

Han Chinese, Cantonese

Approximately 65 million Cantonese-speaking Chinese live scattered throughout dozens of nations in the world. The vast majority (about 62 million) live in southern China, including almost seven million in Hong Kong. The majority of Cantonese live in the south China province of Guangdong, radiating out from the capital city of Guangzhou (also known as Canton). Other significant communities are located in the southern part of Guangxi and on Hainan Island.

Although the Cantonese today proudly consider themselves part of the Han Chinese ethnic group, one ethno-historian has concluded, 'The ethnic origins of the ancient Yue [Cantonese] people . . . may have been Tai, but with a sizable Miao-Yao minority in the hills. . . . The ancient Yue language was definitely not Sinitic. It is estimated that the population of Guangdong was less than 30 percent Sinitic in 1080.'¹

The large southern city of Guangzhou—which has been continually inhabited for 2,200 years—has always been the centre of Cantonese civilization. In the 33rd year of the reign of Emperor Qin Shihuang (214 BC), the Nanhai Prefecture was established in today's Guangzhou. Large numbers of Han people flooded into the area.² Guangzhou became home to numerous foreign merchants in the 9th

century until the Tang emperors lost control of it in AD 878. An Arab traveller reported that 'a hundred and twenty thousand Muslims, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians were slaughtered [in Guangzhou]'.³

The dozens of Chinese language groups in China today are considered by linguists to be mutually unintelligible languages. They are not, as official Chinese sources claim, merely dialects of the same language. Cantonese contains up to nine tones—compared to the national language, Mandarin, which has only four. Although they speak different languages and dialects, all Chinese people in China use the same written script.

The Chinese have a saying that to be happy in this life one must be born in Suzhou, live in Guangzhou and die at Suzhou, 'for in the first are the handsomest people, in the second the richest luxuries, and in the third the best coffins'.⁴

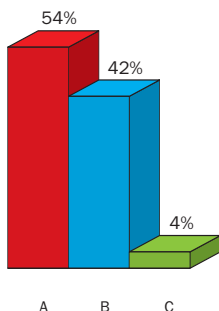
Throughout the Communist era the Cantonese have continued to be the most openly religious of all Chinese. Most homes in Guangdong Province have spirit altars. The Cantonese also zealously observe Daoist and Buddhist festivals. Approximately 40 percent of Cantonese people today profess to be Buddhists—the highest percentage of any Chinese language group.

In September 1807, Robert Morrison landed in Guangzhou. A new era of Protestant missions began in China. Seven years later he baptized his first convert, 'At a stream of water issuing from the foot of a lofty hill, far away from human observation. . . . May he be the first-fruits of a great harvest.'⁵ Today there are at least two million Cantonese Christians in China, and another 500,000 living in nations around the world.



International Mission Board

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

Overview of the Cantonese

Other Names: Yue, Yue Chinese, Yuet, Yuet Yue, Gwong Dung Waa, Cantonese, Yueh, Yueyu, Baihua, Punti, Guangdong Hua, Guangdong

Population Sources:

52,000,000 in China (2000, B Grimes [1984 figure])
 748,010 in Malaysia
 500,000 in Vietnam
 400,000 in Canada
 314,000 in Singapore
 180,000 in Indonesia
 180,000 in USA⁶

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

Dialects: 7 (Yuehai, Yongxun, Gaoyang, Siyi, Goulu, Wuhua, Qinlian)

Professing Buddhists: 40%

Practising Buddhists: 20%

Christians: 4.0%

Scripture: Bible 1894; New Testament 1877; Portions 1862

Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Cantonese, Toi Shaan

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: YUH



Population:

62,123,700 (2000)
 68,156,500 (2010)
 74,801,500 (2020)

Countries: China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Canada, Singapore, Indonesia, USA, Thailand, New Zealand, Philippines, Costa Rica, Brunei, Nauru, Laos, Panama, Australia, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Honduras, Mauritius, South Africa and many other nations

Buddhism: Mahayana
Christians: 2,500,000