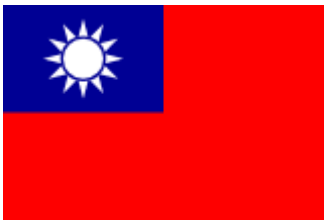
Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailedanalysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Taiwan

Population: 23.36 millions (#52 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography
Area: 35,980 square km. Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa, consists of the main island of Taiwan and the small island groups of Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu. Located off the coast of mainland China, Taiwan's geography is dominated by tall, mountainous topography on the eastern two-thirds of the island. The far western portion of the island consists of plains where the majority of the population resides. Most of Taiwan enjoys a tropical climate that is strongly affected by the surrounding ocean. Large coal deposits exist, but most natural resources have been heavily exploited. Taiwan consists of 18 counties, five municipalities and two special municipalities.

Population: 22,974,347 (July 2009)
Annual Growth Rate: 0.227% (2009)
Fertility Rate: 1.14 children born per woman (2009)
Life Expectancy: male 75.12, female 81.05 (2009)

Peoples
Taiwanese: 84%
Mainland Chinese: 14%
Indigenous: 2%

98% of the population has Han Chinese ancestry. Taiwanese form the largest ethnic group, arriving when China colonized the island prior to the Japanese occupation. Similar Chinese ethnic groups such as Hakka are combined in this statistic. Mainland Chinese, who fled China during the civil war, constitute 14% of the population. The remaining two percent of the population belong to aboriginal tribes who first colonized the island. These tribes have their roots in Polynesia and the Philippines and speak their own tribal languages.

Languages: Min Nan Chinese (66%), Mandarin (19%), Hakka (10%), other (15%).
Most the population speaks Min Nan Chinese, which is found in southern China. Mandarin Chinese is the official language. A sizeable minority (10%) speak Hakka dialects. Due to the Japanese occupation some older Taiwanese speak Japanese. English education is provided during schooling. The most widely spoken indigenous languages are Amis and Atayal. Languages with over one million speakers include Min Nan (15 million), Mandarin (4.32 million), and Hakka (2.37 million).
Literacy: 96.1% (2003)

History
Polynesian settlers first arrived and colonized the island of Taiwan before the arrival of Chinese from mainland China. China did not begin to settle Taiwan until after 1500 A.D. Europeans arrived and established a short-lived presence in the 17th century, particularly the Dutch. For most time between the 17th and 20th centuries, China ruled Taiwan. The Japanese attempted to take the island periodically throughout this time and succeeded in 1895. Taiwan did not return to China's control until the end of World War II. In 1949, Chinese nationals fleeing from mainland China established themselves in Taiwan and formed a republic named the Republic of China. Economic growth began in the 1960s, turning Taiwan into one of the "Four Tigers" of Asia. Taiwan became a single party system under military rule until the past couple decades. Rapid industrialization continued until the 1990s and brought Taiwan to the status of a developed country. Taiwan has not declared independence from China; issues relating to independence versus reintegration with mainland China continue to be debated.

Culture

The Chinese most greatly influence Taiwanese culture. Other influences come from the Japanese occupation and indigenous peoples. Many Buddhist and Taoist temples dot the landscape. Taiwan is one of the most densely population countries in the world. Ancestor worship continues in most families today. Most Taiwanese drink tea daily.

Economy
GDP per capita: $31,100 (2008) [66.3% of US]
Human Development Index: 0.925
Corruption Index: 5.7
One of the strongest, most develop economies in Asia, Taiwan experienced rapid economic growth under government controlled capitalism. Today the most dominant sectors of the economy are services and industry. Dominant industries include electronics, textiles, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals. Due to strong economic growth, the average person has nearly the same buying power as those who live in the European Union. Trade relations between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan continue to improve. The largest exporter is China and the largest importer is Japan. Other nations which receive exports or send imports to Taiwan include the United States, South Korea and Saudi Arabia. Taiwan has few natural resources.

Faiths
Buddhist and Taoist mix: 93%
Christian: 4.5%
Other: 2.5%

Christians
Denominations Members Congregations
Catholic 300,000
Latter-Day Saints 49,054 101
Seventh-Day Adventist

Religion
Most of the population of Taiwan follows Buddhist and Taoist traditions. Confucian and indigenous beliefs also influence culture and religious groups. Christians form 4.5% of the population and other religions, such as Islam among Muslim immigrants, make up the remaining 2.5%. There are around 600,000 Protestants and 300,000 Catholics. The majority of the aboriginal Taiwanese follow Christianity.

Religious Freedom
Persecution Index:
Religious freedom is protected by the constitution and upheld by the government. Missionaries are allowed to proselyte, and government does not tolerate religious discrimination by individuals or groups.[1]

Largest Cities
Urban: 81%
Taipei, Kaohsiung, Taichung, Tainan, Panchiao, Chunghe, Hsinchu, Hsinchuang, Taoyuan,
Chilung, Sanchung, Chungli, Fengshan, Hsintien, Chiai, Tucheng, Changhua, Yunghe, Pingtung,
Yungkang, Pingchen, Luchou, Tali, Hsichih, Pate, Taiping, Shulin, Fengyuen, **Yangmei**, **Luchu**, Tanshui, Kueishan, Chupei, Yuenlin, Lungtan, Hualien, Taitung, Taliao, Touliu, Nantou, Tsaotun.

39 of the 41 largest cities have a congregation. Only Yangmei and Luchu have over 100,000 inhabitants and no congregation. Every county, municipality and special municipality on the island of Taiwan has at least one congregation of the Church.

Membership Growth
LDS Membership: 49,054 (2008)
The first members of the Church were American military who met as a group when the first four missionaries were assigned to Taiwan. Missionary work progressed slowly and steadily, with 50 converts baptized by the end of 1957. One year later membership rose to over 200. Elder Mark E. Peterson dedicated Taiwan for the preaching of the Gospel on June 1st, 1959.[2] By 1975 membership in Taiwan grew to 7,000 members.

By 1984 there were 13,000 members of the Church in Taiwan, increasing to 20,300 in 1993. Asia Area President Monte J. Brough noted that Church membership in Taiwan by this time had grown much in strength and described leadership as very mature. At the time the only temple in the Asia area was located in Taipei.[3] In 1996, membership stood at 22,000. When the Kaohsiung Mission was created in 1998, there were 4,700 members in the Taiwan Kaohsiung Mission, 3,400 members in the Taiwan Taichung Mission, and 6,100 members in the Taiwan Taipei Mission.[4] By the end of 2000 there were nearly 29,827 members. Membership reached 40,000 in 2004 and 50,000 in 2009.

Annual membership growth rates have fallen since 2000 from over 10% to slightly over 4% in 2007 and 2008, indicating that the rate of growth has declined. Instead of increasing by around 3,000 members a year, membership increases currently by around 2,000 members a year. Yet a rate of growth for membership of over 4% a year is unusual for an industrialized country with over 50,000 Church members. Growth has been sporadic in Taiwan, with some years experiencing little growth and other years experiencing rapid growth. In the fall of 2009, there was marked growth in the Taiwan Taichung Mission, with 219 baptisms reported during a six week missionary transfer period.

In Asia, Taiwan has the third highest ratio of members to the population of one member per 467 people.

Congregational Growth
Wards: 80 Branches: 20
Four missionaries arrived from Hong Kong in June 1956 and studied Mandarin Chinese for nine months before serving in Taiwan. Some Anti-American demonstrations slowed progress in missionary work during this time period. By the end of 1958

there were 31 missionaries serving in eight cities.[5] By the end of 1959 eight branches functioned in Taiwan. The Taiwan Taipei Mission was created from the Hong Kong Mission in January 1971 and consisted of the island of Taiwan.

In 1975, 30 branches met in three districts. The following year the Taipei Taiwan Stake was organized. A second mission was created for the southern half of Taiwan based in Kaohsiung. The Taiwan Kaohsiung Mission was renamed the Taiwan Taichung Mission in 1983 when the mission headquarters were moved to Taichung. A second stake was created in Kaohsiung in 1981 and a third stake was created in eastern Taipei in 1982.

Taiwan remained in the Asia Area when it was divided in 1991 to create the Asia North Area. In 1993, members met in 57 congregations, three stakes and three districts. In 1994, the fourth stake was organized in Taichung. During the mid 1990s the first branch was organized in one of the small, offshore islands of Taiwan in Penghu. In 1996 Taiwan celebrated the 40 years of the preaching of the Gospel in Taiwan. The missionary force in Taiwan rose to over 300. In addition to four stakes, four districts also functioned in Hsin Chu, Tao Yuan and Tainan. Membership met in 22 wards and 31 branches.[6]

A third mission for Taiwan was created in 1998 in Kaohsiung. With the creation of the new mission, each of Taiwan's three largest cities had a mission headquarters. Tainan received its first stake in 1997 and Taipei received its third stake in 1998.

By the end of 2000 there were 76 congregations, six stakes, and five districts. Between 2000 and the end of 2004 three additional stakes were organized from districts in Tao Yuan, Hsin Chu and Chung Hsing. Taiwan's tenth stake, the Taichung Taiwan North Stake, was created in 2007 from a division of the Taichung Taiwan Stake. A milestone in Taiwan was reached in 2008 when the Mingchien Branch was organized, bringing the total number of congregations over 100 for the first time. A young single adult unit was organized in Taichung in the late 2000s.

The Church discontinued the Taiwan Kaohsiung Mission in the summer of 2009. Congregations grew to102 as of the fall of 2009. In addition to the 10 stakes in Taiwan, two districts also functioned in Ping Tung and Hua Lien. Three English speaking congregations function in Taiwan: one ward in Taipei, and branches in Hsin Chu and Taichung. There are several Chinese speaking congregations in Australia, Canada and the United States.

Activity and Retention
President Hinckley visited Taiwan in the summer of 2005 to meet with members and dedicate the Church Administration Building for Taiwan. Over 1,200 members attended the dedication for the building which in addition to serving for Church administration also housed five wards.[7] A celebration was held for the 50th anniversary of the Church's establishment in Taiwan in 2006.[8] Other events were held to commemorate the anniversary, including a bike ride from one side of the island to the other and a youth handcart trek in which more than 1,000 youth attended.[9] A special meeting was held in 2009 commemorating the 50th anniversary for the dedication of Taiwan for the preaching of the Gospel.[10]

The average number of members per congregation in Taiwan increased from 414 in 2000 to 486 in 2008, indicating that congregations and membership have grown at different rates. The average number of active members per congregation in Taiwan is likely no more than 100, indicating that active membership for Taiwan numbers around 10,000 or 20% of total membership.

Language Materials
Languages with LDS Scripture: English, Cantonese, Mandarin
The Book of Mormon was translated into Chinese in 1965 in Hong Kong. All LDS scriptures are available in Chinese. Most Church materials are available in Mandarin and Cantonese.

Meetinghouses
During the 1960s two Church built meetinghouses were constructed in Taipei and Kaohsiung. The majority of congregations meet in Church built meetinghouses. Some smaller congregations meet in renovated buildings or rented spaces.

Humanitarian and Development Work
The Church has maintained positive relations with the Taiwanese government. Taiwanese officials visited Church headquarters in Salt Lake City in 1990 as part of a nation-wide visit to various religious organizations requesting assistance in promoting moral and social well being in Taiwan[11]. Possibly the first Church member to serve in government, Jein-Nein Chen was elected governor of Taitung County in 1993[12]. In 2007 the Church held a family week in conjunction with local city and family organizations[13]. Missionaries also provided service in helping provide accurate English translations of Chinese signs in many of the cities throughout the country.

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom
The church has taken advantage of no government restrictions on missionary work. Local members still struggle to conduct member missionary work and rely heavily on missionaries for convert baptisms.

Cultural Issues
Despite rapid industrialization and increasing wealth among Taiwanese, many have remained receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Very few industrialized nations experience membership and congregational growth as rapid as Taiwan. The emphasis placed on the family by Taiwanese allows for greater receptivity of the Church's doctrines pertaining to family. Many Confucian teachings also fall in-line with Church teachings, including contributing to society and strong work ethic. The widespread use of tea creates obstacles between culture and Church teachings. Ancestor worship can also lead to misunderstandings of Church doctrine, but members typically transform the worshipping and veneration of ancestors to respect and appreciation.

National Outreach
The Church has successfully established congregations in nearly all cities over 100,000 inhabitants. 60% of the population lives

in a city with a congregation. Every county on the island of Taiwan has at least one congregation of the Church. Although the Church has established itself in nearly all the major population centers in Taiwan, some areas have seen greater success than others. Since 2000 the Church has seen marked progress in establishing itself outside of Taipei by districts maturing into stakes and established stakes greatly growing in the number of congregations. The number of congregations increased from six wards and one branch in the Taichung Taiwan Stake to 13 wards and two branches within the boundaries of the two stakes in Taichung in 2009. The number of wards has also grown in the stakes in Kaohsiung and Tainan, increasing from six wards in each stake to 10 wards and two branches in the Kaohsiung Taiwan Stake and nine wards and two branches in the Tainan Taiwan Stake. Some areas of Taiwan with multiple small or middle-sized cities do not have congregations close by, such as the coastline between Taichung and Tainan and areas along the northeastern and eastern coasts of the country.

One of the reasons for why the Taiwan Kaohsiung Mission was discontinued was that two missions could provide nearly the same amount of outreach that the three missions were producing. The Taiwan Kaohsiung Mission was one of the least productive areas for missionary work in Taiwan during the last decade, as no new stakes were organized within its boundaries. The other Taiwanese missions saw an increase in stakes during this time, most notably the Taiwan Taichung Mission. Taiwan had one of the lowest population per mission ratios in Asia of less than eight million people per mission. Other industrialized Asian countries like Japan and South Korea have much higher population per mission ratios of over 10 million people per mission. With the mission realignment, each of Taiwan's missions serve 11-12 million people.

Member Activity and Convert Retention
Member activity is comparable to other industrialized East Asian nations. The maturity of membership in Taiwan can be observed by the increase in the number of stakes and wards. Between 1996 and 2006, stakes increased from four to nine, wards increased from 22 to 74, branches decreased from 36 to 20, and districts decreased from four to two. The large increase in the number of wards during this ten year period is a 236% increase; one of the most rapid the Church saw during this period in the world. The decrease in districts and branches indicates the Church's emphasis on establishing larger congregations so that more stakes could be organized. In order for branches to become wards, membership had to meet criteria provided by stake and area presidencies. The transition of many branches into wards suggests great strengthening and maturation of membership as well as continued growth between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s.

Despite the rapid increase in membership and wards since the mid 1990s, inactivity has become a growing problem evidenced by large increases in the average number of members per congregation. Inactivity partly results from converts joining quickly and becoming inactive after only short periods of activity or sometimes without being active in the Church at all. Although many branches becoming wards, which include more active members, at least partially explains this trend, many new converts were not retaining during periods of rapid growth. Several returned missionaries who served in Taiwan have estimated that 20-25% of converts are retained. Retention does not appear to have increased significantly in the past decade.

Elder Bednar visited Taiwan in the spring of 2009 and spoke to over 5,000 members and missionaries. Elder Bednar emphasized Taiwanese members' responsibility to find investigators for missionaries to teach.[14] The falling rate of membership growth is troubling as the Church is better mobilized than ever before to teach and fellowship new converts.

Church meetings and most members use Min Nan Chinese and Mandarin Chinese. Congregations do not appear segregated according to different Chinese languages. Missionaries are able to proficiently learn Chinese languages for Gospel teaching, but often struggle with reading and writing. Outreach among the English-speaking expatriate population is possible through the three English congregations. Immigrant workers from other Asian countries receive little outreach. Filipinos may be the group most receptive to missionary work, but often struggle to join the Church and stay active since most do not speak Chinese and are unable to attend an English speaking congregation due to distance.

Leadership
Leadership continues to increase as reflected by the increase of new stakes in the past decade. Taiwan has also provided leadership to the worldwide Church. Several Taiwanese members have been called to serve as Area Seventies, including Elder Yang Tzung-Ting and Elder Ho Yu-Chen.

Temple
The Taipei Taiwan temple was announced in 1982 and dedicated in 1984. A second temple for the Asia area was dedicated in Hong Kong in 1996. An additional temple will likely not be announced for Taiwan in the near future, as many Taiwanese members live within close proximity to the temple and the temple functioning at a fraction of its capacity. In 2009, endowment sessions were only held three times a day from Tuesday through Friday. On Saturday the temple held an expanded schedule. A high-speed rail system facilities travel, lessening the likelihood of additional temples until the Taipei temple is working at capacity.

Comparative Growth
Taiwan is a pillar of strength for the church in Asia. The Church has grown into one of the larger Christian denominations in Taiwan during the past 50 years in a nation with few Christians. With the exception of Singapore and Hong Kong, the Church may be more available to the overall population of Taiwan than in any other Asian country close to the mainland. This membership and leadership base allows for greater growth for the Church, increasing the number of full families belonging to the Church and providing more social opportunities for fellowshipping. Taiwan is one of the only nations in the world to have a young single adult congregation with meetings not conducted in English.

Other Christian churches which strongly stress missionary work have historically seen limited success in Taiwan. Jehovah's Witnesses numbered around 6,700 in 2008 in 91 congregations. The Seventh Day Adventist Church claimed 5,400 members in 2008 in 52 churches. Christianity in Taiwan has seen few conversions compared to nearby South Korea, where the largest religion is Christianity. It is unclear as to why other Christian groups have seen little growth, but it may be in part due to greater focus from these groups on establishing their congregations in more populous Asian countries with greater humanitarian needs.

Future Prospects

Tremendous opportunity awaits the Church in Taiwan due to a strong membership base and experienced leadership. In coming years, the Church will likely expand and open new congregations in middle-sized cities between 50,000 and 100,000 people as members of the Church move to these cities or as converts join the Church.

Missionary work and Church growth in Taiwan has impacted the potential growth of the Church in mainland China. Mandarin Chinese, which is also the official language of the People's Republic of China, is taught and spoken by missionaries serving in Taiwan. Once China opens for missionary work, Hong Kong and Taiwan will likely play a significant role in supplying missionaries already fluent in Chinese languages and that have experienced living where the Church has functioned for many decades.

Future stakes will likely be organized in the largest cities which currently only have one stake. The stake in Kaohsiung will likely be divided if new wards continue to be created. The Chung Hsing Taiwan and Tainan Taiwan Stakes could be divided to create a third stake based in Chai Yi. Taipei appears unlikely to have additional stakes created until more wards are organized. The district in Ping Tung may become a stake as membership grows in activity, faith and numbers considering that the branches are not spread too far apart. The other district in Hua Lien may not become a stake in the near future as it spans almost the entire eastern coast of the country where the population is much less dense

[1] http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127269.htm

[2] http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/taiwan

[3] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22920/Asia-area--Welcome-mat-is-out-in-several-countries.html

[4] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/31386/New-missions-created-total-now-331.html

[5] http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/taiwan

[6] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/27590/The-Church-in-Taiwan---40-years.html

[7] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/47650/Ties-to-Taiwan.html

[8] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49078/Great-blessings-celebrated-in-Taiwan.html

[9] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49621/Handcart-trek-for-youth-of-Taiwan.html

[10] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/57513/Celebrating-50-years-of-the-gospel-in-Taiwan.html

[11] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/19601/Official-visits-the-Church-in-Taiwan.html

[12] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/24730/LDS-governor-serves-in-Taiwan.html

[13] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/50986/Taipei-family-week.html

[14] http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/57194/Taiwan-welcomes-Elder-Bednar.html