

Japanese



Population:

127,820,200 (2000)
130,779,800 (2010)
133,863,100 (2020)

Countries: Japan, Brazil, USA, Peru, United Kingdom, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, Singapore, Bolivia, Paraguay, Taiwan, Micronesia, Guam, Dominican Republic, Panama, American Samoa, Belize, Canada, Germany, Mongolia, New Zealand, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Philippines, China and dozens of other countries around the world

Buddhism: Mahayana

Christians: 2,000,000

Overview of the Japanese

Other Names: Nihonjin

Population Sources:

124,940,200 in Japan (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])
1,400,000 in Brazil
1,200,000 in the USA
120,000 in Peru
55,000 in the United Kingdom
43,000 in Mexico
32,000 in Argentina
30,000 in Australia¹

Language: Japanese

Dialects: 2 (Western Japanese, Eastern Japanese)

Professing Buddhists: 70%

Practising Buddhists: 20%

Christians: 1.5%

Scripture: Bible 1883; New Testament 1879; Portions 1837

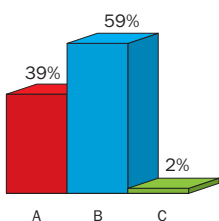
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Japanese

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: JPN

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

There are approximately 130 million Japanese people living in dozens of countries around the world. About 125 million of them live in Japan, while other significant Japanese communities are found in Brazil (1.4 million) and the United States (1.2 million). The Japanese are the second largest Buddhist people group in the world, ranking only behind the Mandarin-speaking Chinese.

The long and rich history of the Japanese dates back at least to 1500 BC, when the progenitors of the Japanese are believed to have arrived from mainland north-east Asia. It was not until AD 300 that the Yamato emperors

unified the Japanese nation for the first time. Mahayana Buddhism first entered Japan in the mid-6th century, via China and Korea. Prince Shotoku (573–620) instituted Buddhism as the state religion. To this day, the Japanese admire traditional animistic Shintoism. Most Japanese people claim to be both Buddhists and Shintoists. They observe festivals and rituals for both religions, not seeing any contradiction between the two ancient ways.²

As a result of the *hakkio-ichiu* (the whole world under one roof) policy, the Japanese military believed they could become the dominant force in the world in the 1940s. Thinking they were invincible because they were led by the emperor—whom they believed was a deity—Japan invaded numerous countries around the Pacific Rim, inflicting untold misery on millions of people. In the decades after the

Second World War, Japan rose from the dust to become the second strongest economic powerhouse in the world. Immediately after the war, there was a tremendous opportunity to evangelize Japan. General Douglas MacArthur, seeing how demoralized the Japanese were, said, 'If I had ten thousand Christian missionaries and one million Bibles, I could change this nation.'

Few missionaries came, and the challenge of one million Bibles was never taken up.

Although some scholars suggest that Christianity may have first arrived in Japan in the first century AD, the visit of Francis Xavier to Kagoshima in 1549 is the first recorded instance of someone bringing the gospel here. 'Catholics expanded rapidly, and there were 300,000 baptized by 1593, many in the Nagasaki region. Severe persecution followed. On the morning of 5 February 1597, 26 Catholics (six foreigners and 20

Japanese) were publicly crucified on crosses in Nagasaki.³ In 1613 the emperor officially banned Christianity. Foreign missionaries were not able to return until 1859, when the present era of missions began.⁴ Protestant missionaries also entered Japan for the first time in that year.

In recent years the Japanese have generally shown more receptivity to Christianity than they had in the past. One poll of Japanese university students found that 53.5 per cent of males and 73.1 per cent of women professed interest in Christianity.⁵ There are an estimated two million Japanese Christians of all descriptions today, although one source notes, 'Often there is personal belief in Christ accompanied by disinterest in or rejection of organized Christianity on the grounds that the churches have adulterated the Christian faith by institutionalizing it.'⁶



Paul Hattaway