

Han Chinese, Mandarin

The Han Chinese are the largest ethnic group on earth, and Mandarin is the world's most widely spoken language. More than 850 million Chinese worldwide speak Mandarin—known as *Putonghua*, meaning 'the common speech'—as their mother tongue. Mandarin-speaking Chinese are found all over China but are mostly concentrated in the northern and eastern provinces. Beijing is the unofficial 'home' of Mandarin, and the Beijing dialect is the standard used in media and education. More than 60 million Mandarin speakers are also found scattered throughout the world, probably in every country on the face of the globe.¹ The name 'China' stems from the Qin (Chin) Dynasty of 221–207 BC. The Chinese call their country *Zhongguo*, 'The Middle Kingdom'.



International Mission Board

There is remarkable linguistic uniformity among Mandarin speakers. Chinese from diverse places such as Urumqi in the north-west, Harbin in the north-east, and Kunming in the south-west—thousands of miles apart—are able to understand each other without too much difficulty.

The Chinese have been most influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism throughout their history, but since the advent of Communism in 1949 most Mandarin-speaking Chinese inside China could be

accurately described as nonreligious. Ralph Covell says, 'The Buddhist faith probably entered China a century or two before the Christian era, but it did not root itself deeply or spread widely until about AD 150. Its greatest growth came after the fall of the later Han dynasty (AD 25–200) and reached its ascendancy and glory during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). Ultimately, Buddhism became very popular both among the masses and the official gentry classes and was accepted as an indigenous Chinese faith.'²

Christianity first made an impact on China in AD 635, when Nestorian Bishop Alopen arrived in China. The emperor declared, 'Bishop Alopen of the Kingdom of Ta'chin, bringing with him the *sutras* and images, has come from afar and presented them at our Capital. Having carefully examined the scope of his teaching, we find it to be mysteriously spiritual, and of silent operation. Having observed its principal and most essential points, we reached the conclusion that they cover all that is most important in life. . . . This Teaching is helpful to all creatures and beneficial to all men. So let it have free course throughout the Empire.'³ By 638 the first church was built in Chang'an, and 21 Persian monks had commenced work in China.⁴

By the time missionaries were expelled from China in the 1950s, it is generally agreed that there were no more than 750,000 Chinese Protestants across the nation. Since that time, China has experienced one of the greatest revivals in church history, with some eastern provinces experiencing continual growth for more than 30 years. Despite these great developments, hundreds of millions of Han Chinese today have yet to hear the name of Christ. Estimates of the numbers of Christians in China today range widely. With the widest definition of Christianity, including all Protestants and Catholics, a worldwide Christian population of 75 million Mandarin-speaking Chinese is probable.



Population:

838,512,200 (2000)
947,648,700 (2010)
1,038,672,800 (2020)

Countries: China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, USA, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, Canada, Australia, Cambodia, Japan, United Kingdom⁵

Buddhism: Mahayana

Christians: 75,000,000

Overview of the Mandarin Chinese

Other Names: Mandarin, Pei, Northern Chinese, Guoyu, Putonghua, Potinhua, Beijinghua, Qotong, Hoton, Guanhua

Population Sources:

701,116,436 in China (1990 census)
21,796,000 in Taiwan
8,520,000 in Indonesia
6,447,000 in Thailand
5,650,000 in Malaysia
2,746,000 in Singapore
1,900,000 in the USA
1,596,000 in Myanmar
1,595,000 in the Philippines
1,120,000 in Vietnam⁶

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

Dialects: 62 (in 8 main dialect clusters)⁷

Professing Buddhists: 25%

Practising Buddhists: 10%

Christians: 8.9%

Scripture: Bible 1874; New Testament 1857; Portions 1864

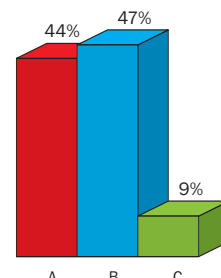
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Mandarin, Yunnanese, Chinese: Sichuan, Chinese: Zhangye, Chinese: Ningxia, Chinese: Thongxin, Chinese: Xining

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: CHN

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