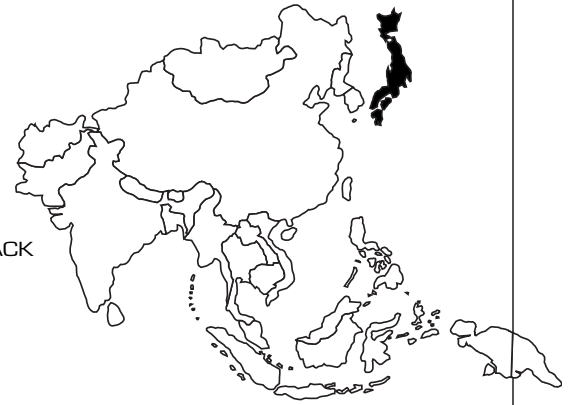


# JAPAN

JAPAN IS THE WORLD'S MOST EXPORT-ORIENTED ECONOMY DESPITE A LACK OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND OIL. IT IS AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION, INFLUENCED BY CHINA AND KOREA, BUT WITH ITS OWN HIGHLY REFINED AND DETAILED CULTURE.



## population

- Population: 127.5 million
- Density: 340 per square km
- 99% Japanese [the other 1% are mostly Korean]

Nearly 80 percent of people live in cities, so real density is much greater. About 30 million people live in and around Tokyo.

## religions

- Buddhist/Shinto 69.9%
- New religions 24.4%
- Non-religious/other 4.3%
- Christian 1.6%
- Muslim 0.1%
- Bahai 0.01%

Operation Japan quotes the number of believers as:

- Shinto: 109 million
- Buddhist: 96 million
- Christian: 1.5 million
- Other: 10.5 million

The total of 217 million is greater than the population of Japan. This is because most Japanese people follow a combination of religions.

Shinto is an indigenous religion based on ancestor and nature worship, with about 200 sects. Many families have either Buddhist family altars or Shinto god shelves at which they make offerings and pray for the spirits of their ancestors. Some families have both. But many Japanese in their day-to-day life have little to do with these religions, visiting Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines for special occasions such as funerals, blessings for babies and

children, weddings and New Year festivities.

In the late 1800s Shinto was made a state religion, stressing worship of the emperor as a divinity and the racial superiority of the Japanese. This was suppressed after the Second World War.

## language

Japanese is used throughout the country, although in some areas there is such a strong dialect that Japanese themselves have difficulty understanding it.

## geography

Japan consists of four main islands and many smaller ones lying in a crescent to the east of China and Korea.

Earthquakes are frequent in Japan. Most are minor, but large ones can cause devastation, such as the Kobe disaster of 1995, when more than 5,000 people died. There are also tsunamis, some 100 active volcanoes and around 1,500 seismic occurrences per year. In 2004 a series of typhoons and earthquakes caused flooding, destroyed buildings and claimed lives.

## climate

Japan's climate varies widely because the country covers 15° of latitude. Temperatures range from minus 30-35°C [86-95°F] in the north to about 0-39°C [32-102°F] in the south. There are short summers and severe long winters in Hokkaido and the northern

part of Honshu. In Tokyo and further south there are hot and humid summers and mild winters with little snow.

## history

From the late 1800s to the end of the Second World War, Japan sought expansion, initially into China, Taiwan, Russia and Korea. Japan joined the First World War on the side of the Allies, and the post-war Treaty of Versailles, granted Japan some territory in the Pacific.

In 1937 Japan went to war with China and in 1940 occupied Indochina. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the U.S. and its allies declared war on Japan in 1941. By 1944 Japan had occupied several other countries in Southeast Asia, and U.S. forces began bombing Japanese cities, including the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945).

Japan joined the United Nations in 1956. Occupied by the UN [chiefly the U.S.] after the war, the country inherited many Western qualities. It experienced astonishing economic growth and is among the world's leading producers in some industries. Japan is now the world's second largest economy. Growth slowed during the 1990s, with a severe recession in 1997.

## christianity

Francis Xavier, the Jesuit missionary, brought Christianity to Japan in 1549. The shoguns [leaders] became



10 W, Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120-4413  
Tel.: 303.730.4160 E-mail: info@omf.org  
Website: www.us.omf.org

convinced that this was to soften them up for European conquest. In 1612 the 300,000 Japanese Christians were persecuted and many were martyred. The country was closed to all foreigners for 250 years.

There was a positive response to the gospel in the late 1800s when Japan re-opened its doors to the West. But this was followed by renewed suspicion and rejection. Church growth slowed dramatically in the early 20th century under pressure from within [rationalistic higher criticism] and without [military government].

The post-war years have seen increased evangelical activity, initially from America, and more recently from Korea. In the last ten years a number of larger churches of over 100 people have been established in Japan,

although there are only two OMF-linked churches of that size.

Despite encouraging growth, the general population remains absorbed in materialistic attitudes.

In line with its pioneering ethos, OMF's first workers moved into unreached territories in 1951, concentrating on Hokkaido and the Aomori Prefecture. Young people in particular responded,

but rapid urbanization led to withering churches as new converts left for the cities. Today OMF works in these cities, with its headquarters being in the greater Tokyo area.

Japan is largely unresponsive to the gospel. Cultural pressures to conform and the intense work ethos squeeze out

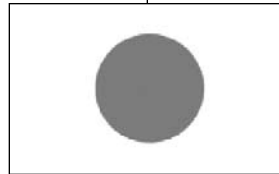
Christianity. Churches often have only a handful of members, mostly women. About 70 percent of all churches have an average attendance of less than 30, though membership is double that. This

is because many Christians have to work on Sundays and are therefore unable to attend church every week. But many of those who cannot attend on Sundays are active in church during the

week. Sometimes there is an uneven distribution of tasks, with pastors responsible for almost everything.

The economic slow-down of the late 1990s and recurrent political scandals have shattered many dreams and revealed the emptiness of materialism. There has been a renewal of interest in spiritual matters, seen in the fast growth of sects and new religions.

There are no restrictions to witnessing or preaching the gospel, yet many small towns, eight cities and numerous country areas are without churches.



## how to pray

- The sincere, polite, hard-working Japanese are too busy to give heed to the gospel and have little concept of personal sin. Pray that economic shocks, political instability and fears for the future may shake many out of complacency.
- There is a resurgence of a nationalistic Shintoism which is hostile to anything un-Japanese.
- New religions and sects have grown faster than evangelical Christianity. Pray that those involved would be set free.
- Japanese Christians have made little impact on the centers of power [industrial, commercial and political] in the land.
- Churches in Japan experienced good growth between 1945 and 1960. Since then overall growth has been very slow. Pray for a decisive breakthrough.
- Bible training for Christian workers is provided by nearly 100 seminaries and Bible schools. The great hope for the church's future is the high quality of many of Japan's pastors and church leaders. However, Christian workers in training are at an all-time low and many post-war pastors are retiring with no one to replace them.
- Student witness is strategic, but only a quarter of campuses have KGK groups [similar to IVCF]. The estimated number of all Christian students is 0.001 percent. There are also 90,000 Chinese students in Japan, most from Mainland China.
- Japanese society is highly literate, with excellent publishing and distribution structures for high-quality Christian literature. Japanese writers are needed. Christian radio and TV are effective.
- Pray for the Japanese church:
  - Christians are a tiny minority in a society where consensus is important. Few families come to faith; individuals feel exposed.
  - The lack of men in the churches. The drive for success and demands of employers make it hard for men to break free.
  - Pray for lapsed Christians to be restored to the church.
  - Pray that the Japanese church may demonstrate God's love through increased social awareness.

## OMF's strategic priorities

- Church planting in strategic areas in association with the Japan Evangelical Churches Association.
- Student work in conjunction with KGK [similar to InterVarsity].
- Training, developing and equipping missionaries.

## opportunities available

- Evangelism, church-planting
- English teaching
- Student evangelism
- Teaching missionaries' children
- Short-term opportunities
- Administrative, accounting, IT and medical posts