

Han Chinese, Hainanese

More than five million Hainanese Chinese are concentrated in the north-eastern parts of China's Hainan ('South Sea') Island. They are located along the coast, from the north-east all the way to the west of the island. Smaller numbers of Hainanese live outside China in Singapore (90,000), Malaysia (7,200) and Thailand (6,700). Unspecified numbers live in Vietnam and Laos.

The Hainanese language (which is also called *Qiongwen*) is widely spoken throughout 14 counties and cities of Hainan. Most Hainanese are bilingual in Mandarin, while many can also speak Cantonese. Hainanese is related to the Min Nan Chinese language of Fujian Province in south-east China. Over the centuries, however, Hainanese 'has evolved in unusual directions and is not at all readily understood by other Min Nan peoples. The early Min Nan peoples who migrated to Hainan could not maintain their family and trade ties with the Min Nan core area [in Fujian Province].'¹

Considered as part of the Han nationality, the Hainanese are descended from Chinese who migrated from Fujian at various times over the last 15 centuries. Tribal peoples were the main occupants in Hainan for much of its history. The arrival of large numbers of Chinese resulted in conflict as the Chinese forced the tribes off their land and into the desolate mountains. By the time of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), Hainan had a reputation as a place of banishment. Exiled Chinese politician Li Deyi even described it as 'the gate to hell'.² By contrast, Hainan is promoted today as a tropical paradise. Most Hainanese families earn their



livelihood from fishing or agriculture. Severe and sudden storms lash the Hainan coastline every summer, causing massive damage to homes and boats. New industry and factories have sprung up on Hainan in the last decade. Significant numbers of Hainanese are employed in the expanding tourist industry, which has catered to a growing number of Chinese and foreign tourists since the early 1980s.

Severe persecution of all religious activity during the Cultural Revolution caused the demise of Buddhism, which was popular on Hainan. Most of the current generation of Hainanese youth are nonreligious, although Buddhism still enjoys significant patronage from many elderly Hainanese.

The first mention of Christianity on Hainan was in 1630 when Jesuit priests came from Macau and constructed a chapel in Fucheng Township.³ The first Protestant missionary on the island was Carl Jeremiassen, a Danish sea captain who was employed by the Qing government 'to hunt down pirates and smugglers'. Jeremiassen, however, 'changed his mind and his profession upon reaching Hainan in 1881 . . . distributing Bibles with one hand and dispensing medicines with the other.'⁴ In 1992 there were at least 37,000 Protestants⁵ and 3,000 Catholics⁶ on Hainan Island, most of them Hainanese Chinese. In the years since then, tremendous revival has affected many parts of the island as several house church networks from mainland China have focused on Hainan. One trustworthy source counted 360,000 house church believers on Hainan Island in 2000, most of them Hainanese-speaking Chinese.



Population:
5,247,500 (2000)
5,931,200 (2010)
6,489,000 (2020)
Countries: China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos
Buddhism: Mahayana
Christians: 300,000

Overview of the Hainanese

Other Names: Chinese, Qiongwen, Qiongwen, Hainan Chinese, Hainanese

Population Sources:
4,400,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)
74,000 in Singapore (2000, B Grimes [1985 figure])
5,880 in Thailand (2000, B Grimes [1984 figure])
5,083 in Malaysia (1980 census)
Also in Vietnam and Laos

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese
Dialects: 5 (Fucheng, Wenchang, Wanning, Yaxian, Changgan)

Professing Buddhists: 20%
Practising Buddhists: 10%

Christians: 5.7%

Scripture: none

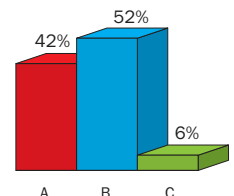
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Hainanese, Chinese: Min Nan Hainan

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: CFR04

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity