

East Asia insight

OMF INTERNATIONAL SPRING 2005

The people of Japan, Taiwan and Thailand have open governments but closed hearts to the gospel. Less than one percent of these countries' peoples know Christ. Yet they are often overlooked by those

considering cross-cultural ministry. In this issue, we focus on these open yet largely unreached countries and issue a call for more workers to labor among these people who desperately need God.

THE GOD WHO SPOKE

WHY JAPAN?

by Mike McGinty, missionary to Japan

On August 15, 1945 a "god" spoke. When Emperor Hirohito of Japan directly addressed his subjects for the very first time, life came to a temporary standstill throughout Japan.

Hirohito's announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender not only ended a war and brought peace, it ended the myth that the emperor of Japan was divine.

Much changed in Japan. A new constitution was adopted and war was renounced. Democratic ideas took root and the emperor was now considered merely human. Japanese industries flourished and a new middle class emerged, resulting in a booming economy. "Made in Japan" stamped on manufactured goods was esteemed as a mark of quality and success. It seemed the one lone threat to this peaceful and prosperous society was the legendary Godzilla!

But much did not change. The traditional gods of Japan were still venerated at Shinto god shelves or Buddhist altars in homes throughout the country. Japanese still made periodic pilgrimages to the local shrines and temples for various life events and relied on good luck charms for success and protection. The often-repeated phrase "We Japanese" continued to mean among other things, "We are Buddhist." An occasional church could be found in obscure corners of Japan, but temples and shrines remained the symbol of the country and retained a strong grip on the Japanese heart. Everything had changed and yet nothing had changed.

As the influence of the West has increasingly come to Japan, Christmas music can now be heard on any street corner or in any department store weeks before Christmas. But only a handful have heard of the real God who took on flesh, intervened in history and drew near to people. God brought eternal change by offering peace not just between men, but more importantly, between God and man. The only and living God has spoken—but few in Japan seem to be listening. The noise of traditions, possessions and success has almost drowned out the message of the gospel.

This then leads to a very important question: "If no one seems to be listening, should we therefore give up, pack our bags and go home?" Absolutely not! Just as the one lost sheep had immeasurable value to the conscientious shepherd, so do the few Japanese who have listened to the Good Shepherd's voice and placed their trust in him. To this end, OMF has invested more than fifty years in Japan planting churches, promoting student ministry, training pastors and networking with other missions so that the few might multiply into an army.

Obviously, we are still in the early stages of this struggle, so more workers are needed to assist in this worthy and eternal endeavor. We give thanks for the changed lives of the few, but we long for more Japanese to hear the voice of the God who loved them so much he died for them. Will you help? ■

The only and living God has spoken — but few in Japan seem to be listening.



WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY IN THAILAND

by Chad Berry, OMF staff writer

It seems
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Sam was the envy of his Thai countrymen. A successful businessman, a millionaire, he was rich in material wealth, though his soul was poor.

Then the bottom fell out. Sam's business had a major reversal and he told his wife they needed to sell their mansion and move to an apartment. His wife, used to a high standard of living, asked for a divorce.

But God intervened. Through the love of Christians, Sam heard the gospel message and saw it at work. Sam is now a believer in Christ.

"Christians showed him real 'agape' love," said Larry Dinkins, the OMF worker who helped share the gospel with Sam.

Unfortunately, Sam's story of faith is a rarity in Thailand. Though missionaries have been at work for 175 years in this Southeast Asian country, a significant spiritual breakthrough has yet to occur. "To be Thai is to be Buddhist," is a common mantra, and it rings true. Ninety-two percent of the Thai people profess to be Buddhist, less than one percent know Christ.

Family pressures make it difficult for Thai believers. A perception exists that Christianity is a "foreign" religion.

"To believe in Christ is not just a private statement of religious faith," Dinkins explains, "you're also considered a traitor and you're going against your Thai-ness."

But times may be changing. The devastating tsunami of December 26 left more than 5,000 people confirmed dead, many of them foreign tourists. Another 3,000 people are still missing. Thai Buddhists are asking questions of faith, much like Sam did during his own "tragedy."

"There's a window of opportunity for impact on Thailand," Dinkins says. "It seems God is shaking the country through all the political unrest and natural calamity."

"Often times when Thai people go through difficulties and see the love of Christians, that is the most powerful testimony to them. That is how many people come to Christ."

OMF has a variety of ministries in Thailand: church planting, English teaching, theological training, even soccer evangelism. The harvest fields of Thailand may be ripening, but more workers are needed. ■

REALITY CHECK

A Serve Asia team researches Taiwan's "hidden" people

With a democratic system of government, Taiwan is dotted with churches which operate freely. But that doesn't tell the whole story. There is an overlooked working class of nearly 15 million people which remains largely untouched by the gospel. Less than 0.5 percent are Christian.

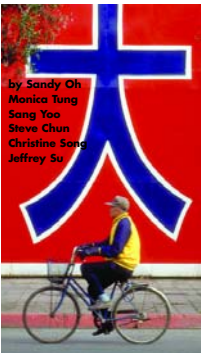
Being the first-short term team to do survey work in Taiwan, our goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual needs of Chia Yi county, the least-reached area of Taiwan. Expecting that Taiwan people practice idol worship merely out of tradition, we were amazed when we saw how bound they were by idolatry. Both young and old bow down with empty eyes to man-made statues. Everywhere we went we saw evidence of God being robbed of the glory due His name.

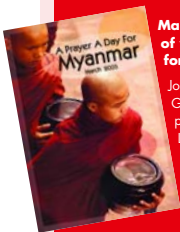
In our survey, we also looked at the state of the Christian churches. Many were run down; others were shut down. Attendance continues to decline. However, we found middle-class congregations that are thriving, but who are finding it difficult to reach out to their working-class neighbors.

The working class makes up 70 percent of the population of Chia Yi and 99 percent of them do not know the Lord. Few ministries are meeting the special needs of these people who work long hours and have no time for Sunday services. They need God just as much as the middle class, but don't have the same opportunities to meet him.

Many people believe Taiwan does not need missionaries, but they forget that both wealthy and poor alike need Jesus. We saw God's heart for Taiwan. He is jealous for this nation and we're confident that He will call more Christians to come here and serve. Will you let God use you here? ■

by Sandy Oh
Monica Tung
Sang Yoo
Steve Chun
Christine Song
Jeffrey Su





March 2005 is a month of worldwide prayer for Myanmar

Join us in praying for God's blessing on the people of "The Golden Land." Order this informative prayer guide at: www.us.omf.org/books

Price: \$3.00

New believers in East Asia

Praise God for the number of people from various people groups coming to Christ:

- the baptisms of 23 "D" people
- significant growth in numbers of new believers among the "T" and "U" people
- the many Khmu in Laos who have turned to Christ in 2004
- the 34 Zhuang believers who were baptized last summer
- the 60 Hoton people in western Mongolia who have professed faith in Christ
- over 30 Japanese in New Zealand who have come to Christ through the death of a friend
- ten of the 80 AIDS patients at Manorum Christian Hospital in Thailand trusted Christ last year

Bearing fruit in prison

Many Shan-Tai men who come from Myanmar to Thailand to find work often end up in prison. One such man, Mung, was given a Shan tract, which had a church address on it. Mung wrote to the church saying he wanted to know more about the Lord Jesus. As he studied the Bible and the lessons sent to him, he put his faith in Christ and began to share the Good News with the other Shan-Tai men in prison. Now 70 men in that prison in northeast Thailand have believed and 25 want to be baptized! Pray for these new Christians who are now being discipled by church members.

Two decades of Sapporo Int'l Church

When Sapporo International held its first service in August 1984 in the apartment of OMF workers Alan and Elaine Mitchell, only three people attended—and two of them were missionaries! But God has grown the church from its humble beginnings. With a vision to reach business people, downtown residents and college students, SIC's attendance has grown to 100, a large number for a Christian church in Sapporo. The church celebrated its 20th anniversary in November 2004 with two weekend events. The church puts an emphasis on discipleship. This is seen in SIC's 14 cell groups, which minister to virtually every demographic attending the church: English speakers, college students, Chinese speakers, young women, young professionals, Japanese families and Korean speakers. The church recently added a people-group specific service to its Sunday schedule. Such ministries reflect SIC's desire that "the glory of God would flow like a river from Sapporo to the ends of the earth."



The international flavor of Sapporo International Church is seen in this photo of members celebrating 20 years of God's faithfulness.

A week in the lives of Thailand missionaries

After receiving a gospel tract at the market, Wiam came to our house three times in one week to talk about God. He had grown disillusioned with his old belief system. When Wiam came back again on the Sunday, he made the decision to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

That same Sunday, two church members, Lin and Sertia, were baptized. Several months previously, Lin received Christ after worshipping in our home. Although Sertia once attended a local church, he had fallen away. Now he was fully committing himself to the Lord.

The next day a man named Hiwat came to our house after hearing about us from a Thai Christian. Hiwat was from a tribal background and his father is a witch doctor. God had already been working in Hiwat's heart when he visited us again on Tuesday. He made a decision to break from his animistic past and worship the one true God.

T S U N A M I U P D A T E

The devastating tsunami of December 26 left more than 225,000 people dead in Southeast Asia. Hundreds of thousands are now homeless.

Indonesia, where OMF has workers, was hit hardest, losing 166,320 people, according to the latest reports. The main area affected was Aceh province on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra. Aceh has the reputation of being the most staunchly Muslim area in Indonesia. There has been a long-running feud between the Indonesian government and the "Free Aceh Movement," a separatist group, which severely hampers relief efforts.

In Thailand, 5,300 people lost their lives, many of them foreign tourists on vacation. Another 3,000 people are still missing.

Spiritually, the people of Indonesia and Thailand will respond to this disaster in different ways. Some Thai Buddhists may look at the tsunami as just a devastating moment in the karmic cycle of life. Others, however, may ask deep questions of faith. Muslims in Indonesia may say this is Allah's will and his punishment on them. Due to the religious situation in Aceh, Christian relief work cannot take a high profile position. However, this is an excellent opportunity to show Christian love and compassion in action.

Please be in prayer for the survivors of this

tragedy and the enormous amount of work to be done in rebuilding. May the limited time they are exposed to the outside world leave a longing to find out more about their Creator and his salvation. What is most needed now are people willing to stay and make a lasting impact on the people in the affected areas. Pray that God will call many young people to commit themselves to do this.

How to donate aid through OMF:

Please make checks out to OMF International designated as follows: Indonesia 69269033: Indonesia Crisis Relief Fund/Tsunami Relief or Thailand [Tsunami Relief] ID#340012. Mail to OMF, 10 W. Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120.



This house in Thailand, belonging to a widow and her crippled brother (the only survivors of a large family), was rebuilt by church groups using relief funds contributed through OMF.



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www.us.omf.org 800-422-5350 info@omf.org

Editor: Mark Bradley

Writers: Chad Berry; Beth Forshree, Mike McGinty

Design/Layout: Patrice Nelson

Photography: Kevin Morris; OMF workers

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