

Chinese folk religion:

The "Chinese folk religion" or "Chinese traditional religion" (or |s=中国民间宗教 or 中国民间信仰|p=Zhōngguó mínjiān zōngjiào or Zhōngguó mínjiān xìnyǎng), sometimes called "Shenism" (pinyin+: "Shénjiào", 神教),refn|group=note|

* The term "Shenism" (神教, "Shénjiào") was first used in 1955 by anthropologist+ Allan J. A. Elliott, in his work "Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore".

* During the history of China+ it was named "Shendao" (神道, "Shéndào", the "way of the gods"), apparently since the time of the spread of Buddhism+ to the area in the Han period+ (206 BCE–220 CE), in order to distinguish it from the new religion. The term was subsequently adopted in Japan+ as "Shindo", later "Shinto+", with the same purpose of identification of the Japanese indigenous religion. The oldest recorded usage of "Shindo" is from the second half of the 6th century. is the collection of grassroots+ ethnic+ religious+ traditions of the Han Chinese+, or the indigenous religion of China+.Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 4. Chinese folk religion primarily consists in the worship of the "shen+" (神 "gods+", "spirit+s", "awarenesses", "consciousnesses", "archetype+s"; literally "expressions", the energies that generate things and make them thrive) which can be nature deities+, city deities or tutelary deities+, of other human agglomerations, national deities+, cultural+ hero+es and demigods, ancestor+s and progenitor+s, deities of the kinship. Holy narratives+ regarding some of these gods are codified into the body of Chinese mythology+. Another name of this complex of religions is "Chinese Universism", especially referring to its intrinsic metaphysical+ perspective.

The Chinese folk religion has a variety of sources, localised worship forms, ritual and philosophical traditions. Among the ritual traditions, notable examples includes Wuism+ and Nuoism+. Chinese folk religion is sometimes categorized inadequately as "Taoism+", since over the centuries institutional Taoism has been assimilating or administering local religions. Zhengyi Taoism+ is especially intertwined with local cults, with Zhengyi "daoshi+" often performing rituals for local temples and communities. Faism+, the tradition of the "fashi" ("masters of rites"), inhabits the boundary between Taoism and folk religion. Confucianism+ advocates worship of gods and ancestors through proper rites, which have an ethical+ importance. Taoism in its various currents+, either comprehended or not within the Chinese folk religion, has some of its origins from Wuism.Libbrecht, 2007. p. 43. Chinese religion mirrors the social landscape, and takes on different shades for different people.Wolf, Arthur P. "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors." "Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society." Ed. Arthur O. Wolf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974. pp. 131-182.

Despite their great diversity, all the expressions of Chinese folk religion have a common core that can be summarised as four spiritual, cosmological, and moral concepts—"Tian+" (天), Heaven, the source+ of moral meaning, the utmost god+ and the universe itself; "qi+" (气), the breath or substance of the universe; "jingzu+" (敬祖), the veneration of ancestors; "bao ying+" (报应), moral reciprocity—, and two traditional concepts of fate and meaningLizhu, Na. 2013. p. 21—"ming yun+" (命运), the personal destiny or burgeoning; and "yuan fen+" (缘分), "fateful coincidence+",Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 23 good and bad chances and potential relationships. Yin and yang+ is the polarity that describes the order of the universe, held in balance by the interaction of forces of growth ("shen") and forces of waning ("gui"), with act ("yang") usually preferred over receptiveness ("yin"). "Ling+" (numen+ or sacred+) is the "medium" of the bivalency, and the inchoate order of creation.

Both in imperial China and under the modern nation, the state has opposed or attempted to eradicate these practices as "superstition". Yet Chinese folk religions are currently experiencing a revival in both Mainland China+ and Taiwan+. Various forms of culture have received support by

the government of China+, such as Mazuism+ in southeastern China+, Huangdi+ worship, and other forms of local culture, for example the Longwang+, Pangu+ or Caishen+ worship. The Vietnamese folk religion+ is similar to the Chinese folk religion practiced in the south.

Chinese folk religion is very diversified, varying from province to province and even from a village to another, for it is bound to local communities, kinship, and environments. Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 5 In each setting, institution and ritual behaviour assumes highly organised forms. Temples and the gods enshrined acquire symbolic character, with specific functions involved in the everyday life of the local community. Local religion holds aspects of natural belief systems such as animism+ and shamanism+.

The Chinese folk religion is a grassroots+, pervasive factor in all aspects of the social life, contributing to the very fabric of Chinese society. It is deeply embedded in family and civic life, rather than expressed in a separate organisational structure like a "church".

Village temple associations and kinship-lineage associations with their temple-congregations, pilgrimage associations and formalised prayers, rituals and expressions of virtues, are the common forms of organisation of Chinese folk religion on the local level. Neither initiation rituals nor official membership into a church organisation separate from one person's native identity are mandatory in order to be involved in religious activities. Contrarywise to institutional religions, Chinese indigenous religion does not require "conversion" for participation.

The prime criterion for participation in Chinese folk religion is not "to believe" in an official doctrine or dogma+, but "to belong" to the local unit of Chinese religiousness, that is the "village" or the "kinship", with their gods and rituals. Scholar Richard Madsen describes Chinese religion, adopting the definition of Tu Weiming, as characterised by "immanent transcendence" grounded in a devotion to "concrete humanity", focused on building moral community within concrete humanity. Madsen, "Secular belief, religious belonging". 2013.

There are many public-domain folk religion texts such as "Journeys to the Underworld+", "The Peach Blossom Spring+", the "Shi Yi Ji+", the "Investiture of the Gods+", the "Shanhaijing+", and notably the "Yijing+" divination+ book, distributed in temples (often without charge) or sold in religious goods store+s.

The Chinese folk religion suffered persecution in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many local temples were destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion+ and the Boxer Rebellion+ in the late 1800s; Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 9 others suffered severe damage during the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. The Cultural Revolution+ between 1966 and 1976 brought a third systematic effort to destroy folk religious devotion.

Since then, Chinese folk religion is exhibiting a dramatic revival throughout China, Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 8 with millions of temples being rebuilt or built from scratch. Since the 1980s the central government moved to a policy of benign neglect or "wuwei+" (无为) in regard to rural community life, and the local government's new regulatory relationship with local society is characterized by practical mutual dependence; these factors have given much space for popular religion to develop. In recent years, in some cases, local governments have taken an even positive and supportive attitude towards indigenous religion in the name of carrying on cultural heritage.

Instead of signing the demise of traditional religiousness, China's economic development has

brought a spiritual renewal. Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 28 The worldview of the Chinese indigenous religion is distinctive; its images and practices are shaped by the codes of Chinese culture, helping Chinese people to face the challenges of modernization.

Despite their great diversity, all the expressions of Chinese folk religion have a common core that can be summarised as four spiritual, cosmological, and moral concepts: "Tian+" (天), Heaven, the source+ of moral meaning; "qi+" (气), the breath or substance of which all things are made; the practice of "jingzu+" (敬祖), the veneration of ancestors; "bao ying+" (报应), moral reciprocity.

"Tian" is usually rendered as "Heaven", but a philological translation would be "Great One", "Great Whole", "Great All". At a point in history he was equated with the concept of "Shangdi+": during the Shang dynasty+, which gave prominence to the worship of ancestral gods+ and cultural heroes, the fountain of the universe was named "Shangdi", meaning "Earliest Patriarch", "Earliest Ancestor", "Highest Emperor", and identified as the imperial power. Libbrecht, 2007. p. 43 With the Zhou dynasty+, that preferred a religion focused on gods of nature+, "Shangdi" was regarded as a more abstract and impersonal concept, as "Tian". Another equivalent concept is that of "Taidi+", the "Great God".

The "Tian" is the absolute reality+, the source of moral meaning and of all creativity inherent to the natural world. This creativity or virtue ("de+"), in humans is the potentiality to transcend the given conditions and act wisely and morally. "Tian" is therefore both transcendent+ and immanent+. Various interpretations were developed by Confucians+ and other schools of thought.

The "qi" is the breath or substance of which all things are made, including inanimate matter, the living beings, thought and gods. It is the continuum energy—matter. Neo-Confucian+ thinkers, among whom Zhu Xi+, developed the idea of "li", the "reason", "order" or pattern through which the "qi" develops, that is the polarity of "yin" and "yang".

"Yin" and "yang", which etymological+ roots mean respectively "shady" and "sunny", or "dark" and "light", are modes of manifestation of the "qi". Yin is the "qi" in its dense, dark, sinking, wet, condensing mode; yang denotes the the light, and the bright, rising, dry, expanding modality. Described as "Taiji+" (the "Great Pole"), they represent the polarity and complementarity that enlivens the cosmos+. They can also be conceived as "disorder" and "order", "activity" or "passivity", with act ("yang") usually preferred over receptiveness ("yin"). Thien Do, 2003, pp. 10-11 In Neo-Confucian terminology this polarity is "li", the natural order.

The concept of 神 "shén" (cognate of 申 "shēn", "expansion, growth") is translated as "gods+" or "spirit+s" (from Latin+ "spiritus", "insufflation"), as they are the essences or energies that generate and grow the different things and phenomena. In poetic speech "they draw out the ten thousand things"; they make phenomena appear and things extend themselves. As forces of growth the gods are regarded as "yang", opposed to a "yin" class of entities called 鬼 "guǐ" (cognate of 归 "guī", "return, contraction"), chaotic beings. The dragon+ is a symbol of "yang", the principle of generation.

There are gods of nature, gods of the place, and ancestral gods. Also humans are enlivened by a spirit ("hun" and "po"+, the "yang" soul or mind, and the "yin" soul that is the body) that to extend life to its full potential must be cultivated, resulting in ever clearer, more luminous states of

being. The "shen" of men who are properly cultivated and honoured after their death are ancestor+s and progenitor+s ("zu" or "zuxian"). Those who are not properly cultivated tend to become "gui". While the "po" returns to the earth, the "hun" is thought to be pure awareness or "qi", and is the "shen" to whom ancestral sacrifices are dedicated. In man there's no distinction between rationality and intuition, thinking and feeling: the human being is "xin", mind-heart.

In Taoist+ and Confucian+ thought, the Tao+ and the multiplicity of "shen" are identified as one and the same. In the "Yizhuan", a commentary to the "Yijing+", it is written that «one "yin" and one "yang" are called the Tao [...] the unfathomable change of "yin" and "yang" is called "shen"». In other texts, with a tradition going back to the Han period+, the gods and spirits are explained to be names of "yin" and "yang", forces of contraction and forces of growth.

While in popular thought they have conscience and personality, Neo-Confucian scholars tended to rationalise them. Zhu Xi+ wrote that they act according to the "li". Zhang Zai+ wrote that they are "the inherent potential ("liang neng") of the two ways of "qi"". Cheng Yi+ said that they are "traces of the creative process". Chen Chun+ wrote that "shen" and "gui" are expansions and contractions, going and coming, of "yin" and "yang"—"qi".

The Chinese traditional belief of "bao ying" ("reciprocity", "retribution" or "judgement"), is inscribed in the cosmological view of an ordered universe, thus moral retribution is in fact a cosmic+ retribution. Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 25 It determines fate+, as written in Zhou+ texts: «on the doer of good, heaven sends down all blessings, and on the doer of evil, he sends down all calamities» (《书经•汤诰》); the "Tian" maintains balance rewarding everyone according to the quality of their actions. Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 26

The cosmic significance of "bao ying" is better understood by exploring other two traditional concepts of fate and meaning: Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 21

* "Ming yun+" (命运), the personal destiny or burgeoning of a being in his world, in which "ming" is "life" or "right", the given status of life, and "yun" defines "circumstance" and "individual choice"; "ming" is given and influenced by the transcendent force "Tian" (天), that is the same as the "divine right" ("tian ming") of ancient rulers as identified by Mencius+. Personal destiny ("ming yun") is thus perceived as both fixed (the status of life) and flexible, open-ended (the individual choice in matters of "bao ying").

* "Yuan fen+" (缘分), "fateful coincidence+", Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 23 describing good and bad chances and potential relationships. Scholars K. S. Yang and D. Ho have analysed the psychological advantages of this belief: assigning causality of both negative and positive events to "yuan fen" reduces the conflictual potential of guilt and pride, and preserves social harmony. Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 24

"Ming yun" and "yuan fen" are linked, because what appears on the surface to be chance (either positive or negative), is part of the deeper rhythm that shapes personal life based on how destiny is directed. They are shapen by "bao ying" through moral actions. Recognising this connection has the result of making a person responsible for his or her actions: doing good for others produces further good for oneself and contributes to social harmony.

These three themes of Chinese indigenous spiritual heritage—moral reciprocity, personal destiny, fateful coincidence—are completed when a fourth notion is explained: Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 27

* "Wu+" (悟), "awareness". According to scholarly studies, many practitioners recently "reverted"

to the Chinese traditional religion speak of a "new awareness" ("kai wu" 开悟 or "jue wu" 觉悟) that makes the aforementioned three themes operative in one's life: awareness of "ming yun" ignites responsibility towards one's life and world; awareness of "yuan fen" stirs to respond to events rather than resigning. Awareness may arrive as a gift, often unbidden; then it evolves into a practice that the person intentionally follows.

In Chinese religion the concept of "ling+" (灵) is the equivalent of holy+ and numen+. "Ling" is the state of the "medium" of the bivalency ("yin"- "yang"), and thus it is identical with the inchoate order of creation. At times "shen" is used as a synonym. Everything inspiring awe or wonder because it is not measured by "yin" and "yang", because it crosses the polarity and therefore can't be conceptualised, is regarded as numinous. These entities possess unusual spiritual characteristics, and possess the power to disrupt the balance of "yin" and "yang".

The notion of "xian ling" (显灵), variously translated as "divine efficacy, virtue" or simply the "numen", is of foremost importance in the Chinese folk religion, in the relationship between men and gods. It describes the manifestation, activity, of the power of a god (灵气 "ling qi", "divine energy" or "effervescence"), the evidence of the holy. Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 183-184 Within the framework of traditional cosmology, the interaction of these energies constitutes the universe.

The term "xian ling" may be interpreted as the god revealing his presence+ in a particular area and temple, Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 184 through events that are perceived as extraordinary, miraculous+. Divine power usually manifests in the presence of a wide public, and once the event is witnessed and acknowledged, reports about it spread quickly and the cult of the deity strikes a root, grows in popularity, and temples are built.

Scholar Zavidovskaya has studied how the incentive of temples restoration since the 1980s in Northern China+ was triggered by numerous instances of gods becoming "active", "returning", and claiming back their temples and place in society. She brings the example of a Chenghuang Temple in Yulin+, Shaanxi+ province, that during the Cultural Revolution+ was turned into a granary+; in the 1980s the temple was restored to its original function because the seeds kept into the temple always rotted, and this event was recognized as god Chenghuang giving signs to empty his residence of grain and let him back in. The "ling qi", divine energy, is believed to accumulate in certain places, temples, making them holy+. Temples with a longer history are considered holier than newly built ones, which still need to be filled by divine energy.

Another example of Zavidovskaya is that of the cult of god Zhenwu in Congluo Yu, Shanxi+; Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 185 the god's temples were in ruins and the cult inactive until the mid 1990s, when a man with a serious cancer, in his last hope prayed ("bai" 拜) Zhenwu. The man began to miraculously recover day after day, and after a year he was completely healed. To thank the god, he organised an opera performance in his honour. A temporary altar with a statue of Zhenwu and a stage for performances was set up in an open space at the foot of a mountain. While the opera was being played, large white snakes appeared, not afraid of people and not attacking them, seemingly watching the opera; the snakes were considered by locals as incarnations of Zhenwu, who came to watch the opera held in his honour.

Within temples, it is common to see banners bearing the phrase "if the heart is sincere, god will reveal his power" (心诚神灵 "xin cheng shen ling"). Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 183 The relationship between men and gods is an exchange of favour. This implies the belief that gods respond to the entreaties of the believer, if his or her religious fervor is sincere ("cheng xin" 诚心). If a person

believes in the god's power with all his heart and accumulates the energy of piety, the gods are confident in his faith and reveal their efficacious power. At the same time, for faith to strengthen in the devout's heart, the deity has to prove his or her efficacy. In exchange for divine favours, a faithful honours the deity with vow fulfillment ("huan yuan" 还愿 or "xu yuan" 许愿), through individual worship, reverence and respect ("jing shen" 敬神).

The most common display of divine power is the cure of diseases after a faithful asks for aid. Another manifestation is the fulfillment of a request of children. The deity may also manifest through mediumship, entering the body of a shaman-medium and speaking through his or her lips. There have been cases of people curing illnesses "on behalf of god" ("ti shen zhi bing" 替神治病). Gods may also speak to people when they are asleep ("tuomeng" 托梦).

Chinese local religion in its communal expression involves the worship of gods that are the generative power and tutelary spirit (genius loci+) of a place or a certain aspect of nature (for example water gods+, river gods+, fire gods+, mountain gods+), or of gods that are common ancestors+ of a village, a larger identity, or the Chinese nation (Shennong+, Huangdi+, Pangu+). This type of local religion has village temples or temples with a wider geographical importance (for example the Heilongdawang Temple+ in Shanbei+).

Rituality expresses into large-scale festivals participated by members of the whole village or township community on the occasions of what are believed to be the birthdays of the gods or other events, or to seek protection from droughts, epidemics, and other disasters. Such festivals invoke the power of the gods for practical goals to "summon blessings and drive away harm". Special devotional currents within this framework can be identified by specific names such as Mazuism+ ("Mazujiao"), Wang Ye worship+, or the cult of the Silkworm Mother.

Another dimension of the Chinese folk religion is based on family or genealogical worship of deities and ancestors in family altars or private temples ("simiao" 私庙 or "jiamiao" 家庙), or ancestral temples+ ("citang" 祠堂 or "zongci" 宗祠). Kinship or lineage associations, often congregating people with the same surname+, are a major organisational unit of kinship religion: these lineage congregations build special congregational temples where the deified ancestors of a kin (for example the "Chen+"s or the "Lin+"s) are enshrined and worshiped. Lizhu, Na. 2013. pp. 14-15 These temples serve as congregational centers for people belonging to the same lineage, and the lineage associations provide groundwork for mutual assistance.

Construction of ancestral temples of impressive sizes and elaborate decorations serves as a mean to represent a kin's wealth, influence and achievement. Scholar K. S. Yang has explored the ethno-political dynamism of this form of religion, through which people who become distinguished for their value and virtue are considered immortal and receive posthumous divine titles, and are believed to protect their descendants, inspiring the mythological lore and substantiating the memory of a family or kin. Lizhu, Na. 2013. pp. 16

If their temples and their deities enshrined acquire popularity they are considered worthy of the virtue of "ling", "efficacy". Ancestor veneration in China+ ("jingzu" 敬祖) is observed nationally with large-scale rituals on Qingming Festival+ and other holidays.

Within the Chinese folk religion, worship may draw upon dedicated ancient ritual traditions. Many of these ascend to Wuism+, the indigenous shamanic+ tradition of China. The "wu+" 巫, "shamans" or "wizards", are men who can mediate with the gods. According to philosopher Ulrich

Libbrecht+, some of the origins of Taoism+ can be traced to Wuism. Different from Wuism is the practice of "tongji" mediumship+, where the medium is imbued by a divine power, yet can't control it.

Nuoism+ is a variety of the Chinese folk religion practiced by most of the Tujia people+, but also by a number of Han Chinese+ and other ethnic groups of China. Nuo religion revolves around the worship of gods and ancestors represented by characteristic wooden masks and idols. Ritual performances (Nuo opera+) carried out by circles of ritual masters wearing masks of the gods are central to this type of religion.

Confucianism, Taoism and Faism—which are formalised or institutionalised, doctrinal or philosophical traditions—can be considered as both embedded within the larger category of Chinese traditional religion, or as separate religions. In fact, one can practice certain folk cults and espouse the tenets of Confucianism+ as a philosophical framework, the Confucian system instructing ancestral worship+, "li" (rite+, right+) and remembrance of the Tian+.

Some currents+ of Taoism+ are interwoven with the Chinese folk religion, especially the Zhengyi+ school, developing aspects of local cults within their doctrines; however Taoists always highlight the distinction between their traditions and those which aren't Taoist. The "daoshi" (道士, "masters of the Tao+") of the Zhengyi school, who are called "sanju daoshi" (散居道士) or "huoju daoshi" (火居道士), respectively meaning "scattered daoshi" and "daoshi living at home", because they can get married and perform the profession of priests as a part-time occupation, may perform rituals of offering ("jiao"), thanks-giving, propitiation, exorcism and rites of passage for local communities' temples and private homes. Edward L. Davis. "Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture". ¶ , Local gods of local cultures are often incorporated into their altars.

Faism+, also called "Redhead" or "Redhat Taoism", from the color of the headgear of its priests, is ingrained in the Chinese folk religion more deeply than Taoism. It is the tradition of the "masters of rites", "fashi" (法師), present especially in southern China, who have the same role of the "sanju daoshi" within the fabric of society. They aren't considered Taoist priests by the "daoshi" of Zhengyi Taoism, who wear a black headgear.

With the internal migrations and political turmoils in China+ between the 19th century and 1949, the cadre of Chinese folk religion and Taoism+ gave rise to a variety of new religious movements called "redemptive societies" by scholar Prasenjit Duara. Duara, "Chinese religions in comparative historical perspective". 2013. Quite different from indigenous religion of devotion to local gods, these "disembedded" religious groups provided aggregation for mobile people that were uprooted from local communities and integrated into the cosmopolitan life of the cities.

Some of these religions call on ideas of transcendent authority to change the established order, recalling Axial Age+ religions, reorienting society towards a transcendent ideal as opposed to worldly power. They provide new variations of traditional practices, in the frame of a millenarian+ or utopian perspective, reconstructing society on orthodox Confucian-Taoist values mediated through folk tradition, often incorporating Buddhist+ themes. Other religions, often those produced by more recent waves of religious innovation, may downplay or miss the "redemptive" millenarian aspects and rather emphasize devotion to a specific deity, virtues, good deeds and other moral values.

These movements were banned in the early Republican China+ and later Communist China. Many

of them still remain illegal, underground or unrecognised in China+, while they operate freely in Taiwan+ since the late 1980s. This group of religions includes Yiguandao+ and other Xiantiandao+ sects, Yaochidao+, Jiugongdao and the more recent De religion+ and the Tiandist+ movement, focused on the worship of Tian+. Also, many Qigong+ schools may rely on the worldview of the Chinese folk religion.

Weixinism is a religion primarily based on the "orthodox lineages of "Yijing+" and Feng Shui+", the Hundred Schools of Thought+, Taiwan Weixin Association for World Peace. and worship of the "three great ancestors" (Huangdi+, Yandi+ and Chiyou+). The movement promotes the restoration of the authentic roots of the Chinese civilization and Chinese reunification+.

The Weixinist church, which headquarters are in Taiwan, is also active in Mainland China+ in the key birthplaces of the Chinese culture. It has a contract with Henan+ government for building the "City of Eight Trigrams" templar complex on Yunmeng Mountain (of the Yan Mountains+), and it has also built temples in Hebei+. Xiaism+ is an organised folk religion founded in the 16th century, present in the Putian+ region (Xinghua+) of Fujian+.

There are many controversial folk religious movements known as "secret religions" with different names and roots in imperial-period heterodox sects such as the White Lotus+ religion. They are not entirely bound to the Chinese folk religion and their category blur with that of the "redemptive societies" of the 18th and 20th centuries. Luoism+ is considered a sect belonging to the "secret religions" group.

There are hundreds of Chinese deities (local gods and goddesses) as well as demigod+s. After apotheosis+, historical figures noted for their bravery or virtue are also venerated and honored as ancestral+ "saint+s", xians+, or heightened to the status of shen+, deities. The Song Dynasty+ enlisted many of them.

Deities reflect the pattern or structure of development of the universe, in a sort of hierarchy in which each one has tutelage of a specific sphere of reality. All the gods and reality are interconnected in the all-encompassing source of the universe—"Tian+" ("Sky"), also represented as "Shangdi+" (the "Highest Emperor"). The following list represents some commonly worshipped deities.

* "'Baoshengdadi'" (保生大帝), a divine physician born in the Song dynasty+, whose powers extend to raising the dead. Worship is especially prevalent in Fujian+ and Taiwan+.

* "'Caishen+' (财神 "God of Wealth"), who oversees the gaining and distribution of wealth through fortune+. He is often the deified manifestation of certain historical personalities such as "Zhao Gongming" or "Bi Gan". His shape is sometimes that of a black and fierce tiger.

* "'Cheng Huang'" (城隍), commonly known as "City God" in English, a class of protective deities: each city has a Cheng Huang who looks after the fortunes of the city and judges the dead. Usually these are famous or noble persons from the city who were deified after death. The "Chenghuangmiao" (城隍庙) or "City God Temple" was often the focal point of a town in ancient times.

* The "'Baxian+' (八仙), the "Eight Immortals", are important literary and artistic figures who were deified after death and became objects of worship. In Taoism+ they're worshipped as xian+s.

* Fu, Lu and Shou:

** "'Fushen+' (福神 "God of Happiness"), he looks like a traditional Chinese feudal lord with red clothing. He symbolizes happiness and joy.

** "'Lushen+' (禄神 "God of Prosperity"), a god of success in work and life. In ancient times he was the patron god of success in imperial bureaucracy.

** "'Shoushen+' (寿神 "God of Longevity"), who stands for a healthy and long life. He is portrayed as an old balding man with a walking stick in his right hand and a peach in his left.

* Fuxi and Nuwa:

** "'Fuxi+' (伏羲), also known as "Paoxi", a divine patriarch reputed to have taught to humanity writing+, fishing+, and hunting+. Cangjie+ is also said to have invented writing.

** "'Nüwa+' (女娲), an ancient mother goddess+, attributed for the creation of mankind. In later traditions she is described as the twin sister or/and wife of Fuxi. It was said she used rainbow coloured stones to mend the sky when it opened a hole.

* "'Guan Yu+' (关羽), also known with the templar names of "Guandi" and "Guan Gong" (literally "Emperor Guan" and "Lord Guan" respectively), the red-faced, bearded hero of "Romance of the Three Kingdoms+" and symbol of loyalty. He is the patron god of policemen (and also gangsters), fortune, and law, as he shows forgiveness. He is the most popular god of war+ ("Wudi" 武帝) in both northern and southern China, although in certain areas and ethnic minorities the martial god is Chi You+ (蚩尤).

* "'Guanyin+' (观音), "Observing the Cries of the World", is the goddess of mercy+. Thought to derive from the goddess "Miao Shan" adopted also by Buddhists to represent bodhisattva+ Avalokiteśvara+.

* "'Huangdi+' (黄帝), or "Yellow Emperor", the divine patriarch of the Huaxia+ culture lineage. He is regarded as the founder of China.

* "'Huye+' (虎爺), a guardian tiger god. Worshipers revere the tiger spirit to curse spiritual enemies. Rituals include stomping an effigy of a spiritual enemy in front of the tiger spirit, as well as sacrificing meat offerings, paper gold, and others.

* "'Lei Gong+' (雷公 "Lord of Thunder") or "'Leishen+' (雷神 "God of Thunder"), with an eagle-face and a hammer, he is the spirit of thunder punishing evil-doers in Heaven's behest.

* "'Longwang+' (龙王 "Dragon Kings"; also "Sihai Longwang" 四海龍王, "Dragon Kings of the Four Seas"), four water god+s or rain god+s, patrons of the Four Seas+ ("sihai" 四海) and the four cardinal direction+s. They are the White Dragon, the Black Dragon, the Red Dragon or Yellow Dragon, and the Blue Dragon or Green Dragon. They are usually represented as creatures with a human body and a dragon head, less often as entirely human figures.

* "'Lu Ban+' (魯班), the legendary master craftsman from the 5th century BC; patron deity of Chinese craftsmen.

* "'Mazu+' (媽祖 "Ancient Mother"), the sea god+dess and patroness of sailors. Shrines can be found in coastal areas of eastern and southeastern China. Today, belief in "Mazu" is especially popular in Fujian+, Guangdong+, Hainan+, Taiwan+, and Hong Kong+. She is also a significant deity

where emigrants from these provinces have settled, including in Singapore+, Malaysia+ and Vietnam+.

* The "Jiuhuangdadi+" (九皇大帝) represent the gods of each of the seven stars of the Big Dipper+ plus two invisible stars, all sons of "Dou Fu Yuan Jun" (斗父周御國王天尊) and "Dou Mu Yuan Jun" (斗母元君), the goddess of the Big Dipper itself.

* "Pangu+" (盤古), the Cosmic Man+ and creator god+ in certain myth+s. He is usually depicted as a primitive, hairy giant+ with horns on his head and clad in furs. Pangu set about the task of creating the world: he separated yin from yang with a swing of his giant axe, creating the Earth (murky "yin") and the sky (clear "yang"). According to other sources, after Pangu died, his body became the land and other celestial bodies.

* "Qiye" (七爺) and "Baye" (八爺), two generals and best friends, often seen as giant puppets in street parades. Qiye is black, because he drowned rather than miss his appointment to meet with Baye, even though a flood was coming. Baye has his tongue sticking out, because he hanged himself in mourning for Qiye.

* "Shennong+" (神农), also identified as "Yandi+" (炎帝), a divine patriarch said to have taught the ancient Chinese the practices of agriculture+. He is often represented as a human with bull+ horns.

* "Songzi Niangniang+" (送子娘娘) or "Zhusheng Niangniang" (註生娘娘), a fertility god+dess. She is worshiped by people who want children, or who want their child to be a boy.

* "Tudi Gong+" (土地公 "God of the Earth"), the "genius loci+" who protects a local place (especially hills), and whose statue may be found in roadside shrines. He is also the god of wealth, by virtue of his connection with the earth, and therefore, minerals and buried treasure.

* "Wenchangdi+" (文昌帝 "God of Thriving Culture") or "Wendi" (文帝 "God of Culture"), god of students, scholars, and examination. He is worshiped by students who wish to pass their examinations. He is associated with the Big Dipper+ asterism. In northern China the "Wendi" is often identified with Confucius+.

* "Xi Wangmu+" (西王母), the "Queen Mother of the West", also known as "Yaochi Jinmu" (瑤池金母 "Golden Mother of the Jade Pond"), a mother goddess+ who reigns over a paradisaical mountain and has the power to make others immortal. In some myths, she is the mother of the Jade Emperor+ (玉帝).

* "Yuexia Laoren" (月下老人 "Old Man Under the Moon"). The matchmaker who pairs lovers together, worshiped by those seeking their partner.

* "Zaoshen+" (灶神), the "God of the Kitchen", also "Zao Jun" (灶君), mentioned in the title of Amy Tan+'s novel, "The Kitchen God's Wife". He reports to Heaven on the behavior of the family of the house once a year, at Chinese New Year, and is given sticky rice to render his speech less comprehensible on that occasion.

Most of the temples of the Chinese folk religion emphasise the formula "if there is an entreaty, there will be a response" ("you qiu bi ying" 有求必应) or "if the heart is sincere, god will reveal his

power" ("xin cheng shen ling" 心诚神灵), since the relationship between the gods and humans is one of exchange of effervescence and favour. The formula explains that in exchange of their favour and protection the gods require a certain type of conduct from their faithful. Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 186 Once the power of the deity ("ling qi", "xian ling") is attested, it is the responsibility of humans to prove their religious fervor and deserve/merit of divine protection.

Through rituals of worship, people acquire and maintain a sense of stable world order, peace and balance (in philosophical-cosmological terms expressed by the concepts of Tian+, Qi+ and bao ying+). Violating rules may insult a god and hence, undermine the balance and open the doors to chaos. The attitude of the people towards their deities is of awe and apprehension. Through devotional practices a person strives to secure balance and protect himself and the world he is located into from the power of unfavorable forces. In this sense, the Chinese traditional view of human life is not fatalistic, but one is a master of his own life through his relationship with the divine energies.

The core idea of individual worship is the display reverence/respect ("jing shen" 敬神) for the gods. Believers fear offending the deity and wreaking havoc. Honouring the deities means the fulfillment of vows ("huan yuan" 还愿). In most of cases, vow-fulfillment is expressed in material forms: for example "jingxiang+" offering rituals.

Many people repay vows to the gods by contributing with incense, oil, and candles, as well as money. Lizhu, Na. 2013. p. 10 Religious devotion may also express in the form of performance troupes ("huahui"), involving many different kinds of groups of performers such as stilt walkers, lion dancers, musicians, martial arts masters, "yangge+" dancers, and story-tellers.

Some gods are considered carnivorous, for example Heshen (河神) or the Longwang+ (龙王), and offering to them requires animal sacrifice ("shengji" 生祀), Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 189 while other deities, for example Zhenwu, do not ask for animal sacrifice.

A deity may also require in exchange, for his or her help through divine effervescence, that people act morally and perform good works, virtuous deeds ("shanshi" 善事), and practice self-cultivation ("xiu xing" 修行). For this aim, some forms of local religion develop clear prescriptions for believers, such as detailed lists of meritorious and sinful deeds in the form of "books of virtue" ("shanshu" 善书) and "ledgers of merit" ("guogong ge" 过功格). Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 182 Involvement in the affairs of communal or intra-village temples are perceived by believers as ways for accumulating merit ("gongde" 功德). "Doing good deeds to accumulate virtue" ("xing shan ji de" 行善积德) is a common formula for religious practice. Zavidovskaya, 2012. p. 187 Virtue is believed to accumulate in one's heart, which is seen as energetic centre of the human body ("zai jun xin zuo tian fu" 在君心作福田).

Practices of communication with the gods comprehend different forms of Chinese shamanism, such as wu shamanism+ and tongji mediumship+, or fuji+ practice. On the community level, religious services are organised and led by local people themselves. Leaders are usually selected among male heads of families or lineages, or on the village level they may be the village heads.

Temples of the Chinese folk religion can be distinguished into "miao" (庙) or "dian" (殿), meaning "temple"; family altars or private temples ("simiao" 私庙 or "jiamiao" 家庙), or ancestral temples+ or shrines ("citang" 祠堂 or "zongci" 宗祠). The terms have often been used interchangeably.

However "miao" is the general Chinese term for "temple+" understood as "sacred space", "worship place". In Chinese folk religion it is mostly associated to temples which enshrine nature gods and patron gods. Instead "ci" is the specific term for temples enshrining ancestry gods, deified+ virtuous men.

Shen temples are distinct from Taoist temple+s in that they are established and administered by local managers+, village communities, lineage congregations and worship associations, and don't have professional priest+s, although Taoist+ "daoshi+", Faist+ "fashi", and also Wuist+ "wu+" and "tongji+", may perform services within these temples. Shenist temples are usually small and decorated with traditional figures on their roofs (dragons and deities), although some evolve into significant structures. Other terms associated to templar structures of Shenism and other religions in China are 宮 "gong" ("palace"), referring to a templar complex of multiple buildings, and 院 "yuan", a general term for "sanctuary", "shrine".

Chinese folk religion followers and temples make use of different symbols, from symbols with cosmological or generative significance to symbols peculiar of specific deities, lineages or areas.

As in Taoism+, also in the Chinese folk religion the yin and yang+ concept can be represented through the taijitu+ symbol, but also in pairs of complementary figures such as the dragon+ and the phoenix+, heaven and earth, or water and fire. The taijitu is often represented in the hands of creator deities such as Pangu+, who represent the originating principle separating into heaven and earth. The bagua+ of I Ching+ is also a symbol used in Chinese folk religion.

The Chinese dragon ("long" 龙) is a very important symbol in Chinese indigenous tradition: it is a positive creature representing "yang", and thus the life-giving creative force, the universal generating power+ (Tian+-Shangdi+) and qi+, from which also the kin lineage.

The Pew Research Center+ has collected statistics saying that in China+ 22% of the population practices the Chinese indigenous religion. Another estimate puts it at over 30% of the total population.

A 2010 survey has found the following numbers: 754 million (56.2%) people practice Chinese ancestral veneration+, but only 216 million people (16%) believe in the existence of ancestral "shen" (spirits). The same survey says 173 million (13%) adopt Taoist practices on a level which is indistinguishable from the Chinese folk religion. 2010 Chinese Spiritual Life Survey conducted by Dr. Yang Fenggang, Purdue University's Center on Religion and Chinese Society. Statistics published in: Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, David Strait. """. Religions and Christianity in Today's China, Vol. II, 2012, No. 3, pp. 29-54, ISSN: 2192-9289.

In Taiwan+, Chinese folk religions are mostly subsumed under the label and the institutions of "Taoism", which is the religion of 33% of the population.

Scholars have studied the economic+ dimension of Chinese folk religion, with its ritual and templar economy that constitutes a form of grassroots+ capitalism+, that produces well-being among local communities through the circulation of wealth and its investment in the "sacred capital" of temples, gods and ancestors.

This groundwork, which was already there in imperial China and plays an important role in modern Taiwan+, is seen as the driving force in the rapid economic development in parts of rural China+,

especially the southern and eastern coasts. It is an "embedded capitalism", which preserves local identity and autonomy. The drive for individual accumulation of money is tempered by the religious and kinship ethics of generosity in sharing wealth for devotion, ritual, and the construction of the civil society.

Being the Chinese folk religion an ethnic religion and indigenous to the soil of China, Chinese people who emigrate tend to lose their connection to ancestral rites and local temples. The overseas Chinese settled in Southeast Asia have mostly adopted Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, Christianity. However, some of them have succeeded in preserving the Chinese folk religion, often adapting it to the new environment developing new cults and incorporating elements of local traditions. Southeast Asia's Chinese folk religions are particularly ready to adopt Buddhist bodhisattva ("fo", enlightened beings) as gods, and even Hindu gods such as Hanuman, Ganesh and Brahma, into their pantheon. Some of the organised folk religions, such as Yiguandao and Deism, have also succeeded in spreading amongst Southeast Asian Chinese communities.

In Singapore about 11% of the total population is Taoist, composed by a 14.4% of the Chinese Singaporeans identifying as Taoists. In Malaysia, around 3% of Chinese Malaysians practice Chinese folk religions, corresponding to around 1% of the whole country population. In Indonesia, Taosu Agung Kusumo, leader of the Majelis Agama Tao Indonesia, claims there are 5 million Taoist followers in the country as of 2009.

Chinese temples in Indonesia and Malaysia are called "kelenteng" or "klenteng" in local Malay language, or alternatively "bio", the southern Chinese pronunciation of Mandarin "miao" (廟).

The Chinese folk religion of the Chinese Indonesians is named "Confucianism", and officially recognised by the government as "Agama Khonghucu" or "religion of Confucius", which was chosen because of the political condition in Indonesia before the end of Suharto rule in 1998, which saw the Chinese religions forbidden and the Chinese forced to convert to Buddhism or Christianity. The Chinese Indonesians had their culture and religious rights restored only after the fourth president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, issued a regulation that recognised "Confucianism" among the legal religions of the country. He said that:

The first precept of "Pancasila" (the Five Basic Principles of the Indonesian state) stipulates belief in the one and only God. The Confucian philosophy is able to fulfill this, for Confucius mentioned only one God in his teaching, the Heaven or Shangdi. The Heaven possess the characteristic of "Yuan Heng Li Zhen", or "Omnipresent", "Omnipotent", "Omnibenevolent", "Just". Bidang Litbang PTITD/Matrisia Jawa Tengah. 2007. "Pengetahuan Umum Tentang Tri Dharma", First Edition (July 2007). Publisher: Benih Bersemi, Semarang, Indonesia.

The Master said, "Great indeed was Yao as a sovereign! How majestic was he! It is only Heaven that is grand, and only Yao corresponded to it. How vast was his virtue! The people could find no name for it. How majestic was he in the works which he accomplished! How glorious in the elegant regulations which he instituted!" (VIII, xix, tr. Legge 1893:214)

Another movement in Indonesia is the "Tridharma" (Sanskrit: "religion of the Three"), syncretising elements of different religions, the Chinese three teachings amongst others. Tsuda Koji. "Chinese Religion" in Modern Indonesia: Focusing on the Trend Toward Systematization in

the Post-Soeharto Era". Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. After the fall of Suharto rule it is undergoing a process of systematisation of doctrines and rituals. Tridharma temples always consist of three main rooms: the front room for Tian+ or God, the middle for the main deity of the temple, the back room for the three teachers and their pantheon: Confucius+, Laozi+, and Buddha+.

In Malaysia the Malaysian Chinese constitute a large segment of the population, mostly adherent of Mahayana Buddhism+. The Chinese traditional religion has a relatively significant following in the states of Sarawak+ (6%) and Penang+ (5%). A prominent cult is that of Tua Pek Kong (大伯公 "Dabo Gong"), and it has incorporated the cult of the Na Tuk Kong (拿督公 "Nadu Gong") of local Malay origin.

Thailand+ has a large population of Thai Chinese+, people of Chinese or partial Chinese origin. Most of those who follow Buddhism have been integrated into the Theravada Buddhist+ tradition of the country, with only a negligible minority having retained Chinese Buddhism+. However, many others have retained the Chinese folk religions and Taoism. Tatsuki Kataoka. "Religion as Non-religion: The Place of Chinese Temples in Phuket, Southern Thailand". In "Southeast Asian Studies", Vol. 1, No. 3, December 2012, pp. 461–485. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. Despite the large number of followers and temples, and although they are practiced freely, these religions have no state recognition, their temples are not counted as places of worship, and their followers are counted as "Theravada Buddhists" in officially released religious figures. Chinese temples are called "sanchao" in Thai language+.

The Chinese folk religion of Thailand has developed local features, including the worship of local gods. Major Chinese festivals such as the Nian+, Zhongqiu+ and Qingming+ are widely celebrated especially in Bangkok+, Phuket+, and other parts of Thailand where there are large Chinese populations.

The Chinese in the city of Phuket+ are noted for their nine-day vegetarian festival between September and October. During the festive season, devotees will abstain from meat and mortification of the flesh+ by Chinese mediums are also commonly seen, along with rites devoted to the worship of Tua Pek Kong+. Such traditions were developed during the 19th century in Phuket by the local Chinese with influences from Thai culture.

Some within the Chinese community in India+ practice the Chinese folk religion. The community of Kolkata+ have built some "churches" to the Chinese gods.

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