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The Number of Buddhists
in the World

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THE NUMBER OF BUDDHISTS IN THE WORLD.

BY THE EDITOR.

A. P. Hopper.

IN considering the population of the Earth, besides arriving at the number of the inhabitants of the several countries and continents it is not unusual with many writers to classify the populations of the various nations according to their religion; stating how many are Christians, how many are Confucianists and how many are Buddhists. In stating the number of Christians and Mohammedans there is a general agreement among the various authorities as to their respective numbers. This arises from the fact that in the lands where these religions are found the census of the population is taken with a good degree of accuracy: and the people are classed by those who are engaged in taking the census according to their declared or manifest wishes. But in the statements of the number of Buddhists, as published by different authorities, there are great discrepancies, as will appear from the following details. Thus Hassel, in the Penny Cyclopaedia, estimates the number of Buddhists to be 315 millions. Johnstone in his Physical Atlas gives the number of Buddhists as 245 millions. Perkins in Johnson's American Atlas states the number of Buddhists to be 320 millions. Professor Newman estimates the number of Buddhists to be 367 millions. See "The Ten Great Religions," p. 146. Other authorities estimate the number of Buddhists to be 450 millions; and Mr. Edwin Arnold, in his preface to the Light of Asia, states the number of Buddhists to be 470 millions, a number which is equal to one third of the population of the globe.

It is evident from this wide diversity in the statements of the number of Buddhists, that the data upon which the estimates are made are not certain; and that the different authorities are guided by very different principles in fixing their estimates. For if the number of the followers of Buddha in each of the several countries where this religion is followed was known, the grand total of Buddhists could easily be ascertained: and there would be uniformity in the number as given by different writers on the subject. I will attempt to discover the cause of these discrepancies by referring to the countries in which Buddhists are found.

The countries in which Buddhists are found in large numbers are the following; viz, Ceylon, Siam, Burmah, Thibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, Annam, China, Corea and Japan. But the extent to which Buddhism prevails in these several countries differs very

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greatly. In some of them it is the state religion and is followed by all the people as in Siam, Burmah and Thibet. In some of them it is the religion which is followed by the great mass of the population, almost to the exclusion of all other religions as in Ceylon, Mongolia, and Manchuria. But in the other countries as Annam, China, Corea and Japan it exists in connection with other religions. In these last named countries it was introduced at a very early period of the Christian era; it has its priests, its temples, its monasteries, its forms of worship, its feast days and its following; but Buddhism is by no means to be considered as the only religion of these countries, nor even as the most prevalent religion therein.

It will be evident to every one who investigates the subject, that the great cause of the wide discrepancies in the estimates of the different authorities as quoted above, is the difficulty of arriving at the correct number of Buddhists in the population of China. One authority who gives the number of Buddhists to be 340 millions gives 80 millions as the number of Confucianists, classifying the rest of China as Buddhists. If this authority estimated the population of China to be 350 millions and only counted 80 millions as Confucianists this would leave 270 millions of the population of China to be classed as Buddhists leaving the other 70 millions of his estimate of the number of Buddhists to be made up from the population of the other countries in which Buddhism is found. Some of the authorities whose estimates are quoted above, must have counted the whole population of China and Japan as Buddhists in order to make up the numbers as given by them. I express this opinion by way of inference, because in none of the authorities above referred to was there any statement given of the number of Buddhists in each several country, but only the one statement of the number of Buddhists in the world. But every one who will consider the facts of the case, must see at once, that the enumeration of the whole, or even of a large part, of the population of China and Japan as Buddhists is erroneous; because in China a very large part of the people as well as the government are Confucianists; and in Japan the government and a large portion of the people are Shintoists. Before any reliable estimate can be given of the number of Buddhists in these countries it is necessary to settle upon some principles to guide us in classifying the population of those countries where several religions are recognised among the people. In the countries of Europe and America, when the census of the population is taken by their respective governments great accuracy is attained in regard to the number of those who adhere to the several religions which are found in the different countries. When the

census is taken in Great Britain and Ireland not only is it ascertained how many in each country are Protestants and how many are Roman Catholics; but it is also ascertained how many of those who are classed as Protestants are connected with the several Protestant denominations; stating how many adhere to the Established Church of England, how many to the Established Church of Scotland, and how many are Wesleyan, how many are Baptists &c. The same accuracy in stating the number of the adherents to several religious faiths which are found in the country is found in the census when taken in Germany, France and Italy. In the census recently taken by the British Government in India the population of the several provinces are classified in reference to their religions as "Hindus," "Sikhs," "Mohammedans," "Buddhists," "Christians," "Others," and "Religion not Known." When the census of any country is taken in this manner the number of the adherents of each system of religion is easily arrived at. In all western lands there are many of the population who are not very decided or pronounced as to their religious opinions. I fancy that if a minute inquiry was made as to the principles which guide those who take the census in Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy, it would be found that a very large number of the population are classified as being connected with the established religion of each country, who have but little religious preference of any kind, or, in other words, that it is the prevailing usage in classifying the populations in different western lands to consider all those of the population as belonging to the established religion of the State who do not express their positive dissent therefrom. Hence in the United Kingdom a large part of the population is classed as connected with the Established Church of England who have but little predilection for that church, because they do not express their dissent therefrom; and because under these circumstances it is the most natural thing to class them with the Established Church. So in France and Italy a very large part of the population is classed as Roman Catholics though they attend very indifferently upon the rites and ceremonies of the church. But in childhood most of them were baptized according to the rites of this church, their marriages were solemnized by the Priests of this church and the rites of this church are used at the funerals which occur in their families. In these circumstances, though many of the people neglect the regular services of the church, and some of them are skeptical as to the doctrines of the church, yet, by usage and general consent the great mass of the population of these countries is classed as Roman Catholics. The same usage is found in all the other countries of

Europe. The inhabitants of Russia are classed as adherents of the Greek Church, because that is the national church, notwithstanding so many of them do not attend upon its rites and ceremonies, and do not conform to its requirements. In China it is well known that there are three religions; the Confucian,* the Buddhist and the Taouist. It is also true that many of the inhabitants of China worship according to the rites and ceremonies of each one of these religions; and worship nearly all the objects of worship which are held sacred by the several systems of belief. In this state of the case we cannot class them all as Confucianists, neither can we class them all as Buddhists as some have done, nor all as Taouists. But how shall we assign the population to their respective classes? What principles shall guide us in assigning a portion of the population to each one of the several religions? The census of the population which has been taken by the Chinese government affords no help in making such a classification of the population, as in no census has any note been taken of such a division of the people. Before we proceed to classify the population of China according to religious belief it is necessary to settle some principles to guide us from the usages which prevail in like matters in other lands.

It is quite true that these three religions are found in all parts of China; that the temples of these several faiths stand side by side in the cities and in the country. Many of their various ceremonies, much of their worship occur on the same days; and many of the people worship at all the various shrines. But still there is a very marked difference in the position which is occupied by these respective systems among this people. Confucianism is the oldest religion of China. It is also the national religion of this empire. It is the religion which is authorized by the Imperial Statutes. It is the only religion which has an authorized and established ritual and the worship according to which is appointed by law. The emperor himself is the chief worshipper at the high services on state occasions. Every officer in the Empire worships according to the established ritual in his own official residence and in the temples of his own district. And each and every family worships its ancestors, according to the Confucian faith, on the 1st and 15th of each month

* I conform to usage in speaking of Confucianism as one of the religions of China. This does not mean that this native cult originated with him. It was prevalent in China long before he lived. But as he arranged and transmitted its Canonical Books and gave his sanction to it, it has become customary to designate the indigenous systems of religious worship as Confucianism. The objects of worship according to its ritual are Heaven, earth, the sun, moon and stars, the gods of the land and the grain, the goddess of silk culture, the god of healing, the god of literature, the god of war, and more important than all the worship of ancestors. Confucianism comprehends this system of religion as well as the political and ethical systems of Confucius.

and at the four great festivals of the year and on the proper birthday; these four great festivals are all connected with Confucianism. Buddhism and Taouism are *tolerated*, but only as inferior and less respected systems of popular superstition, but they are not on an equality with the Orthodox faith. Confucianism has the precedence and preëminence in every thing and every way. Its Canonical Books, the Five Classics and Four Books, are the recognized foundation of all their philosophy and religion. These are the text books in all their schools of every kind and class, from the lowest to the highest. The themes at the literary examination throughout the whole empire for the coveted degrees are taken from these Canonical Books. The gods which are acknowledged by the Confucian system are found in the idol loft of every family in the land. The principal worship and rites at births, marriages and deaths in the families of all classes of the population, are those of the Confucian faith. It is also true that some of the Buddhist and Taouist gods are found in the idol loft of many families, and that ceremonies from one or both of these faiths are joined with those of the Confucian faith at births, marriages and funerals. But it remains true that the *principal* ceremonies at these three great events are according to the Confucian faith. In my intercourse with this people doing these thirty nine years, I have met with very few persons indeed, apart from those who are Christian, who disavowed their belief in Confucianism or their non-adherence to it.—Whatever the people hold in regard to Buddhism and Taouism it is not to the renunciation or neglect of Confucianism; but it is held in connection with and in addition to the belief in Confucianism.

The sentiments and opinions of the people of China in regard to Buddhism and Taouism are conformed to the teachings of their orthodox rituals and authorized manuals. In these they are spoken of and regarded as heresies, while Confucianism is the Orthodox or Correct Doctrine. The Seventh Maxim in the Sacred Edict of the Illustrious Emperor Kanghi, which is ordered to be read on the 1st and 15th of each month for the instruction of the officers of the government, reads thus; “Degrade strange religions in order to exalt the orthodox doctrine.” Milne’s Translation. In the explanation of this maxim by the Emperor Yung Ching, Confucianism is designated the correct and orthodox doctrine, while Buddhism and Taouism are classed among the perverse heresies; and the people are warned against them and exhorted to forsake them and avoid their deceptions. When preaching to Chinese audiences the preacher, whether foreigner or native may denounce the follies, the superstitions and the idols of Buddhism and Taouism and carry the feelings

and the concurrence of the audience with him. But if he commences to decry any of the doctrines of Confucius; or to argue against any of the forms of worship which are sanctioned by the national religion, as that of the worship of ancestors, or of Confucius, he at once arouses the feelings of all his audience in dissent from his utterances. The honorary tablets which have been conferred by successive Emperors, at different periods, have marked the *increased reverence* with which he has been regarded with the lapse of time. He has been styled "The Ancient Holy One," "The Great Sage," "The Most Holy Ancient Sage Confucius," "The Perfect, Most Holy Ancient Sage Confucius." A more popular form is expressed in this form taken from a sacrificial prayer, "He is the rule and pattern of the hundred Kings, the Teacher and Exemplar of the myriad ages." These sententious expressions express the sentiments of the people in regard to him. No one has arisen to contest his claim to preeminence in their estimation.

It is to be remarked that the estimate of Confucius, and the hold of Confucianism upon the hearts of the people, so far from showing any evidence of declining has manifested increasing power and influence with each successive dynasty. Hence, both as expressive of its own sentiments and as the surest way of commending itself and its policy to the people, each dynasty has sought to exceed the preceding dynasty in its homage to Confucius. This has been manifested in conferring a higher title upon him which is henceforth inscribed on the tablets before which the worship and offerings are rendered. Mr. T. Waters, in his "Guide to the Tablets of the Temple of Confucius," says; "The Emperors of the present dynasty have outdone all others in the services they have rendered to the honour and worship of the Sage and his saints. Under them has been enforced, for the first time, the rule that every city and town should have its temple."

Dr. Legge, in "The Religions of China," says: at the present day he is worshipped twice a year on certain days in the middle of Spring and Autumn. Then the Emperor goes in state to the Imperial College in Peking, and performs the homage, and presents the appointed offerings before the spirit tablets of Confucius, and four of his most famous disciples. These are the words of the principal prayer on the occasion:—"On this month of this year I, the Emperor, offer sacrifice to the Philosopher K'ung, the ancient Teacher, the perfect Sage; and say, O Teacher, in virtue equal to Heaven and Earth, whose doctrines embrace the times past and the present, thou didst digest and transmit the six classics, and didst hand down lessons for all generations." p. 148.

In "The Middle Kingdom, Williams says; "there are 1560 temples dedicated to Confucius; there are, it is said, 62,606 pigs, rabbits, sheep and deer, and 27,000 pieces of silk annually presented upon their altars." Vol. II. p. 239. In Peking, as Dr. Legge states, the homage is paid, at one of the temples, by the Emperor himself. In the other temples under this dynasty the law is "that the chief civil officer at each place shall conduct the worship."

In the Sacrificial Ritual which is used at these services occurs the following ode in praise of Confucius. There is a hearty response of concurrence in every inhabitant of China to this laudation of their great Sage the transmitter of the cult which is indigenous to China.

"Confucius! Confucius! How great is Confucius;
Before Confucius there never was a Confucius;
Since Confucius there has never been a Confucius?
Confucius! Confucius! How great is Confucius."

If when a census of the population is taken in China the people were questioned, as they are in western lands, and required to say how they wished to be classed as Confucianists, or Buddhists or Taouists, one or the other, to the exclusion of the others, it is my opinion that 19/20ths, if not 99/100ths, of the people would claim to be designated as Confucianists. This adherence to Confucianism follows as a matter of course by all loyal subjects of the Empire because it is the national religion and it is associated in their minds with all that preeminence and renown which belongs to the Empire and the race. Confucius is associated with all the strongest and most interesting associations of their whole lives; as the tablet has been regularly worshipped on the 1st and 15th day of every month by all those who have attended school for any length of time; and more devoutly by all those who have sought literary honors. The tablet of Confucius is found in every school room and College in the whole Empire. And when the position and influence of the literary class in China is considered, it will be no surprise to any who carefully consider the subject that the population of China are Confucianists.

This view of the matter is confirmed by the opinions of the best students of Chinese institutions and History. Dr. Williams in "The Middle Kingdom" says; "This brings us to the consideration of the real religion of the Chinese, that in which more than anything else they trust, and to which they look for consolation and reward, the *worship of deceased ancestors*. * * * The heart of the nation reposes more upon the rites offered at the family shrine to the two "living divinities" who preside in the hall of ancestors *than to all the rest.*" Vol. 11. p. 259. "In China no one is called a Buddhist except the priests and nuns; and the same is true in Japan and Lewchew, and

probably in Corca, in all of which Buddhism has no support from government, though approved by many officers." p. 250. Dr. Edkins, who has written so fully and ably on Chinese Buddhism says in answer to inquiries by me, "Strictly speaking no Chinese could be called Buddhists, except those who have their heads shaved, of either sex; *i.e.* the priests and nuns of this faith." Dr. Edkins also remarked, "Chinese Historians only class priests and nuns as Buddhists and even they have strong leanings to Confucianism." In his work "Religion in China," Dr. Edkins says "The religions of Confucius, Buddha and Tao are truly national, because the mass of the people believe in them all. They are far from feeling it to be inconsistent to do so. Philosophers may not know what to do with a fact like this; but it is true nevertheless. Those who themselves have a devoted love of truth, do not understand how any one should belong to three religions at once. Hence some writers have parcelled out the Chinese among these systems, assigning so many millions to one and so many to another. In estimating the number of Buddhists in the world, one hundred and eighty millions of Chinamen are placed by one author at the head of his enumeration of nations. He has obtained this number by halving the whole population; a process conveniently short, but far from giving a true view of the case. Some other mode of classification must be employed." Religion in China, 2nd Edition p. 58.

I have suggested some principles that should guide us in making such classification, with what success I leave to my readers to say. I simply apply to the Chinese the principles that are applied in Western lands classifying the population among the several religions that are found in those countries. By applying those principles I have arrived at the result that the great mass of the population of China is to be classified as Confucianists. It does not militate against the result that many of them, in connection with their Confucian faith have a belief in some of the teachings of Buddhism and Taouism, and worship some of their idols. This same thing is found to exist very commonly in the populations of western lands. In the Protestant denominations, many views are held in common with the adherents of other creeds because such views are common to all Protestants Christians. But they differ on the essential point of their respective creeds. It is the common belief of the adherents of the three religions of China that a plurality of gods may be worshipped. There is no exclusive claim for the worship of only one God. Hence the Confucianists see no inconsistency in worshipping the gods of the Buddhist and Taouist faith with their respective rites, in *addition* to the gods presented

in the Confucian faith. But when Buddhism teaches any thing contrary to the "five cardinal virtues," "the five relations" and "the worship of ancestors" which are the distinguishing teachings of Confucius they adhere to Confucius, and they should, by the same principle that guides in similar matters in western lands, be classified as Confucianists.

The principles and teachings of Confucius have been fully accepted by the inhabitants of Corea and Annam. The religion of this system is recognized as the state religion of these kingdoms. Buddhism and Taoism have both been introduced into Corea, and the former has at various times had great success in securing votaries. But in the most recent history of that kingdom, "Corea, the Hermit Nation," the author, Mr. Griffis says, "Confucianism overspreads the whole peninsula, but during the prevalence of Buddhism, from the fourth to the fourteenth century, it was probably fully studied and practised by the learned classes. Under the present dynasty, or from the fifteenth century the religion of China has been both the official and popular cult of Corea, long ago reaching the point of bigotry, intolerance and persecution. Taoism appears to be little studied." page 330. While we have not the same definite information in regard to Annam, the similarity of the institutions and usages in that country to those in China leads me to the conclusion that the people of Annam are to be classed as Confucianists. Japan is the only other country that requires to be considered. Japan has two systems of religious faith, viz., the native cult which is called Sintoism, and Buddhism. It is true that the teachings of Confucius were introduced into Japan in the third century of the Christian era, and the "Four Books" have formed the basis of their educational system. But it was mainly Confucius' teachings on political science that have been received into Japan. Sinto-ism means the "the way of the gods," and means simply the worship of the gods according to their native mythology. The system is a worship of the objects of nature. The chief divinity is the Sun-goddess which goddess is regarded not only as chief divinity in Japan but she is regarded as the Patron of the kingdom. The Mikado regards himself, and he is so regarded by the people, as a descendant of the goddess and as holding the kingdom by divine right from her. In connection with this worship of the objects of nature is the worship of ancestors. This is a very important part of their worship as the ancestral shelf is found in every house. It is the part of idolatry which converts to Christianity give up with the greatest reluctance.

But it would appear that the native system of worship had not the strength to meet Buddhism in Japan that Confucianism had in

China. This may have been because there was no sage in Japan holding the position that Confucius does in China. Neither is there such a collection of Canonical Books coming down from early ages and so intimately connected with the national life and Government. However that may be, Buddhism appears to have become more rooted in Japan than in China. The two systems of Shintoism and Buddhism have become very much joined together in the minds of the people. "Some of the gods of old Japan were recognized as incarnations of previous Buddhas." This would indicate that Buddhism in Japan conformed to the native system in order to get more firmly rooted. The people while adhering to the worship of ancestors call indiscriminately for help upon the Shinto Sun-goddess and on the Buddhist objects of worship. A correspondent writes, "In 1868, through a spirit of patriotism, the Mikado and the government did all in their power to uproot the Indian religion and to make Shinto all. This effort has met with so little success that Buddhism is now gradually regaining its old position of "better half" in this curious alliance." This same correspondent remarks; "Only two Buddhist sects, viz., Nichiren and Monto sects forbid their adherents to worship the Shinto gods. The Monto sect is powerful and energetic, and with the Nichiren sect may take in a third of the population, though there are no statistics on the subject."

Under these circumstances it is very difficult to classify the population of Japan. If when a census of the population of Japan was taken the people were required to declare their preference, a large majority would probably declare themselves Shintoists. But in the absence of any statistics it may be the safer way, as there is a kind of union of two systems in the minds of the people, to consider one half Shintoists and the other half as Buddhists according to the Japanese type of Buddhism. This would make the number of the followers of each system to be 18 millions.

It remains to arrive at the population of the several countries in which Buddhism is accepted as the religion of the inhabitants, as Siam, Burmah, Thibet, Ceylon, Mongolia and Manchuria. The population of each of these several countries is not well ascertained. No two authorities give the same number. Siam is stated by some to have a population of 6 millions. Thibet is also stated to have 6 millions and Burmah is estimated to have 4 millions. Ceylon has 2 millions, Mongolia 2 millions, and Manchuria 10 millions. In the recent census of India the number of Buddhists is stated to be in all the provinces, 4,342,407. Of this number 3,251,589 reside in British Burmah. This only leaves 1,090,846 for the whole of India. If it is considered that only the priests and nuns of this

faith in China are to be considered as Buddhists, we have no data to settle the number of these religionists in the Empire. But if we consider there are some devotees who have not shaven their heads and estimate the number of Buddhists in China, Corea and Annam to be 20 millions we have made an estimate which must be considered by all who have studied the subject to be a large one.

If we tabulate the population of these various Countries it will give us the aggregate of those who may classified as Buddhists.

Siam,	6 millions.
Thibet,	6 „
Birmah,	4 „
Ceylon,	2 „
India,	4,342,407.
Mongolia,	2 millions.
Manchuria,	10 „
China,	20 „
Japan,	18 „
Total,	<u>721,342,407.</u>

The considerations presented in this paper, if accepted, will have the effect of requiring that Confucianism shall be enumerated as one if the religions when classifying the population of the world according to religions. The number of Confucianists will vary as stated by different persons because of the different statements of the population of China. These range from 255 millions to 369 millions. If we estimate the population of China, Corea and Annam to be 300 millions and deduct 20 millions for Buddhists and 15 millions for the Mohanmedans it will leave the number of Confucianists to be 265 millions.



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