

# Han Chinese, Min Dong

More than nine million Chinese people living in eastern China's Fujian Province speak the Min Dong—or Eastern Min—language.<sup>1</sup> People who inhabit 19 cities and counties of Fujian, ranging from the town of Fu'an in the north-east to the large city of Fuzhou on the coast, speak this language. Min Dong speakers are also scattered throughout Southeast Asia. More than 200,000 have

made their home in Malaysia, 30,000 in Singapore and at least 20,000 in Indonesia.

Min Dong is part of the Min group of languages that are distinct from Mandarin and other Chinese varieties. The different Min vernaculars 'seem to incorporate remnants of Sinitic offshoots that

predate the Sui-Tang era [AD 589]. They may represent variations as old as the Han Dynasty itself—language forms set in place . . . during the Jin Dynasty [AD 265–420].<sup>2</sup> Fujian Province seems to have developed separately from the rest of China in many ways. One historian notes, 'Min is another name for Fujian Province. The territory has functioned in Chinese history almost as if it were an island. . . . The Min valley was late to come under Sinitic political control. Access by sea has been the key to its trade and other contacts with the outside world.'<sup>3</sup>

In the past, other Chinese people gave Fujian the nickname 'The province of a hundred dialects'. The complexity of the province has long frustrated the efforts of missionaries trying to learn its languages. J E Walker wrote this colourful commentary after an 1878 trip inland from Fuzhou: 'What a Babel of brogues, and dialects there is among those wild mountains! A

native can hardly pass the limits of his own village but his speech will betray him. The tones are the most unstable element. . . . They seem utterly lawless. They shoot up to the sky, then plunge into the bowels of the earth, then stiffen straight out, they double up and twist about; they sing, cry, whine, groan, scold, plead; here, are musically plaintive; there, are gruff and overbearing.'<sup>4</sup>

Generally speaking, the Min Dong have proven more receptive to Christianity than Chinese in other parts of China. As early as the 13th century, Marco Polo came across a large body of believers in 'Fugiu'

[now Fuzhou City]. 'They had books . . . found to be the words of the Psalter. . . . And thus they had in a certain temple of theirs three figures painted, who had been three apostles of the seventy who had gone preaching throughout the world, and they said that those had taught their ancestors in that religion long ago, and that that faith had already been preserved among them for seven hundred years, but for a long time they had been without teaching and so were ignorant of the chief things.'<sup>5</sup>

Missionaries have worked among the Min Dong for more than 160 years. They translated Scripture portions into Min Dong in 1852, followed by the New Testament in 1856 and the entire Bible in 1884. Today there are at least 500,000 Min Dong believers in China, including more than 100,000 in Fuqing County alone.<sup>6</sup> An additional 100,000 Min Dong-speaking Christians live in Southeast Asia.



International Mission Board



**Population:**  
 9,164,300 (2000)  
 10,379,100 (2010)  
 11,389,600 (2020)  
**Countries:** China, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand  
**Buddhism:** Mahayana  
**Christians:** 600,000

## Overview of the Min Dong

**Other Names:** Eastern Min, Min Dong  
**Population Sources:**  
 7,526,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)  
 206,013 in Malaysia (2000, B Grimes [1979 figure])  
 31,391 in Singapore (2000, B Grimes [1985 figure])  
 20,000 in Indonesia (1982, CCCOWE)  
 6,000 in Brunei (2000, B Grimes [1979 figure])  
 Also in Thailand  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Chinese  
**Dialects:** 3 (Houguan, Funing, Manhua)  
**Professing Buddhists:** 30%  
**Practising Buddhists:** 15%  
**Christians:** 6.5%  
**Scripture:** Bible 1884; New Testament 1856; Portions 1852  
**Jesus film:** none  
**Gospel Recordings:** Chinese: Min Bei Fuzhou  
**Christian Broadcasting:** none  
**ROPAL code:** CDO

## Status of Evangelization

