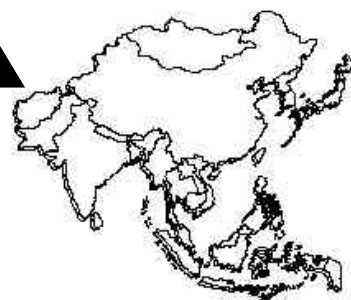


EAST ASIA



EAST ASIA IS THE LEAST EVANGELISED PART OF THE GLOBE AND IS HOME TO APPROXIMATELY ONE THIRD OF THE WORLD POPULATION. DURING THE 20TH CENTURY IT WENT THROUGH EXTENSIVE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE. THE CHURCH HAS GROWN DESPITE OPPRESSION AND SUPPRESSION IN SEVERAL AREAS.

EAST ASIA

East Asia is going through the most dramatic political, economic and social changes in the world today. Having shaken off the effects of colonialism and of the Second World War, East Asian nations established their independence and identity in the 1960s and 1970s, and are now becoming major players in the political and economic world scene. Left mostly untouched by the gospel for many centuries, some parts of the region are now also experiencing an unprecedented spiritual movement.

POPULATION

With approximately two billion people, East Asia is one of the most heavily populated areas of the world. The distribution, however, is very uneven, with low density in the mountainous and desert areas of South and West China and Mongolia, contrasted with the very densely populated island of Java. Ethnically it is equally diverse, with Turkic people living in the north-west, Mongoloid groups mainly in China and mainland South-East Asia, and Malayo-Polynesian in the archipelagos in the south-east.

RELIGIONS

There are four major religious groupings in East Asia: Chinese religion [Confucianism and Taoism] is practised among many Chinese; Buddhism is found in most parts of East Asia, notably Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Japan. Islam came to Asia in the

12th century, and is now the predominant religion in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, whereas Christianity is the majority religion in the Philippines [mostly Roman Catholic and mixed with animism], but is practised by minorities in most other countries as well. Other religions include animism, Hinduism, Shinto, shamanism, Sikhism and many cults. Communism has eroded much of the foundations of these religions, but today it is materialism which seems to be winning the battle for the souls of people.

LANGUAGES

The ethnic diversity in East Asia is reflected in the range of languages found there. Around 2500 ethno-linguistic people groups have been identified. Mandarin is spoken by around one billion people. Other languages are confined to a few thousand people. The Bible has been translated into less than 100 of these and much more work needs to be done until all these groups have the scriptures in their mother tongue.

CLIMATE

This is as varied as the surface configuration, ranging from the hot and humid tropical areas in the south to the harsh desert climates in Mongolia. The monsoon wind brings heavy rainfall to most parts of South-East Asia, in contrast to Central Asia, which is dry for most of the year. Coastal regions are subject to destructive typhoons.

GEOGRAPHY

The topography is varied and includes the world's highest mountains, in the Tibetan plateau, the world's largest archipelago; Indonesia, the Gobi desert, the Mekong Delta and large but significantly diminished areas of [rain] forest. To the east of the Philippines, in Micronesia, is the Mariana Trench, the lowest region on the earth's surface and the deepest part of the sea floor. Huge rivers like the Yangtze, Yellow River, Mekong and Irrawaddy flow through the mainland, providing fertile alluvial soil to the vast plains. Deposits from a chain of volcanoes have had the same effect on the islands of the south-east. The mountainous areas of Central Asia and the Mongolian plateaux are very arid and difficult to cultivate.

HISTORY

Some of the earliest known civilisations were based in North China. They were agricultural societies that used advanced social and political structures to maintain irrigation and flood-control systems.

From 200BC to 200AD, ambitious emperors from the Han dynasty spread Chinese hegemony over large parts of East Asia. As their empire declined, waves of Turkic, Mongol and Hunnish invaders swept across many areas of Central and East Asia. From the seventh century to the 15th, two forces dominated Asian events: the



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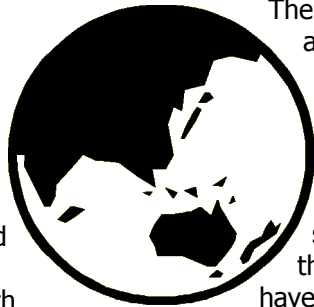
spread of the new religion of Islam and the expansion of the Mongols, who conquered much of Asia and threatened Europe. During that time, smaller empires like the Japanese, Korean, Thai and Khmer, and different Chinese dynasties came and went.

By 1500, Islam had gained a strong foothold in South-East Asia. Then, as many of these empires disintegrated, Europe's new national states entered an era of exploration and colonialism. By the mid-19th century, much of East Asia was in the hands of the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and Russians. These powers exploited local resources and invested in plantations. Road and railroad systems aided transport and commerce, but most of the profits went abroad.

This exploitation led to conflicts, and the 20th century saw nation after nation fighting for and gaining independence from Western colonial powers. Many of these newly independent nations were then caught up in the rivalry of the Cold War of the 1960s and 1970s. But the emergence of Japan, Korea and Taiwan as major industrial powers and of Hong Kong and Singapore as world centres for

trade and commerce triggered a wave of assertiveness and rapid economic growth.

CHRISTIANITY IN EAST ASIA



The first recorded attempts to introduce Christianity to East Asia were made by the Nestorians in China in the seventh century [though some people believe that Christians may have reached China as early as the third century].

Nestorian Christianity was also introduced to the Mongols. Catholicism reached the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan in the 16th century, imported by Spanish and Portuguese settlers, and notably by the missionary Francis Xavier, who established a mission in Japan which lasted for 100 years. Around the same time, Protestantism was introduced to Indonesia by the Dutch, who made the first translation of the Bible into Indonesian.

Across the centuries, many East Asian countries were visited by Christians and missionaries, but with little result. Permanent mission work was largely established in the 19th century. During the 20th

century, several countries in East Asia have been through political upheaval, Communism and harsh regimes involving persecution and pogroms: Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea. The Church seems to have survived and even flourished in some places despite such attacks on Christianity.

OMF'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Supporting development of national churches
- Church planting
- Placing professionals in key positions to witness
- Theological, leadership and missionary training
- Student work
- Education and health
- Economic and community developments
- Christian literature
- Grassroots ministry – urban poor, immigrants, drug addicts
- Other development work, eg literacy teaching, agriculture

OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE

- Teaching: theology, university, seminary, English
- Evangelists, church-planters
- Support work: teachers, 'dorm parents' for missionaries' children, guest house hosts, administrative, IT and finance staff
- Student workers
- Medical personnel and counsellors
- Bible translators and literature production/publishing work
- Professional positions including engineering, development, environmental work, business
- Short-term work

OTHER RESOURCES

Contact us for:

- Videos
- Books
- Free literature
- Prayer materials

HOW TO PRAY

- Pray for the various governments of East Asia: for religious liberty, wise politicians, political and economic stability.
- An end to persecution of Christians and ethnic minorities.
- Korea: reunification; the end of famine and persecution in the North.
- Good Bible teaching, godly leaders with integrity and a sense of unity.
- More churches to be planted.
- The Church to cope with growing affluence and materialism in countries such as South Korea and Singapore, where young people drop out of the Church as much as join it.
- Barriers to Christianity: materialism, nominalism, other religions, new religions/cults, false teachings in churches, occult practices, resurgence of Buddhism, Taoism and Shinto, lack of church workers, business commitments.
- Students and student witness.
- Unreached peoples and minority groups with few Christians.
- Crime, drugs, corruption, poverty, gambling.
- Openings for foreign professionals.
- Largely unevangelised countries, eg Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam.
- Bible translations, Christian literature, audio-visual media.
- Give thanks for the great growth of the Church in several countries.