

CHINESE RELIGION

The term Chinese religion is extremely broad. It includes:

1. Organized religions- Buddhism, Taoism
2. State sponsored rites- Confucianism
3. Popular religion- local cults, practices, beliefs.

POPULAR RELIGION

Popular religion is the common religion of the Chinese people. It is the ancient cultural matrix from which Confucianism and Taoism arose and to which Buddhism adapted. Once thought to be a chaotic amalgam of formal religions, popular religion has its own identity.

Large number of popular gods and goddesses distinct from Taoist deities and Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Pantheon is not clearly differentiated and many deities do not have strict boundaries. This fluidity has helped popular religion elude identification.

People interact with gods through sacrifice, prayer, divination, and mediumistic seances. Many rituals centered around community temples or home shrines. Ethical norms are strongly present having borrowed from and lent to Confucianism.

Elements of popular religion are not systematic but include various common principles largely shared by organized religions.

1. Belief in heaven as the highest principle and acceptance of fate dictated by heaven. Mandate of heaven. "Wholeness" of man, nature, heaven
2. Multiple Deities- belief in supernatural world of gods and ghosts.
3. Ancestor veneration- obsession with and fear of dead. Belief in proper rites, soul and afterlife.
4. Omnipresence of yin and yang principles. Importance of harmony and balance. Opposites necessary and complementary.
5. Occult practices- Divination, channeling, amulets, faith healing, astrology, magic, mediums, ghosts, etc.

Ordinary persons not concerned with Philosophical Taoism or Confucianism. More concern with pursuit of worldly success, appeasement of the dead and spirits, seeking knowledge about the future, harmony and balance in everyday life.
