Overview of Buddhism in Asia

Southern Buddhism (150 million)	***Eastern Buddhism*** (360 million)	***Northern Buddhism*** (18 million)
Thailand (61 m.)	China (228 m.)	Tibet (5 m.)
Burma (45 m.)	Japan (52 m.)	Mongolia (3 m.)
Sri Lanka (15 m.)	Vietnam (43 m.)	Nepal (3 m.)
Cambodia (13 m.)	South Korea (11 m.)	Bhutan (0.5 m)
Laos (4 m.)	Taiwan (8 m.)	
	Malaysia (6 m.)	
	North Korea (3 m.)	
	Singapore (2 m.)	
	Hong Kong (1 m.)	
▪ Theravāda (with a few tantric elements) ▪ Buddhism within the parameters of Indian culture ▪ Study: Emphasis on both *Sūtras* and systematizing treatises ▪ Meditation: Emphasis on mindfulness of ordinary experience especially in *vipassanā* meditation ▪ "Worship of pre-Buddhist nature gods has continued, while, especially in Sri Lanka, Buddhists also worship gods whose cults are Indian in origin. Most Buddhists would not see this as a betrayal of Buddhism, but just an attempt to interact with minor powers of the cosmos for some worldly advantage: like a person asking a member of parliament to try and help him" (Harvey, p.5). ▪ Nature of Path: Gradual development, but sudden realizations	▪ Mahāyāna ▪ Buddhism within the parameters of Chinese culture ▪ Study: Emphasis on *Sūtras* ▪ Meditation: Emphasis on mindfulness of ordinary experience especially in Sōtō in Zen ▪ In China, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam, Buddhism has co-existed with Confucianism (more a system of social philosophy than a religion), the Daoist religion, and much folk religion. People have often partaken of elements of all these traditions. In Japan, Buddhism has existed alongside the indigenous nature-orientated religion of Shintō, and the Confucianism that it brought with it from China (From Harvey, p.5). ▪ Nature of Path: Chan/Zen downplays or abandons gradual working towards perfection; Jōdo Shin sees assurance of salvation as obtained 'simply' by true faith.	▪ Mahāyāna ▪ Tantric elements are dominant ▪ Buddhism within the parameters of Indian culture ▪ Study: Emphasis on systematizing treatises ▪ Meditation: Emphasis on mindfulness of ordinary experience especially in *Dzogch'en* and *Mahāmudrā* ▪ A relationship exists with the indigenous Bön religion of Tibet. ▪ Nature of Path: Gradual development, but sudden realizations

Notes:
▪ There are around 7 million Buddhists outside Asia.
▪ There is an overall total of around 535 million Buddhists in the world.
▪ "One can see these as like the three main branches of the 'tree' of Buddhism, though as all parts of a tree are genetically identical, this underplays the differences that have developed within Buddhism over time. Yet one can trace a series of transformations linking early and later forms in a causal continuum; just as Buddhism says that a person in one life and the next rebirth is 'neither (unchangingly) the same nor (completely) different', this can be said of the various forms of Buddhism that have evolved. A better image than branches of a tree is branches of a large 'family'. There are 'family resemblances' across all three branches, though certain features and forms are more typical of, and sometimes unique to, one of the three branches" (Harvey, p.4).
▪ "Buddhism's concentration on the essentials of spiritual development has meant that it has been able to co-exist both with other major religions and with popular folk traditions which catered for people's desire for a variety of rituals. There has hardly ever been a 'wholly Buddhist' society, if this means a kind of religious one-party state. Buddhism has been very good at adapting to different cultures while guarding its own somewhat fluid borders by a critical tolerance of other traditions. Its style has been to offer invitations to several levels of spiritual practice for those who have been ready to commit themselves" (Harvey, p.5).

Source:
Harvey, P. (2013) *An introduction to Buddhism: teachings, history and practices*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 4-7; 376-418.) Note: Buddhist population figures (millions) are approximate.

Alexander Peck (22 May 2015)