southern Chinese populations known collectively as Chu in the Zhou dynasty.[61] Emperor Wu of Han (142–87 BCE), under the influence of the scholar Dong Zhongshu (who incorporated into Confucianism the man-focused developments of the common religion, formulating the doctrine of the Interactions Between Heaven and Mankind),[62] and of prominent fangshi,[63] officially integrated the Confucian state religion and ritual inherited from the erstwhile dynasties with the theology of Taiyi,[64] while outside the state religion the Yellow God was the focus of Huang-Lao religious movements which influenced the primitive Taoist Church.[59] Before the Confucian turn of Emperor Wu and after him, the early and latter Han dynasty had Huang-Lao as the state doctrine under various emperors; in Huang-Lao, the philosopher-god Laozi was identified as the Yellow Emperor and received imperial sacrifices, for instance by Emperor Huan (146-168).[65] Popular millenarian and early Taoist churches in later Han period Han dynasty mural representing the Queen Mother of the West. The latter Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE) struggled with both internal instability and menace by non-Chinese peoples from the outer edges of the empire. Prospects for a better personal life and salvation appealed to the masses who were periodically hit by natural disasters and galvanised by uprisings organised by self-proclaimed "kings" and "heirs". In such harsh conditions, while the imperial cult continued the sacrifices to the cosmological gods, common people estranged from the rationalism of the state religion found solace in enlightened masters and in reviving and perpetuating more or less abandoned cults of national, regional and local divinities that better represented indigenous identities. The Han state religion itself was "ethnicised" by associating the cosmological deities to regional populations.[66] By the end of the dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE) the earliest record of a mass religious movement attests the excitement provoked by the belief in the imminent advent of the Queen Mother of the West (西王母 Xīwángmǔ) in the northeastern provinces (then Henan, Hebei and Shandong) in the first half of the year 3 BCE. Though the soteriological movement included improper and possibly reprehensive collective behavior, it was not crushed by the government. Indeed, from the elites' point of view, the movement was connected to a series of abnormal cosmic phenomena seen as characteristic of an excess of 阴 yīn (femininity, sinister, reabsorption of the order of nature).[67] Between 184 and 205 CE, the Way of the Supreme Peace (太平道 Tàipíngdào) in the Central Plains, the earliest attested popular Taoist religious-military movement led by members of the Zhang lineage—prominently Zhang Jue and Zhang Liu, among leaders from other families—, organised the so-called Yellow Turban Rebellion against the Han dynasty.[68] Later Taoist religious movements flourished in the Han state of Shu (modern Sichuan). A 巫 wū (shaman) of the Supreme Peace named Zhang Xiu was known to have led a group of followers from Shu into the uprising of the year 184. In 191 he reappeared as a military official in the province, together with the apparently unrelated Zhang Lu. During a military mission in Hanning (modern southwest Shaanxi), Xiu either died in battle or was killed by Lu himself, who incorporated Xiu's followers and seized the city, which he renamed Hanzhong. A characteristic of the territory governed by Lu was its significant non-Chinese population. Between 143 and 198, starting with the grandfather Zhang Daoling and culminating with Zhang Lu, the Zhang lineage had been organising the territory into dioceses or parishes, establishing a Taoist theocracy, the early Celestial Masters' Church (in Chinese variously called 五斗米道 Wǔdǒumǐdào, "Way of the Five Pecks of Rice", and later 天师道 Tiānshīdào, "Way of the Celestial Masters", or 正一道 Zhèngyīdào, "Way of the Orthodox Unity"). Zhang Lu died in 216 or 217, and between 215 and 219 the people of Hanzhong were gradually dispersed northwards, implanting Celestial Masters' Taoism in other parts of the empire.[69] Introduction of Buddhism "Heroic Gesture of the Awakened Being" from Tumxuk, 6th or 7th-century Buddhist Serindian art, which developed in what is now Xinjiang, whence Buddhism spread to China proper. Further information: Silk Road transmission of Buddhism Buddhism was introduced during the latter Han dynasty, and first mentioned in 65 CE.[70][71]:821–822 Liu Ying, a half brother of Emperor Ming of Han (57–75 CE) was one of the earliest Chinese adherents, at a time when the imported religion interacted with Huang-Lao proto-Taoism.[71]:821–822 China's earliest known Buddhist temple, the White Horse Temple, was established outside the walls of the capital Luoyang during Emperor Ming's reign.[71]:823 Buddhism entered China via the Silk Road, transmitted by the Buddhist populations who inhabited the Western Regions (modern Xinjiang), then Indo-Europeans (predominantly Tocharians and Saka). It began to grow to become a significant influence in China proper only after the fall of the Han dynasty, in the period of political division.[62] When Buddhism had become an established religion it began to compete with Chinese indigenous religion and Taoist movements, deprecatorily designated as Ways of Demons (鬼道 Guǐdào) in Buddhist polemical literature.[72] Six Dynasties period After the fall of the Han dynasty, a period of disunity defined as the "Six Dynasties" began. After the first stage of the Three Kingdoms (220–280), China was partially unified under the Jin dynasty (266–420), while much of the north was governed by sixteen independent states. The fall of the Han capital Luoyang to the Xiongnu in 311 led the royal court and Celestial Masters' clerics to migrate southwards. Jiangnan became the center of the "southern tradition" of Celestial Masters' Taoism, which developed characteristic features, among which a meditation technique known as "guarding the One" (shouyi), that is visualising the unity God in the human organism.[73]:3.2 Representatives of Jiangnan's indigenous religions responded to the spread of Celestial Masters' Taoism by reformulating their own traditions according to the imported religion. This led to the foundation of two new Taoist schools, with their own scriptural and ritual bodies: Shangqing Taoism (上清派 Shàngqīngpài, "Highest Clarity school"), based on revelations that occurred between 364 and 370 in modern-day Nanjing, and Lingbao Taoism (灵宝派 Língbǎopài, "Numinous Gem school"), based on revelations of the years between 397 and 402 and recodified later by Lu Xiujing (406-77). Lingbao incorporated from Buddhism the ideas of "universal salvation" and ranked "heavens", and focused on communal rituals.[73]:3.3 Buddhism brought a model of afterlife to Chinese people and had a deep influence on Chinese culture. The story Mulian Rescues His Mother, for instance, is a parable dated back to the 3rd century, which adapts an originally Buddhist fable to show Confucian values of filial piety. In the story, a virtuous monk descends into hell to rescue his mother, who had been condemned for her transgressions.[74] Sui and Tang dynasties In the Tang dynasty (618–907) the concept of "Tian" became more common at the expense of "Di", continuing a tendency that started in the Han dynasty. Both also expanded their meanings, with "di" now more frequently used as suffix of a deity's name rather than to refer to the supreme power. "Tian", besides, became more associated to its meaning of "Heaven" as a paradise or the hierarchy of physical skies. The proliferation of foreign religions in the Tang, especially Buddhist sects, entailed that each of them conceived their own ideal "Heaven". "Tian" itself started to be used, linguistically, as an affix in composite names to mean "heavenly" or "divine". This was also the case in the Buddhist context, with many monasteries' names containing this element.[75] Under the influence of foreign cultures and thought systems, new concepts to refer to the supreme God were formulated, such as Tiānzhōngtiān (天中天 "God of the Gods"), seemingly introduced by Yuezhi Buddhist missionaries to render the Sanskrit Devātideva (of the same meaning) or Bhagavān from their Iranian sources.[76] Both Buddhism and Taoism developed hierarchic pantheons which merged metaphysical (celestial) and physical (terrestrial) being, blurring the edge between the human and the divine, which reinforced the religious belief that gods and devotees sustain one another.[77] City Gods cult Temple of the City God of Sheng County, Zhejiang. City God Temples are often built at the heart of trade and economic districts. The principle of reciprocity between the human and the divine, which was strengthened during the Tang dynasty, led to changes in the pantheon that reflected changes in the society. The late Tang dynasty saw the spread of the cult of the City Gods in direct bond to the development of the cities as centres of commerce and the rise in influence of merchant classes. Commercial travel opened China to influences from foreign cultures.[78] The City God is a protector of the boundaries of a city and of its internal and economic affairs, such as trade and elections of politicians. In each city, the respective City God is embodied by one or more historical personages, native of the city itself, who distinguished themselves by extraordinary attainments. Scholar Valerie Hansen argues that the City God is not a homegrown cult, but has its prototype in the Indian Vaiśravaṇa as a guardian deity.[79] Suppressions of Buddhism and foreign religions Further information: Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution Ming dynasty In the 16th century, the Jesuit China missions played a significant role in opening dialogue between China and the West. The Jesuits brought Western sciences, becoming advisers to the imperial court on astronomy, taught mathematics and mechanics, but also adapted Chinese religious ideas such as admiration for Confucius and ancestor veneration into the religious doctrine they taught in China.[8]:384 Qing dynasty Stations of the China Inland Mission of Protestants in 1902, with hubs in Zhejiang, and between Gansu, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan. In the late 19th and early 20th century China was flooded with Christian missionaries working for Western powers.Domains of the Christian-inspired Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851–1864), founded by the Christian convert Hong Xiuquan inspired by Biblical millenarianism. The civil war started by Taiping Christians costed between 20–30 million deaths. Founded by Manchu rulers, the Qing dynasty (1636–1912) promoted the teachings of Confucius as the textual tradition superior to all others. The Qing made their laws more severely patriarchal than any previous dynasty, and Buddhism and Taoism were downgraded. Despite this, Tibetan Buddhism began in this period to have significant presence in China, with Tibetan influence in the west, and with the Mongols and Manchus in the north.[80] Later, many folk religious and institutional religious temples were destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1871).[81] It was organised by Christian movements which established a separate state in southeast China against the Qing dynasty. In the Christian-inspired Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, official policies pursued the elimination of Chinese religions to substitute them with forms of Christianity. In this effort, the libraries of the Buddhist monasteries were destroyed, almost completely in the Yangtze River Delta.[82] As a reaction, the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the century (1899–1901) would have been inspired by indigenous Chinese movements against the influence of Christian missionaries—"devils" as they were called by the Boxers—and Western colonialism. At that time China was being gradually invaded by European and American powers, and since 1860 Christian missionaries had had the right to build or rent premises, and they appropriated many temples. Churches with their high steeples and foreigners' infrastructures, factories and mines were viewed as disrupting feng shui ("wind–water" cosmic balance) and caused "tremendous offense" to the Chinese. The Boxers' action was aimed at sabotaging or outrightly destroying these infrastructures.[83] Early 20th century Further information: Freedom of religion in China Temple of the Great Buddha in Midong, Urumqi, Xinjiang Evening market at the Temple of Supreme Brightness (太清宫 Tàiqīnggōng), an urban temple of Zhengyi Taoism in Xiguan, Lanzhou, Gansu China entered the 20th century under the Manchu Qing dynasty, whose rulers favoured traditional Chinese religions, and participated in public religious ceremonies, with state pomp, as at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, where prayers for the harvest were offered. Tibetan Buddhists recognised the Dalai Lama as their spiritual and temporal leader. Popular cults were regulated by imperial policies, promoting certain deities while suppressing others.[84] During the anti-foreign and anti-Christian Boxer Uprising of 1900, thousands of Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries were killed, but in the aftermath of the retaliatory invasion, numbers of reform-minded Chinese turned to Christianity.[85] Between 1898 and 1904 the imperial government issued a measure to "build schools with temple property" (庙产兴学 miàochǎn xīngxué).[86]:3[87] After the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, with increasing urbanisation and Western influence, the issue for the new intellectual class was no longer the worship of heterodox gods as it was the case in imperial times, but the delegitimisation of religion itself, and especially folk religion, as an obstacle to modernisation.[87] Leaders of the New Culture Movement (1916–1923) revolted against Confucianism debated whether religion was cosmopolitan spirituality or irrational superstition, and the Anti-Christian Movement of 1923 was part of a rejection of Christianity as an instrument of foreign imperialism.[88] Despite all this, the interest of Chinese reformers for spiritual and occult matters continued to thrive through the 1940s.[89] The Nationalist-governed Republic of China intensified the suppression of local religion. Temples were widely appropriated, destroyed, or used for schools.[90] The 1928 "Standards for retaining or abolishing gods and shrines" formally abolished all cults of gods with the exception of human heroes such as Yu the Great, Guan Yu and Confucius.[91] Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China, and his successor Chiang Kai-shek, were both Christians. During the Japanese invasion of China between 1937 and 1945 many temples were used as barracks by soldiers and destroyed in warfare.[81][92] People's Republic of China A Buddhist temple being refurbished in 2015 in Chongwu, Fujian. Statues and ceremonial complex of the Yellow and Red Deities in Zhengzhou, Henan. The People's Republic of China, proclaimed in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong, established a policy of state atheism. Initially, the new government did not suppress religious practice, but, like its dynastic ancestors, viewed popular religious movements, especially in the countryside, as possibly seditious. The government condemned religious organisations, labeling them as superstitious. Religions that were deemed "appropriate" and given freedom were those that entailed the ancestral tradition of consolidated state rule.[93] In addition, Marxism viewed religion as feudal. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement institutionalised Protestant churches in official organisations that renounced foreign funding and foreign control as imperialist. Chinese Catholics resisted the new government's move towards state control and independence from the Vatican.[94] Later onwards, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) involved a systematic effort to destroy religion[81][91] and New Confucianism. The historian Arthur Waldron explains that "communism was, in effect, a religion for its early Chinese converts: more than a sociological analysis, it was a revelation and a prophecy that engaged their entire beings and was expounded in sacred texts, many imported from Moscow and often printed in English".[95] The radical policy relaxed considerably in the late 1970s. Since 1978, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China guarantees "freedom of religion". Its article 36 states:[96][97] Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination. For several decades, the party acquiesced or even encouraged a religious revival. Most Chinese were allowed to worship as they felt best. Although "heterodox teachings" such as the Falun Gong were banned and practitioners have been persecuted since 1999, local authorities were likely to follow a hands-off policy towards other religions. In the late 20th century there was a reactivation of the state cults devoted to the Yellow Emperor and the Red Emperor.[98] In the early 2000s, the Chinese government became open especially to traditional religions such as Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and folk religion, emphasising the role of religion in building a "Harmonious Society" (hexie shehui),[99] a Confucian idea.[100][101] The government founded the Confucius Institute in 2004 to promote Chinese culture. China hosted religious meetings and conferences including the first World Buddhist Forum in 2006 and the subsequent World Buddhist Forums, a number of international Taoist meetings and local conferences on folk religions. Aligning with Chinese anthropologists' emphasis on "religious culture",[86]:5–7 the government considers these religions as integral expressions of national "Chinese culture".[102] A turning point was reached in 2005, when folk religious cults began to be protected and promoted under the policies of intangible cultural heritage.[86]:9 Not only were traditions that had been interrupted for decades resumed, but ceremonies forgotten for centuries were reinvented. The annual worship of the god Cáncóng of the ancient state of Shu, for instance, was resumed at a ceremonial complex near the Sanxingdui archaeological site in Sichuan.[103] Modern Chinese political leaders have been deified into the common Chinese pantheon.[104] The international community, including the United Nations, has become concerned about evidence that China has harvested the organs of Falun Gong practitioners and other religious minorities, including Christians and Uyghur Muslims. In 2019, a panel of lawyers concluded that organ harvesting was happening for Falun Gong followers and asked for further investigation to determine if the situation was a genocide.[105] In 2012, Xi Jinping was elected as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. During his early political career in the 1980s, Xi was the secretary of Zhengding County in Hebei, where he allied himself with Chan master Youming and helped the reconstruction of the county's Buddhist temples, explicitly expressing interest towards Buddhism. Once he became president of China, fighting moral void and corruption through a return to traditional culture became the primary tasks of the new government.[106] The government's project also involved restricting Christian churches, which resulted in some removals of crosses from steeples and churches' demolition. At least one prominent pastor who protested was arrested on charges of misusing church funds. A lawyer who had counselled these churches appeared on state television to confess that he had been in collusion with American organisations to incite local Christians.[107] André Laliberté noted that despite there having been much talk about "persecution against religion (especially Christianity) in China", one should not jump to hasty conclusions, since "a large proportion of the population worship, pray, perform rituals and hold certain beliefs with the full support of the Party. Most of this activity affects people who subscribe to world views that are sometimes formally acknowledged by the state and are institutionalised, or others that are tacitly approved as customs". In this context, Christianity not only represents a small proportion of the population, but its adherents are still seen by the majority who observe traditional rituals as followers of a foreign religion that sets them apart from the body of society.[108] In September 2018, the Associated Press reported that "Xi is waging the most severe systematic suppression of Christianity in the country since religious freedom was written into the Chinese constitution in 1982", which has involved "destroying crosses, burning bibles, shutting churches and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith".[109] These abuses continued with a crackdown on all non-state religious groups and tighter control of state ones as Xi Jinping Thought was implemented.[110] In addition to Christianity Islam has suffered from increasing repression with Muslim scholars and writers targeted by the state.[111] Religious communities in China have been increasingly isolated from their coreligionists abroad.[110] Demographics Demoscopic analyses and general results Temple of Mazu, the goddess of the sea, in Shanwei, Guangdong. Worshipers at the Temple of the City God of Suzhou, Jiangsu. Is it Taoism or folk religion? To the general Chinese public they are not distinguished, but a lay practitioner would hardly claim to be a "Taoist", as Taoism is a set of doctrinal and liturgical functions that work as specialising patterns for the indigenous religion.[112] Temple of Hebo ("River Lord"), the god (Heshen, "River God") of the sacred Yellow River, in Hequ, Xinzhou, Shanxi. Incense Snow Temple (香雪寺 Xiāngxuěsì), a rural Buddhist convent in Ouhai, Wenzhou, Zhejiang. A neighbourhood folk shrine festooned for a festival, in Chongwu, Fujian. Counting the number of religious people anywhere is hard; counting them in China is even harder. Low response rates, non-random samples, and adverse political and cultural climates are persistent problems.[113]:47 One scholar concludes that statistics on religious believers in China "cannot be accurate in a real scientific sense", since definitions of "religion" exclude people who do not see themselves as members of a religious organisation but are still "religious" in their daily actions and fundamental beliefs.[114] The forms of Chinese religious expression tend to be syncretic and following one religion does not necessarily mean the rejection or denial of others.[115] In surveys, few people identify as "Taoists" because to most Chinese this term refers to ordained priests of the religion. Traditionally, the Chinese language has not included a term for a lay follower of Taoism,[116] since the concept of being "Taoist" in this sense is a new word that derives from the Western concept of "religion" as membership in a church institution. Analysing Chinese traditional religions is further complicated by discrepancies between the terminologies used in Chinese and Western languages. While in the English current usage "folk religion" means broadly all forms of common cults of gods and ancestors, in Chinese usage and in academia these cults have not had an overarching name. By "folk religion" (民間宗教 mínjiān zōngjiào) or "folk beliefs" (民間信仰 mínjiān xìnyǎng) Chinese scholars have usually meant folk religious organisations and salvationist movements (folk religious sects).[117][118] Furthermore, in the 1990s some of these organisations began to register as branches of the official Taoist Association and therefore to fall under the label of "Taoism".[119] In order to address this terminological confusion, some Chinese intellectuals have proposed the legal recognition and management of the indigenous religion by the state and to adopt the label "Chinese native (or indigenous) religion" (民俗宗教 mínsú zōngjiào) or "Chinese ethnic religion" (民族宗教 mínzú zōngjiào),[120] or other names.[note 4] There has been much speculation by some Western authors about the number of Christians in China. Chris White, in a 2017 work for the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity of the Max Planck Society, criticises the data and narratives put forward by these authors. He notices that these authors work in the wake of a "Western evangelical bias" reflected in the coverage carried forward by popular media, especially in the United States, which rely upon a "considerable romanticisation" of Chinese Christians. Their data are mostly ungrounded or manipulated through undue interpretations, as "survey results do not support the authors' assertions".[123] According to the results of an official census provided in 1995 by the Information Office of the State Council of China, at that time the Chinese traditional religions were already popular among nearly 1 billion people.[114] 2005: a survey of the religiosity of urban Chinese from the five cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Nantong, Wuhan and Baoding, conducted by professor Xinzhong Yao, found that only 5.3% of the analysed population belonged to religious organisations, while 51.8% were non-religious, in that they did not belong to any religious association. Nevertheless, 23.8% of the population regularly worshipped gods and venerated ancestors, 23.1% worshipped Buddha or identified themselves as Buddhists, up to 38.5% had beliefs and practices associated with the folk religions such as feng shui or belief in celestial powers, and only 32.9% were convinced atheists.[124] Three surveys conducted respectively in 2005, 2006 and 2007 by the Horizon Research Consultancy Group on a disproportionately urban and suburban sample, found that Buddhists constituted between 11% and 16% of the total population, Christians were between 2% and 4%, and Muslims approximately 1%.[125] The surveys also found that ~60% of the population believed in concepts such as fate and fortune associated to the folk religion.[125] 2007: a survey conducted by the East China Normal University taking into account people from different regions of China, concluded that there were approximately 300 million religious believers (≈31% of the total population), of whom the vast majority ascribable to Buddhism, Taoism and folk religions. 2008: a survey conducted in that year by Yu Tao of the University of Oxford with a survey scheme led and supervised by the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy and the Peking University, analysing the rural populations of the six provinces of Jiangsu, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Jilin, Hebei and Fujian, each representing different geographic and economic regions of China, found that followers of the Chinese folk religions were 31.9% of the analysed population, Buddhists were 10.85%, Christians were 3.93% of whom 3.54% Protestants and 0.39% Catholics, and Taoists were 0.71%.[126] The remaining 53.41% of the population claimed to be not religious.[126] 2010: the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey directed by the Purdue University's Center on Religion and Chinese Society concluded that many types of Chinese folk religions and Taoism are practised by possibly hundreds of millions of people; 56.2% of the total population or 754 million people practised Chinese ancestral religion[note 5], but only 16% claiming to "believe in the existence" of the ancestor;[note 6] 12.9% or 173 million practised Taoism on a level indistinguishable from the folk religion; 0.9% or 12 million people identified exclusively as Taoists; 13.8% or 185 million identified as Buddhists, of whom 1.3% or 17.3 million had received formal initiation; 2.4% or 33 million identified as Christians, of whom 2.2% or 30 million as Protestants (of whom only 38% baptised in the official churches) and 0.02% or 3 million as Catholics; and an additional 1.7% or 23 million were Muslims.[129] 2012: the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) conducted a survey of 25 of the provinces of China. The provinces surveyed had a Han majority, and did not include the autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet and Xinjiang, and of Hong Kong and Macau.[130]:11–12 The survey found only ~10% of the population belonging to organised religions; specifically, 6.75% were Buddhists, 2.4% were Christians (of whom 1.89% Protestants and 0.41% Catholics), 0.54% were Taoists, 0.46% were Muslims, and 0.40% declared to belong to other religions.[130]:12 Although ~90% of the population declared that they did not belong to any religion, the survey estimated (according to a 1992 figure) that only 6.3% were atheists while the remaining 81% (≈1 billion people) prayed to or worshipped gods and ancestors in the manner of the folk religion.[130]:13 Four surveys conducted respectively in the years 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2011 as part of the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) of the Renmin University of China found an average 6.2% of the Chinese identifying as Buddhists, 2.3% as Christians (of whom 2% Protestants and 0.3% Catholics), 2.2% as members of folk religious sects, 1.7% as Muslims, and 0.2% as Taoists.[130]:13 2012-2014: analyses published in a study by Fenggang Yang and Anning Hu found that 55.5% of the adult population (15+) of China, or 578 million people in absolute numbers, believed and practised folk religions, including a 20% who practised ancestor veneration or communal worship of deities, and the rest who practised what Yang and Hu define "individual" folk religions like devotion to specific gods such as Caishen. Members of folk religious sects were not taken into account.[131] Around the same year, Kenneth Dean estimated 680 million people involved in folk religion, or 51% of the total population.[note 7] In the same years, reports of the Chinese government claim that the folk religious sects have about the same number of followers of the five state-sanctioned religions counted together (~13% ≈180 million).[133] The CFPS 2014 survey, published in early 2017, found that 15.87% of the Chinese declare to be Buddhists, 5.94% to belong to unspecified other religions, 0.85% to be Taoists, 0.81% to be members of the popular sects, 2.53% to be Christians (2.19% Protestants and 0.34% Catholics) and 0.45% to be Muslims. 73.56% of the population does not belong to the state-sanctioned religions.[1] CFPS 2014 asked the Chinese about belief in a certain conception of divinity rather than membership in a religious group in order to increase its survey accuracy.[2][note 1] Besides the surveys based on fieldwork, estimates using projections have been published by the Pew Research Center as part of its study of the Global Religious Landscape in 2010. This study estimated 21.9% of the population of China believed in folk religions, 18.2% were Buddhists, 5.1% were Christians, 1.8% were Muslims, 0.8% believed in other religions, while unaffiliated people constituted 52.2% of the population.[134] According to the surveys by Phil Zuckerman published on Adherents.com, 59% of the Chinese population was not religious in 1993, and in 2005 between 8% and 14% was atheist (from over 100 to 180 million).[113] A survey held in 2012 by WIN/GIA found that in China the atheists comprise 47% of the population.[135] Yu Tao's survey of the year 2008 provided a detailed analysis of the social characteristics of the religious communities.[126] It found that the proportion of male believers was higher than the average among folk religious people, Taoists, and Catholics, while it was lower than the average among Protestants. The Buddhist community shew a greater balance of male and female believers. Concerning the age of believers, folk religious people and Catholics tended to be younger than the average, while Protestant and Taoist communities were composed by older people. The Christian community was more likely than other religions to have members belonging to the ethnic minorities. The study analysed the proportion of believers that were at the same time members of the local section of the CCP, finding that it was exceptionally high among the Taoists, while the lowest proportion was found among the Protestants. About education and wealth, the survey found that the wealthiest populations were those of Buddhists and especially Catholics, while the poorest was that of the Protestants; Taoists and Catholics were the better educated, while the Protestants were the less educated among the religious communities. These findings confirmed a description by Francis Ching-Wah Yip that the Protestant population was predominantly composed of rural people, illiterate and semi-illiterate people, elderly people, and women, already in the 1990s and early 2000s.[136] A 2017 study of the Christian communities of Wuhan found the same socio-economic characteristics, with the addition that Christians were more likely to suffer from physical and mental illness than the general population.[137] The China Family Panel Studies' findings for 2012 shew that Buddhists tended to be younger and better educated, while Christians were older and more likely to be illiterate.[130]:17–18 Furthermore, Buddhists were generally wealthy, while Christians most often belonged to the poorest parts of the population.[130]:20–21 Henan was found hosting the largest percentage of Christians of any province of China, about 6%.[130]:13 According to Ji Zhe, Chan Buddhism and individual, non-institutional forms of folk religiosity are particularly successful among the contemporary Chinese youth.[138] vteGraphic representations of various analyses General surveys' results Religions in five Chinese cities[A], Yao X. 2005[139] Religion or belief % Cults of gods and ancestors 23.8% Buddhism or worship of Buddha 23.1% Believe in fate and divination 38.5% Believe in feng shui 27.1% Believe in celestial powers 26.7% Are not members of religions 51.8% Are members of religions 5.3% Are convinced atheists 32.9% Religions in China, Horizon[140] Religion 2005 2006 2007 Buddhism 11% 16% 12% Taoism

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