

**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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OF THE CHINESE;

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

BY

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LANGUAGE, FORMERLY CALLED MANDARIN," "CHINA'S PLANTS
PHENOLOGY," "THE CHINESE CHARACTER," ETC.

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1878.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.



THE history of the Chinese religions is replete with instruction. They have developed themselves from bases which are entirely Asiatic. Partly of native origin, and partly Indian, they have grown up quite independently of Judaism and of Christianity.

The nomenclature and fundamental ideas of Confucianism and of early Taoism are purely native, and bear testimony to the fact of clear moral distinctions, a strong appetite for legend, and a deep love of traditional religion. The Buddhism of India transplanted into a colder climate and adapted to the habits of a practical and unimaginative people, yet bears traces through all its immense ramifications of Aryan origin.

To show how the tree of religion in China has gradually attained its present size and shape is the object of this little book. Its root is native, and its principal branch has always continued so. But a mighty branch of foreign origin has been grafted in the old stock. The metaphysical religion of Shakyamuni was added to the moral doctrines of Confucius. Another process may then be

witnessed. A native twig was grafted in the Indian branch. Modern Taoism has grown up on the model supplied by Buddhism. That it is possible to observe the *modus operandi* of this repeated grafting, and to estimate the amount of gain and loss to the people of China, resulting from the varied religious teaching which they have thus received, is a circumstance of the greatest interest to the investigator of the world's religions. This little book contains a brief sketch of a very wide subject. Only the main features could be embraced. It is hoped, however, that no very important points have been entirely omitted.

If Professor Max Müller succeeds in making the study of religions as popular as he has done that of Comparative Philology, the field for research presented by China may soon be worked by many new investigators. Meantime this book may continue to serve as a brief manual to the subject it treats for some years to come.

Those interested in the progress of the Christian missionary enterprise have here the means of judging what sort of work has to be done in China.

Ancestral worship is seen taking very much the place of a religion, and duty to parents needs, therefore, to be placed on the Christian footing. Reverence to heaven and earth is commonly inculcated, and instead of it has to be substituted the worship of the Supreme, Eternal God by every human being. The duty of man to man is very fully laid down. It is requisite for the Christian teacher to class all human duties in subordination to the love of God. The future life as presented to the eye of the popular reli-

gious consciousness does not command intelligent faith, because Buddhism has no confidence in its own teaching on this point. The Chinese will find in the Christian doctrine of the future life that which will help them to change vagueness and uncertainty for assured hope. So also with redemption as taught by Buddhists. There is no solidity in it. It reduces itself to abstractions and fine distinctions in words. Its indefiniteness is in strong contrast to the Christian redemption, which finding man beset with evil, holds out to him the strong hand of a divine deliverer, and makes him both virtuous and happy.

Thirty-five years have gone by since China was opened. Missionary progress was at first very slow. In some cities many summers and winters passed before the occurrence of a single baptism. After fifteen years a thousand converts rewarded the labours of the missionaries. Another fifteen years saw this number increased to ten thousand. The growth of the Christian element is now seen steadily advancing.

The number of points at which the work of the Protestant missions is carried forward is rapidly increasing, and the same is true of those of the Romish Church, which count their adherents by hundreds of thousands.

Among the causes of the more frequent baptisms that we hear of in most of the districts where missionaries are labouring at the present time, are the greater peace of the country during the last few years, and the fact that the local authorities and persons of influence understand better than before that the acceptance of Christianity is

not a crime against the law. Wrongs inflicted on Christians have in several instances been rectified, and there is not so much fear felt as there was that baptism must involve very much suffering.

One of the concessions secured by Sir Thomas Wade in the negotiations of 1876, with Le-hung-chang, Governor-General of Chile, was the posting in all public places through the country of an imperial proclamation respecting the murdering of Mr. Margary. This is found to have a beneficial effect on the people, as making it their duty to look on foreigners as friends. Several instances have lately occurred of persons asking for baptism being led to think of it through this proclamation.

We can judge best of the prospect of the spread of Christianity in China by casting an eye on those districts where Christian communities have been gathered. They are extending themselves in many places with no small rapidity. In some parts the village population has during recent years shown a tendency to adopt new religious ideas, combined with the prohibition of opium and tobacco smoking, worship without images, and obedience in regard of doctrine to some spiritual guide. In the neighbourhood of Peking there are several such associations, all of modern origin. In some the abandonment of opium-smoking is rigidly enforced. Many persons follow the practice of these sects for a few months or years, and then, on being urged by the Christians to join them, they yield without much difficulty, saying that they did not in

the new association they had entered realise the good they had expected.

There is a better prospect of progress in the village population than in the cities, because the influence of the literary class is little felt in country places. The attitude of the cultured class for the present is not favourable towards Christianity, and their policy is to say nothing about it. Most of the educated will read books on Western science, geography, and politics with much more willingness than on our religion. Illustrations on this subject will be found in the following chapters.

The first edition of this work was published in 1859, and has been long out of print. Four chapters are now added. One of these chapters contains a description of imperial worship. The other three are an account of a journey to Wou-tai-shan, a celebrated seat of Buddhist worship, and very popular place of pilgrimage. The book has been revised throughout.

PEKING, October 1877.