

XIANGXIANG 湘乡

The city of Xiangxiang in central Hunan Province is home to more than 1.1 million people. Xiangxiang is located on the banks of the Lianshui River, which connects with the Xiang River further to the east. Xiangxiang is well connected by train and bus to Changsha, the provincial capital, just 93 km (57 miles) to the northeast.

The official population of Xiangxiang includes a number of surrounding districts that lie within the city's jurisdiction. The city area itself is rather small, and has the feel of a large town rather than a city. The rural makeup of Xiangxiang is seen in the employment figures for the city, which show 83% of workers are employed in the agricultural sector.

In recent years, hundreds of farmers in Xiangxiang have walked off their land and moved to Changsha and other large Chinese cities in search of work. The farmers realize that a factory job can give them several times the wages they earn doing backbreaking work on the farm. The central government is alarmed at this nationwide trend, as huge areas of farmland are being left fallow as China's urban rush continues. If the trend continues, there may soon not be enough food being produced in the countryside to support the nation's massive urban population.

Population:
852,789 (1990)
1,146,000 (2000)
1,540,100 (2010)

Province:
Hunan

Major Ethnic Groups:

Han 99.7%
Tujia 0.1%
Miao 0.1%
Manchu 0.1%

Christians:
2,300 (0.2%)

The rural atmosphere of Xiangxiang is reflected in statistics of educational attainment, which show well-over half of the city's inhabitants have never attended higher than primary school. A significant number of people have never been to school at all.

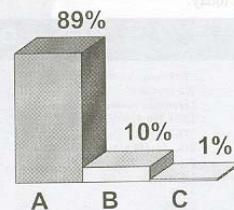
The Han Chinese people in Xiangxiang belong to the Xiang (Hunanese) language group. Xiang is considered quite different from other Chinese varieties, although it is now under pressure from Mandarin-speakers on all its borders. Most Xiang Chinese can now also speak Mandarin adequately.



Food stall outside the Xiangxiang train station.



Status of Evangelization (Awareness of Christ and the Gospel)



A = have never heard the Gospel or the name of Christ
B = were evangelized but have not yet become Christians
C = Adherents to any form of Christianity

Although Protestant mission work began in Hunan Province with the arrival of Josiah Cox of the Wesleyan Mission in 1865, few workers were able to reside in the province for some time. In 1875 C. H. Judd of the China Inland Mission rented a property but was driven out by hostile neighbors a few days later. The Xiang were acutely anti-foreign and anti-Christian in the latter part of the 19th century. While large tracts of coastal China had been carved up and dished out to colonial powers, inland Hunan was still unaffected and highly sensitive to any foreign intervention in their customs or religion.

In 1911, a missionary described the Xiang Chinese as "the best haters and best fighters in China. Long after the rest of the empire was open to missionary activity, Hunan kept its gates firmly closed against the foreigner." (Lin Shaoyang, *A Chinese Appeal To Christendom*, 1911).

Early missionary work in Hunan Province did not focus on church-planting, but on evangelism. In the 1920's it was reported, "Evangelistic work throughout Hunan has been characterized from the beginning by strong colporteur work. The native colporteurs going from place to place with a boatload of Scriptures, preaching the Gospel and distributing tracts of all kinds, many of the volunteer workers, are responsible in a larger measure than can be readily calculated, for the present openness of the country to evangelistic effort. Scores of villages have been worked by these groups of volunteer colporteurs." (Stauffer, *The Christian Occupation of China*, p.98)

Today, Hunan has one of the lowest percentages of Christians of any province of China. Believers are few and far-between, especially in the cities. Xiangxiang is one of the neediest and most unreached cities in China. Except for a small number of Catholics and Three-Self church members, few people in Xiangxiang have any awareness of the Gospel message.



An impromptu bookshop spread out on a pavement in Xiangxiang. The Chinese love to read. Surveys show each Chinese person reads an average of two hours per day, but God's Word is known by few.

Pray for Xiangxiang

- 1 Pray the Gospel would not continue to be held from the people of Xiangxiang. Ask God to thrust forward workers into the area with an uncompromising and bold witness for Jesus Christ.
- 2 Pray the small number of believers in Xiangxiang would be visible witnesses in their communities. Ask the Holy Spirit to give them a burden for their neighbor's lost souls.
- 3 Pray the life-transforming power of God would enjoy widespread acceptance among the 64 million souls of Hunan Province.

Overview of Xiangxiang

Pronunciation : "Sheeung-sheeung"
Old Spelling : Hsiang-hsiang
Location : Hunan Province, southeast China
Population : 852,789 (1990 census)
Males : 436,081 (51.14%)
Females : 416,708 (48.86%)
Households : 231,340
Average household : 3.68 people
Divorced people : 3,246
% of population : 0.38%
Centurians (1990) : 0 people aged 100 or more
Immigrants to City : 2,756 per year
From same province : 2,203 (79.9%)
From other provinces : 552 (20.1%)

Employed people : 484,428 (56.8% of total population)
Main Industries : Agriculture 83.5%, Industrial 7.2%, Professional 3.4%
Educational : University: 0.1%
Attainment : High School: 41.4%
(highest level) Primary School: 50.9%
Never attended any level of school: 7.6%
Population under 15 : 27.2%
Adult Literacy : 92% (men 97%, women 86%)
Major Nationalities : Han 852,159
Tujia 287
Miao 99
Manchu 54
Zhuang 50
Others (17 groups): 140
Christians : 2,300 (0.2%)