

**RELIGION IN CHINA; CONTAINING A  
BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE THREE  
RELIGIONS OF THE  
CHINESE: WITH OBSERVATIONS ON THE  
PROSPECTS OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION  
AMONGST THAT PEOPLE**

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Religion in China; containing a brief account of the three religions of the Chinese: with observations on the prospects of Christian conversion amongst that people by Joseph Edkins

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**JOSEPH EDKINS**

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WITH

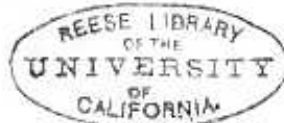
*OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROSPECTS OF CHRISTIAN  
CONVERSION AMONGST THAT PEOPLE.*

BY

JOSEPH EDKINS, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "A GRAMMAR OF THE SHANGHAI DIALECT," "OF THE CHINESE COLLOQUIAL  
LANGUAGE, COMMONLY CALLED MANDARIN," "CHINA'S PLACE IN  
PHILOLOGY," "THE CHINESE CHARACTERS," ETC.

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## PREFACE TO FOURTH EDITION.

SOME persons say that the Chinese have no religion. The facts are, however, opposed to this view. They show that the natives of China are not content with the worship of ancestors which they have elaborated for themselves. They have invited the Buddhists among them, and devoted great and long-continued attention to the establishment of a Buddhist ritual and literature adapted to their own country. If they had been content without the beliefs and practice of religion, they would not have done this. For example, the future state is not in the worship of ancestors looked forward to joyfully. At the best this worship is a sad and solemn function, and if the extinction of the soul's life is postponed by the sacrifices, extinction sooner or later is to be expected. In consequence, we find many of the Chinese indulging in Buddhist and Tauist reading, and looking forward, if not to the Paradise of the Western Heaven, at least to the condition of the immortal genii who live unseen in green forests, on lofty mountains, or on some distant star in heaven.

The Chinese were not satisfied with the Emperor's worship of the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. They had in that worship only an indirect share. In con-



sequence, they made Buddhist images of clay, and worshipped these rather than have nothing to adore at all. They also accepted the gods of the Taoists and their forms of worship as a welcome supplement to the coldness of the worship of ancestors. Yet the Chinese cannot be said to be warm believers in either Buddhism or Taoism, and they conform to the ritual of these religions in a perfunctory manner. They prefer a cold ritual, unsatisfactory as it is, to no worship, and the religion of the country continues to be practised with no zeal or earnestness of conviction on the part of worshippers.

The proof of this is found in the facts adduced in the work now in the reader's hands. While China remains as it is it must be regarded as a revolted province of the divine kingdom, in which in nearly all the families the worship of ancestors takes the place of the worship of God. Buddhism early saw its advantage, and pressed into this great spiritual vacuum where the religious instinct, feeling after the divine without response, seemed to invite a propaganda of foreign religious teachers. Buddhism pressed forward into every province, calling to its aid the *feng shui* superstition in each commercial city. For example, above Shanghai a few miles, where the river bends from the west to the north, is a pagoda taken care of by a hundred priests. Their daily worship, combined with the influence of the pagoda, are relied on by the Shanghai native merchants to render their trade prosperous. They maintain Buddhism as a help to them in growing rich. Their feeling being of this kind, they can have no intelligent faith in Buddhist dogma. That dogma fails to give the people spiritual

elevation. The same merchants invite Taoist priests to offer prayers for help in times of drought, flood, and pestilence. The number of Taoists in the country is a third or a fourth of the Buddhists. They cannot claim in any efficient way to sow the field which the religious instinct of four hundred millions of people presents to the spiritual instructor.

The aim of this work is to show how China has attempted to supply her own spiritual needs in past ages. At the present time, when the population has increased beyond all precedent, the weakness of the native religions is more than ever clear; and there is a most manifest demand for teaching of a healthier kind, such as Christian missionaries are able to give. The people have industry, ingenuity, and a hundred different occupations. They have also a salubrious climate and fertile soil. The adoption of Christianity by the Chinese would be for their highest benefit, and impart to them a spiritual elevation which would be to them of the greatest advantage in their future history.

LONDON, February 1, 1893.

