

Religions of East Asia

 THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EAST ASIAN STUDIES CENTER



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Introduction

What is Religion?

According to Webster's Dictionary, religion can be defined as "belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshiped as the creator(s) and ruler(s) of the universe" or "a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices."

The **United Religions Initiative** tackles this question [here](#).

Can a religion also be a philosophy?

The sets of beliefs described here will be referred to as religions, philosophies, or both. You may question the difference. One explanation is that religion answers the fundamental questions of existence through traditional beliefs handed down or from exalted leaders who received revelations from God. Philosophy, on the other hand, seeks to answer life's ultimate questions through deep thinking, reasoning, and debate.

Religions of East Asia



Buddhism: Taoism

The great missionary religion developed from the teaching of Siddhartha Gautama (6th century BCE), and spread from India (now Nepal) into Southeast Asia, later expanding into northern Asia, China, Korea, and Japan.



:

Also spelled Daoism, this Chinese philosophy outlined in the *Tao Te Ching* was written by Laozi /Lao-Tzu or his followers. Its aim is to achieve harmony with all that is by pursuing inaction and effortlessness.



Confucianism:

The system of social ethics was taught by Confucius/K'ung Fu'Tzu (551-479 BCE) and given imperial recognition in China in the second century CE. It has since spread from China to Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other southeast Asian countries.



Shinto:

The indigenous nature religion of Japan became an official state religion between 1868 and 1945. It is based on the belief that spiritual powers, called kami, exist in the natural world.

Source: Descriptions from *Eerdmans' Handbook to The World's Religions* and *The Usborne Encyclopedia of World Religions*

A Blending of Religion in East Asia

Religion in East Asia is a blend of ancient beliefs and practices that have been influenced by the spread of Buddhism.

In China, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism are called "The Three Teachings."

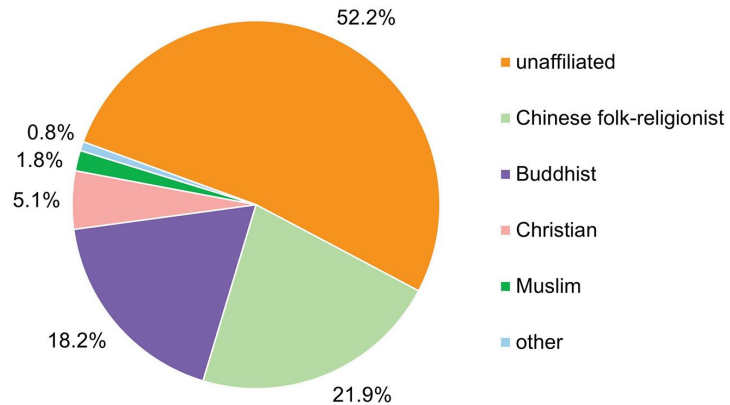
Japanese incorporate Shinto rituals in their Buddhist worship practices.

Access this map at

<https://commons.princeton.edu/mg/religions-in-asia-c-1500/>



China religious affiliation (2010)*

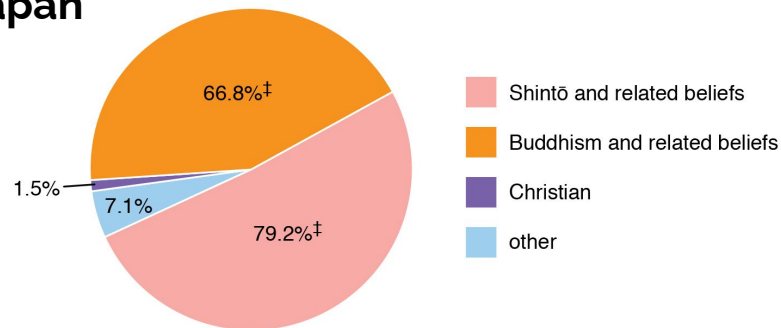


© Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

*Many Chinese practice both China folk religion and Buddhism.

Religious affiliation (2012)

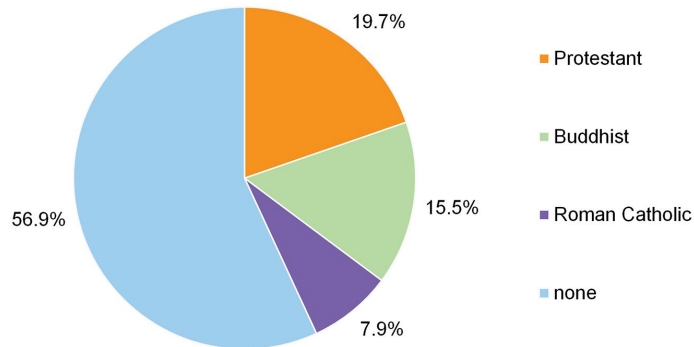
Japan



© Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

‡Many Japanese practice both Shintōism and Buddhism.

South Korea religious affiliation (2015)



© Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Background Information

The following slides provide background information for your study of East Asian religions. Click the blue links for more information.

Religions of East Asia



Buddhism

China
Japan
South Korea



Taoism / Daoism

China

Confucianis m

China
South Korea

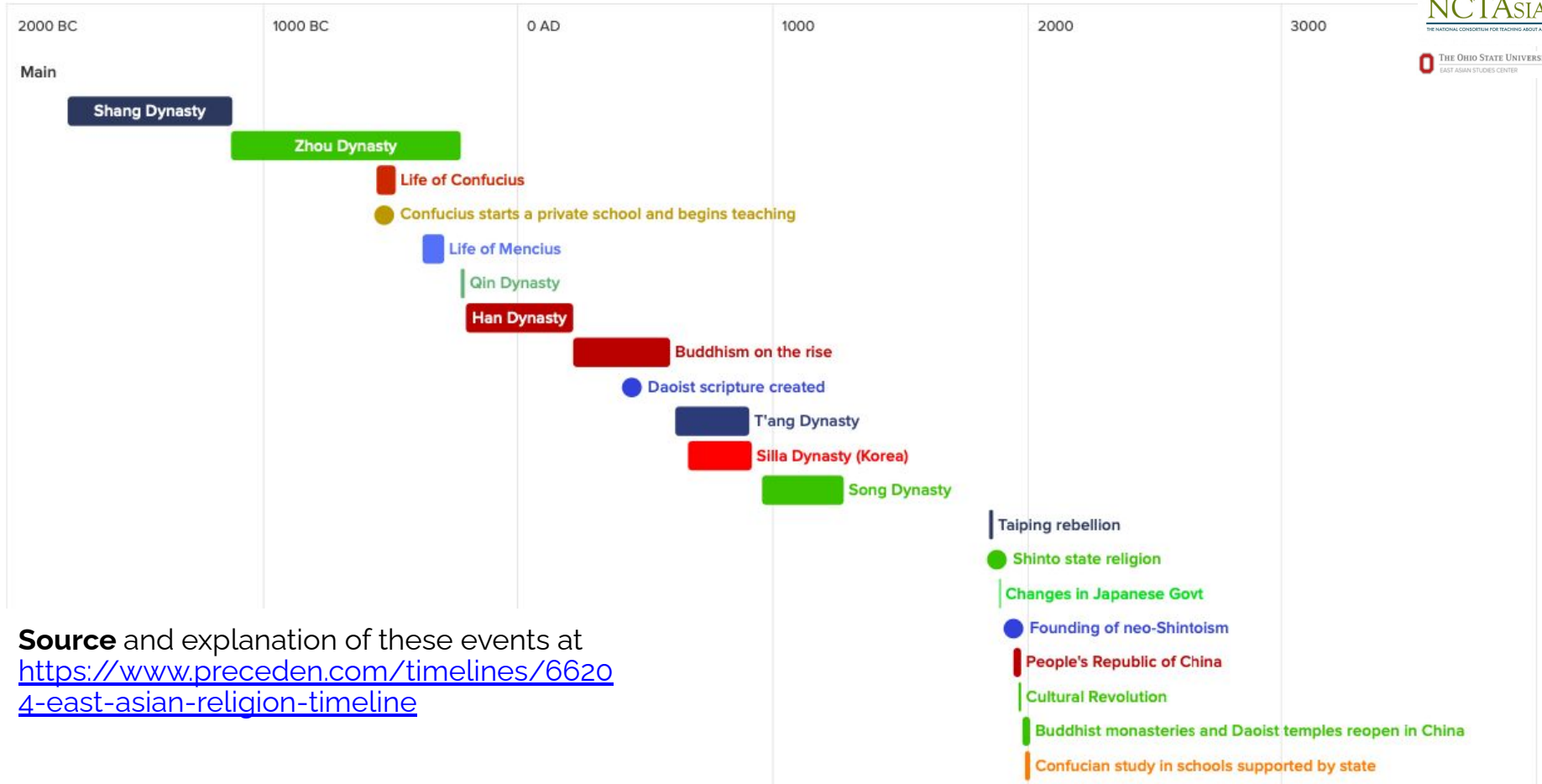
Shintoism

Japan



NOTE: Religion in North Korea is discouraged by the government. Historically, Buddhism and Confucianism flourished there.

East Asian Religion Timeline



Source and explanation of these events at
<https://www.preceden.com/timelines/6620-4-east-asian-religion-timeline>

Origin

In India (what is now Nepal), **Siddhartha Gautama**, the Buddha, was born. Read about his search to solve the problem of suffering [here](#).

Types of Buddhism

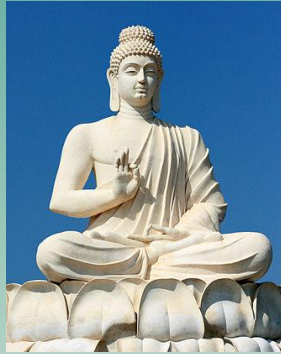
[Three Schools of Buddhism](#)

Places of Worship

[Buddhist Temples and Stupas](#)

[Japanese Buddhist temples](#)

Buddhism Facts



Sacred Texts

Buddha's teachings were first passed down orally, but later written down in the [Pali Canon](#), also called the **Tipitika/Tripitika**, or "Three Baskets."

Mahayana sacred texts, the **Sutras**, were written in Sanskrit.

The [Tripitika Koreana](#), a collection of Buddhist teachings carved into over 80,000 wooden blocks, is housed in [Haeinsa Temple](#).

Religious Practices

[Buddhist Rituals, Practices, and Objects](#)

[Buddhist Holidays](#)

Major Beliefs

[The Three Jewels](#) are the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (monks and nuns.).

[The Four Noble Truths](#)

[The Eightfold Path](#)

[Reincarnation](#)

[Nirvana](#)

[Karma](#)

[The Five Precepts](#)



Origin

In China, [Laozi / Lao-tze](#) is an historical or legendary figure. He may have been a shi, an archivist and historian for the emperor during the Zhou Dynasty. Some modern scholars believe he did not live at all. His name means "old master" or "ancient child."

Taoism was declared the state religion during the Tang Dynasty, but was later supplanted by Buddhism.

Important Writing

[Daodejing/Tao-Te-Ching](#) (The Book of the Way), is a book of poetry said to have been written by Laozi. It offers guiding principles for living in harmony with Ch'i/qi, the energy of the universe.

Taoism Facts



This Taoist symbol depicts the yin (dark) and yang (light), representing opposites in balance. **Click the symbol** to learn about its meaning.

Places of Worship

Taoists worship at home altars, although there are [temples](#) devoted to Taoism, such as the [White Cloud Taoist Temple](#) in Beijing.

Religious Practices

[Introduction to Taoism](#)

[Rites and Rituals of Taoism](#)

Major Beliefs

[Dao/Tao](#) is a spiritual force that is present in everything. It is not a god to be worshipped. There are Taoist gods, which are part of the Tao.

Taoists try to live in tune with the Tao. This means letting things happen naturally, rather than trying to control events.

[Ch'i/qi](#), is the energy present in and guiding everything in the universe." (National Geographic)

Facts

Origin

[Confucius](#), also known as Kongzi, or Master Kong, was a teacher and philosopher who lived in China ca. 551–479 BCE.

Mencius and Xunzi were two disciples of Confucius who carried on his teachings after his death.

Important Texts

[The Analects](#), a collection of Confucius' teachings, was written after he died by his students.

Confucius is well-known for his wise sayings, or proverbs. Explore many of them [here](#). (Scroll down to watch the profile of Confucius.)



"I hear and I forget.
I see and I remember.
I do and I understand."
~Confucius

Education

[China's Civil Service Examinations](#) during the Han-Tang dynasties tested scholars' knowledge of Confucian principles.

Rituals

There are special rituals for [birth, marriage, and death](#).

Major Points

Confucianism focuses on right behavior toward others. It supports education and a strong organized government.

Respect for elders and ancestors is very important. [Filial piety](#) refers to respect, devotion, and loyalty to family.

Five relationships are discussed: ruler-subject; parent-child; husband-wife; younger sibling-older sibling; friend-friend.

Shinto Facts

Origin

[Shinto](#) is an ancient Japanese religion, beginning over 3000 years ago. The word Shinto means "the way of gods."

There is no founder, central god, or doctrine in this religion. Worship involves ritual and tradition. Many Japanese follow both Shinto and Buddhism. The religions are very compatible.



Torii gates are the portals between the physical and spiritual worlds in Shinto.

Places of Worship

[Shinto Shrines](#)

[Architecture and Sacred Spaces in Shinto](#)

Religious Practices

[Shinto Worship: Traditions and Practices](#)

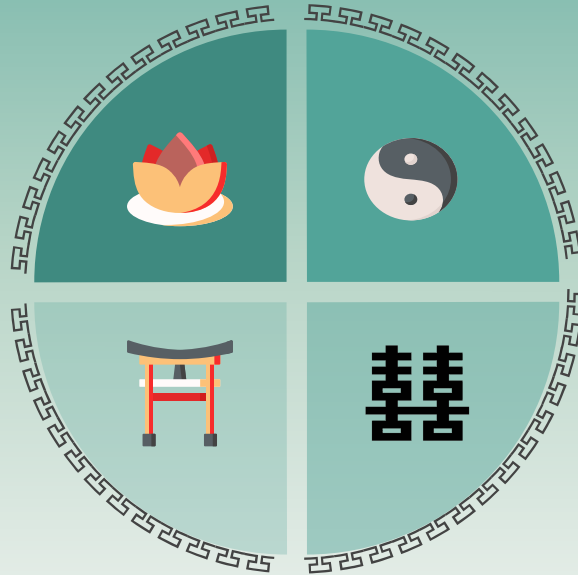
Major Beliefs

[Kami](#) are Shinto spirits that can be present in all things and live in natural places such as mountains, rivers, animals, plants, and people, both living and dead. Prayers, offerings, and dances are offered to the Kami for good fortune and peace of mind.

[Purification](#) is important, especially before entering a shrine. Human beings are naturally pure, but become impure through daily living. Rituals can cleanse someone of impurity.

Research Resources

01
Buddhism



02
Taoism/Daoism

04
Shinto

03
Confucianism



S

These sites contain a wealth of information and the ability to search by topic and/or format.

NCTA

(National Consortium for Teaching About Asia)

[Featured Resources for Teaching About East Asia](#)

Columbia University Asia for Educators

[Resources for Teachers & Students](#)

The Ohio State University East Asian Studies Center

[Resources About East Asia](#)

Asia Society

[The Three Teachings](#)

(Page includes links to articles on Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shinto)

Learn

Religions

[East Asian Religions](#)

United Religions Initiative URI

[URI Kids: World Religions](#)

(Click on **More...** for Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism.)

ThoughtCo.

[Ancient Asian History](#)
[East Asia History](#)

Books

E

Blake, Philip. *My Religion and Me: We are Buddhists*. Franklin Watts.

MS
JH
HS

Cooper, Alison. *World Religions: Facts About Buddhism*. New York: rosen central.

E

Dicker, Katie and Nisansa De Silva. *I Belong to the Buddhist Faith*.

MS
JH
HS

Faelli, Rita. *Religions of the World: Buddhism*. AV² by Weigel.



Buddhism

Visuals

360 VR experiences of Buddhist sites in Japan:

- [Kinkaku-ji](#)
- [Teisyoudji Soto Zen Buddhist Temple in Saku, Japan](#)



[Art of Asia: The Art of Enlightenment](#)
(Minneapolis Institute of Art)

Articles

1. [Buddhism](#) (World History Encyclopedia)
2. [Buddhism in China](#) (China Highlights)
3. [The Origins of Buddhism](#) (Asia Society)



Taoism / Daoism

Visuals



[What is Taoism?](#) (Cognito)



[What is Daoism?](#)
(Let's Talk Religion)

Book

Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*.
(New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

Articles

1. "[Daoism](#)" (Asia Society)
2. "[Laozi: The Old Master](#)" (Asia Society)
3. "[Chinese Taoism](#)" (China Highlights)
4. "[Taoism](#)" (World History Encyclopedia)
5. "[Taoism \(Daoism\)](#)" (Learn Religions)
6. "[Daoism in China](#)" (Learn Religions)
7. "[It's easy to understand Tao if you have a great teacher like...](#)" (Ancient China: Taoism for Kids--Mr. Donn)



Confucianism

Visuals



[Confucius and Confucianism](#)
(Khan Academy)



[Who was Confucius?](#)
(TED-Ed)



["The Analects" by Confucius](#)
(World Library Foundation)
(start at 1:30)



[Seowan, Korean
Neo-Confucian Academies
of UNESCO Heritage.](#)

Articles

1. "[Confucianism](#)" (Asia Society)
2. "[Confucius Says: Excerpts from the Analects](#)" (Asia Society)
3. "[What did Confucius Say?](#)" (Asia for Educators)
4. "[Reversing the Cultural Revolution: Chinese Parents Are Keen on a More Confucian Education.](#)" *The Economist*, 22 May 2021.



Shinto

Visuals



[Japan: Where Gods Aren't Gods and Worshippers Aren't Religious \(Shinto Explained\)](#) (Life Where I'm From)



[15 Best Shinto Shrines You Have To Visit](#) (Japan Objects)



[Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess](#) (Asian Art Museum Storyteller)

Webpages

1. ["Shinto"](#) (Asia Society)
2. ["Religion: Shinto"](#) (BBC)
3. ["Shintoism"](#) (Learn Religions)

General Resources

Books

Buller, Laura. *A Faith Like Mine*. DK Children.

Meredith, Susan and Clare Hickman. *The Usborne Encyclopedia of World Religions*. [Contains website links]

Osborne, Mary Pope. *One World, Many Religions: The Ways We Worship*. Knopf, New York, NY; 1996.



Novels and Nonfiction Books:

[Recommended book titles by grade and country \(NCTA website\)](#)

Articles

1. [Historical and Modern Religions of Korea](#) (Asia Society)
2. [Religions in China](#) (China Highlights)
3. [Chinese Religions and Philosophies](#) (National Geographic)

Primary Sources

[Primary Sources with DBQs-China:](#)
(Asia for Educators--scroll down for Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.)

Student Activities

Readings

[CONFUCIANISM, DAOISM, AND BUDDHISM How do different belief systems fit together in one country?](#)
(Field Museum Lesson)

[Taoism and Confucianism — Ancient Philosophies](#)
(Newsela)

Quizzes & Games

[Ask Mr. Donn About Ancient China](#) (Interactive Religion Quiz)

[Quizizz](#): search for "East Asian Religions;" there are several quizzes.

[Buddhism Games & Activities](#)

Chinese Religion Sort: found in [China: Teaching Buddhism Confucianism Taoism \(Daoism\) with Kung Fu Panda & Mulan](#)--
(Teachers Pay Teachers: Greg's Goods - Making History Fun) \$



Video Tours

[Visiting a Shinto Shrine](#)

[Senso-ji Temple](#)

Temple visit begins at 5:00.
(Institute for Japanese Studies at The Ohio State University)

[Inside a Buddhist Temple](#)
(no narration)

[White Clouds Taoist Temple](#) in Beijing



Art

["Attitudes Toward Nature in Daoist Art"](#): a drawing activity with poetry.

[Create a Lotus Lantern-](#)
(Buddhism)

[Create Your Own Mandala-](#)
(Buddhism)


Prezi

[Celebrations of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism](#)

Explore and Learn More

Step inside a temple or Confucian school on the slides that follow. Click on the shapes to learn more about the spiritual practices of East Asia.

Buddhist Temple

Click each  for more info.

Who was Siddhartha Gautama?

Discovering Sacred Texts: Buddhism





Taoist Temple: Click each  to learn more!



[Civil Service Examinations](#)



Confucian School-- click on each  to learn more!



Shinto vs. Buddhism

Shinto Shrine- click near each



to learn more!

"To be able under all circumstances to practice five things constitutes perfect virtue; these five things are gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness."

~ Confucius

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