

**NON CHRISTIAN  
RELIGION SYSTEM.  
BUDDHISM IN CHINA**

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Non Christian Religion System. Buddhism in China by S. Beal

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**S. BEAL**

**NON CHRISTIAN  
RELIGION SYSTEM.  
BUDDHISM IN CHINA**



Non-Christian Religious Systems.

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# BUDDHISM IN CHINA.

BY

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# BUDDHISM IN CHINA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

§ 1. OF the three religions, or religious persuasions, professed in China, two have already been described in a volume of the present series.<sup>1</sup>

The third, Buddhism, is to be considered in the following pages. To understand the position which this religion holds in China, it must be borne in mind that its influence depends not so much on its recognised authority as on the tone which it has given to the religious thought of the people. Although it was formerly patronised by the emperors and the court, it is now proscribed. Yet, in the presence of this, its influence is everywhere felt, and it undoubtedly affects the whole religious condition of the empire.<sup>2</sup> Hence it is not erroneous to include in the number of professed Buddhists throughout the Eastern world the great proportion of the Chinese people, who, if not professed disciples, are at least implicit

<sup>1</sup> "Confucianism and Taouism," by R. K. Douglas.

<sup>2</sup> Edkin's "Religion in China," p. 58.

believers in the leading facts of this religion, and conform themselves to its teaching in daily life.

The result of the co-existence of the three religious systems for so many years has been, indeed, to obliterate the distinctive features of each separately. The worship of Pu-sah, in the houses of the rich and poor, is hardly recognised as Buddhist in its origin; and, indeed, the very term Pu-sah, which is the Chinese form of Bodhisattva, is explained in the ordinary language as of native origin, and signifying "universal benevolence," whilst the objects of Buddhist worship, such as the "Goddess of Mercy" and the "Queen of Heaven," have been placed among the number of their genii, and, in the case of the former,<sup>1</sup> at least, attributed to their own country. Hence, again, the images of their Bodhisattvas, or Pu-sahs, are to be found in the houses of the people and the officers of government, who would strongly object to be called Buddhists. At the capture of Canton, in 1858, a large golden image of Kwan-yin was found in a shrine in an inner room of the Yamén of Yeh Ming-shin, the governor of the province. The same official had, about two years before the loss of the city, written to the emperor to state that on one occasion, at a critical juncture, whilst engaged in exterminating a band of roving plunderers, "a large figure in white had been seen beckoning to the army from the sky." This was Kwan-yin; the soldiers were inspired with courage, and won an easy victory over the enemy.<sup>2</sup> We are not surprised to

<sup>1</sup> Eitel, "Handbook," *sub* "Avalokiteśvara."

<sup>2</sup> Edkin's "Religion in China," p. 127.

find that one of the largest temples in the city of Canton dedicated to Kwan-yin, "who came flying from heaven" to defend the town from the first attack of the English, was mainly restored by the exertions of the chief officers of the neighbourhood, and regarded as the source of security to the inhabitants at the time of the second siege of the city. In this way we may understand how the Buddhist religion has affected the entire population of the country, and, although not supported or countenanced by the Government, is yet secretly respected even by the highest functionaries of the state.

So much, then, as to the general influence of this religion in explanation of the statement often made, that the Chinese are Buddhists. Independently of this general conformity, however, there is a large proportion of the population professedly Buddhist. What this number may be we have no means of ascertaining, but in every town and village, so far as we know, there are to be found some; and, in many cases, a Buddhist temple or temples may be seen, with numerous worshippers, so that China undoubtedly contributes to the total of Buddhists throughout the world a large proportion.

Notwithstanding our improved acquaintance with the country, however, it is discouraging to find that our actual knowledge of the Buddhist community there is very limited. The monasteries are visited, but there is little information given about the condition of the priests, or their mode of teaching, or the character of their distinctive doctrine, so that for the purpose of this treatise we shall have to depend on