

# Hakka

Approximately 36 million Hakka people are scattered throughout the world. More than 31 million inhabit over 200 cities and counties spread throughout seven provinces of China: Guangdong, Jiangxi, Guangxi, Fujian, Hong Kong, Hunan and Sichuan. An additional two million Hakka live in Taiwan, 1.4 million in Malaysia, 800,000 in Indonesia and 170,000 in Singapore.<sup>1</sup>

There is much speculation concerning the historical roots of the Hakka. Some claim they were the first Chinese people to arrive in China. Others claim the Hakka are the descendants of the Xiongnu tribe. This much is agreed upon: at various stages between the 4th and 13th centuries AD, large numbers of people were forced to flee their homes in the war-torn Yellow River valley to seek refuge in southern China. These war refugees came to be known as *Kejia*—a Hakka word meaning ‘strangers’, or ‘guests’.<sup>2</sup> When the savage Mongol hordes swept across China in the 13th century, many Hakka fled to the south to escape the carnage.<sup>3</sup> Although proud of their cultural differences, the Hakka have never claimed to be non-Chinese. Many famous Chinese have been Hakka, including Deng Xiaoping, Lee Kwan Yew and Hong Xiuquan (the leader of the Taiping Rebellion).

The Hakka are proud of their language

and say they would ‘rather surrender the ancestral land, but never the ancestral speech’.<sup>4</sup> As part of the careful preservation of their language, when a non-Hakka woman marries into a Hakka family she is required to learn the Hakka language. In the past, many Hakka mothers in China killed their female babies. ‘Sooner than sell their daughters into slavery or concubinage, Hakka mothers prefer to kill them soon after birth.’<sup>5</sup> The Hakka never practised foot binding like most other Chinese.



Julian Hawken

Buddhism is followed by relatively few Hakka, about 8 per cent (which amounts to nearly three million

people). Buddhism is stronger among the Hakka in Taiwan and Southeast Asia than it is in China. Most Hakka ‘are involved with shamanism (belief in gods, demons, ancestral spirits) and sorcery. . . . A few Hakka are Buddhists, but their faith is mixed with shamanistic rituals and traditions.’<sup>6</sup>

Rev T H Hamburg and Rudolf Lechler were the first missionaries sent out by the Basel Mission. They arrived in China in 1846 to commence work among the Hakka. They experienced great success, and by 1922 the Hakka Christians numbered 30,000.<sup>7</sup> In the 1800s a Hakka leader, Chung Wang, pleaded for missionaries to have patience with his people. ‘You have had the gospel for upwards of 1,800 years; we only, as it were, eight days. Your knowledge of it ought to be correct and extensive, ours must necessarily be limited and imperfect. You must therefore bear with us for the present, and we will gradually improve. . . . We are determined to uproot idolatry, and plant Christianity in its place.’<sup>8</sup>

Today, most of the estimated 150,000 Hakka Christians in China are located in southern Guangdong.<sup>9</sup> Outside China, the percentage of Hakka Christians is much higher, as many as 30 per cent in some Southeast Asian nations.



## Population:

36,059,500 (2000)  
40,745,200 (2010)  
44,745,400 (2020)

**Countries:** China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, French Polynesia, Panama, Suriname, French Guiana, Brunei, Mauritius, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, USA, Canada, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Australia, Kenya, Netherlands, France, Germany, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago

**Buddhism:** Mahayana

**Christians:** 900,000

## Overview of the Hakka

**Other Names:** Hakka Chinese, Han Chinese: Hakka, Hokka, Kejia, Kechia, Ke, Xinmin, Majia, Khek, Kek, Kehia

### Population Sources:

25,725,000 in China (2000, B Grimes [1984 figure])  
2,240,000 in Taiwan (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])  
985,635 in Malaysia (1980 census)  
640,000 in Indonesia (1982, CCCOWE)  
170,000 in Singapore (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])  
58,000 in Thailand (2000, B Grimes [1984 figure])<sup>10</sup>

**Language:** Chinese, Hakka

**Dialects:** 12 (Jiaying, Xinghua, Xinhui, Shaonan, Yuezhong, Huizhou, Yuebei, Tingzhou, Ninglong, Yugui, Tonggu, Hailu)

**Professing Buddhists:** 9%

**Practising Buddhists:** 5%

**Christians:** 2.5%

**Scripture:** Bible 1916; New Testament 1883; Portions 1860

**Jesus film:** available

**Gospel Recordings:** Hakka, Hakka: Mei Shan, Hakka: Moali

**Christian Broadcasting:** available

**ROPAL code:** HAK

## Status of Evangelization

