

Han Chinese, Min Bei

A 1987 study listed a population of 2,191,000 Min Bei speakers in China.¹ Other publications have listed the much higher figure of 10.29 million Min Bei,² but this figure includes the Min Dong group who have been profiled separately in this book. The Min Bei live in eight cities and counties in the north-western part of Fujian Province. Smaller numbers of Min Bei Chinese live scattered throughout Southeast Asia in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, where they are commonly known as

Hokchiu.

Min Bei is one of five distinct languages spoken by the Min Chinese in Fujian. Other scholars divide the Min into 'nine inherently unintelligible varieties'.³ The Min Bei live both north and south of the Min River. Although most people live in the plains and

valleys, there are also some extremely isolated and rugged mountains in this part of China. In 1929, Arthur Sowerby went as far as to say, 'In spite of its comparatively dense population, Fukien [Fujian] is wild, inexpressibly wild, and over the greater part of the province the people live very close to the jungle.'⁴ Regarding the variety of ethnic groups in Fujian, Sowerby declared, 'A traveler up the Min will soon realize that there are many types of people in this area, types as distinct as, let us say, the different races in Europe.'⁵

The Min Bei region was first incorporated into the Chinese empire during the Three Kingdoms Period (AD 220–264). However, the Min Bei region 'long remained a frontier zone occupied primarily by barbarian tribes,

peoples presumably similar to the She minority nationality still found in small numbers in the mountains of Fujian. . . . About 300 AD, the political situation in northern China had become very unstable. . . . As a consequence, many Han Chinese families decided to evacuate northern China and take refuge along the open frontier farther south, where the barbarians were more easily controlled. Many established themselves on the lower reaches of the Min River during this period.'⁶



International Mission Board

The Min Bei Chinese have practised Mahayana Buddhism for more than one thousand years. Approximately 30 per cent of the population profess faith in Buddhism, although Daoism, ancestor worship, animism and Christianity also have a share on the religious scene.

When Marco Polo arrived in today's Fujian

Province, he encountered many Christian communities along the coastal areas. The believers in Fuzhou asked Marco Polo's uncles for advice as to what they should do to gain freedom to worship. They told the Christians to contact the Nestorian Metropolitan in Beijing, 'Explain to him your state, that he may come to know you and you may be able freely to keep your religion and rule.'⁷

Portions of the Bible were first translated into Min Bei in 1852, followed soon after by the New Testament in 1856. The entire Bible was to prove difficult to finish, and it was not until almost half a century more has passed—in 1905—that the whole Bible was available in Min Bei.⁸ The *Jesus* film is also available.



Population:
2,574,300 (2000)
2,909,200 (2010)
3,194,700 (2020)
Countries: China, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia
Buddhism: Mahayana
Christians: 150,000

Overview of the Min Bei

Other Names: Northern Min, Min Pei, Hokchia, Hockchew, Hokchiu

Population Sources:
2,191,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)
11,000 in Singapore (2000, B Grimes [1984 figure])
Also in Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 30%

Practising Buddhists: 15%

Christians: 5.8%

Scripture: Bible 1905, New Testament 1856; Portions 1852

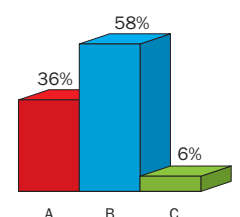
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Chinese: Min Bei Hockchia

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: MNP

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