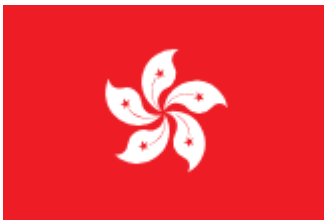


Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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.



Hong Kong

Population: 7.11 millions (#102 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 1,108 square km. Comprising the Kowloon Peninsula and more than 200 islands, Hong Kong is located in East Asia and is under Chinese administration as a special administrative region. The largest islands are Hong Kong Island and Lantau Island. Steep mountains and hilly terrain occupy most areas with some lowlands in the north. The climate is subtropical and characterized by hot, rainy weather in the spring and summer and cool, humid weather in the winter. Monsoon rains deliver most of Hong Kong's precipitation in the summer months. Typhoons are a natural hazard, and air and water pollution are environmental issues.

Peoples

Chinese: 92.0%

Filipino: 2.5%

Indonesian: 2.1%

Other: 3.4%

Population: 7,213,338 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.29% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.2 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 80.4 male, 86.0 female (2018)

Languages: Cantonese (88.9%), English (4.3%), Mandarin (1.9%), other Chinese languages (3.1%), other (1.8%). Cantonese, English, and Mandarin are the official languages. Nearly half of the population speaks English.[1]

Literacy: 97% (2016)

History

Archaeologists have dated the earliest human settlement of Hong Kong back to 3,000 BC. Han Chinese began settling the region in the seventh century AD. Trade with Britain commenced in the early eighteenth century and the British annexed Hong Kong following the Chinese defeat in the First Opium War in 1842. Conflict between the Chinese and British formally came to a close at the end of the Second Opium War in 1858. The geographic size of Hong Kong expanded dramatically in 1898 as a result of the United Kingdom obtaining a ninety-nine-year lease of the New Territories from the Chinese government out of defense concerns. The British used Hong Kong as center of economic activity and commerce for East Asia during the twentieth century. Following the communist takeover of mainland China, hundreds of thousands fled to Hong Kong. During the latter half of the twentieth century, Hong Kong emerged as a regional economic power due to its success in manufacturing, tourism, finance, and commerce. Consequently, standards of living greatly improved, reaching some of the highest levels of life expectancy, GDP per capita, and literacy in Asia. Sovereignty of Hong Kong transferred to China in 1997 when the British lease expired. With the exception of foreign relations and defense, Hong Kong remains highly autonomous and will retain its economic, judicial, and political systems until 2047.[2] Nevertheless, there has been mounting tension, particularly during the 2010s, between many Hong Kongers and Beijing regarding political and democratic freedoms in Hong Kong with the “one country, two systems” policy. These tensions came to a significant head in 2019 with major demonstrations and protests that disrupted Hong Kong life. Resolution of protestor demands and Beijing’s solution to the crisis remained uncertain as of late 2019.

Culture

Hong Kong represents a fusion of Western and Eastern cultures, attributed to long-term Chinese influence and approximately 160 years of British rule. Consequently capitalism, materialism, and traditional Chinese religion are the dominant influences on society. Most the population does not practice an organized religion but rather follows some aspects of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. There is an internationally-renowned, well-developed entertainment industry that produces many martial arts films. Cuisine comprises a mixture of Chinese and Western foods. Common recreational activities include swimming and hiking. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates compare to the worldwide average rates of use of these substances. Hong Kong has historically been regarded as one of the safest large cities in the world.

Economy

GDP per capita: $61,500 (2017) [103% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.933 (2017)

Corruption Index: 76 (2018)

International trade and finance drive the modernized economy, which is highly integrated into regional and world trade markets. Tourism is a major source of revenue, and in recent years relaxed travel restrictions with mainland China have dramatically increased the number of tourists. Strong economic growth has occurred for several decades, and recovery from the global financial crisis was speedy. A lack of affordable housing and dependence on international trade are economic challenges. Hong Kong’s excellent deep-water harbor is its primary natural resource; raw materials and food are imported. Services generate 92% of the GDP, whereas industry generates approximately 8% of the GDP. Trading, financial services, professional services, and tourism are major industries. Forty-five percent (45%) of imports and 54% of exports are trafficked with mainland China. The United States, Singapore, and Japan are also major trade partners.

Hong Kong is perceived as being among the least-corrupt nations or territories worldwide but is an international transshipment point for heroin and methamphetamine. Illicit use of synthetic drugs has increased in recent years. Hong Kong is a money laundering center due to its modern banking infrastructure.

Faiths

Chinese religions: 28%

Christian: 13%

Muslim: 4%

Hindu: 1%

Other/None: 54%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Evangelicals – 434,079

Catholic – 379,000

Latter-day Saints – 24,933 – 38

Jehovah's Witnesses – 5,571 – 63

Seventh Day Adventists – 4,301 – 21

Religion

Although the Chinese population traditionally followed Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, most are not religiously active today. Practitioners of Buddhism and Taoism number approximately two million and often worship at the same temples. There are slightly less than one million Christians; approximately half are Catholic and half are Protestant. Eight hundred Christian chapels and churches, 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, five mosques, four synagogues, one Hindu temple, and one Sikh temple operated in 2010.[3] There are approximately 300,000 Muslims, 100,000 Hindus, 12,000 Sikhs, and 2,500 Jews.[4]

Religious Freedom

The Basic Law protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Religious groups are not required to register with the government but groups must register to obtain government benefits. There have been some exchanges of Catholic and Protestant clergy between Hong Kong and mainland China in recent years. Mainland government authorities have pressured Hong Kong government personnel to restrict the activities of Falun Gong followers.[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 100%

Kowloon, Victoria, Tuen Mun, Sha Tin, Tseung Kwan O, Kwai Chung, Tseun Wan, Tin Shui Wai, Tai Po, Fanling—Sheung Shui, Ma On Shan, Tsing Yi, Yuen Long, Aberdeen, Tung Chung.

All fifteen cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the population resides in the fifteen most populous cities.

Church History

The first Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in April 1853 and served in Hong Kong for four months until returning to the United States as they were unable to learn the language and faced challenges adapting to local culture. In 1949, Latter-day Saint apostle Elder Matthew Cowley dedicated Hong Kong for missionary work on Victoria Peak; the following year, full-time missionaries were assigned and began proselytism. By the end of 1950, there were eight missionaries serving in Hong Kong, and the first convert baptisms occurred. The Korean War temporarily closed full-time missionary activity in the early 1950s. Based in Hong Kong, the Southern Far East Mission was organized in 1955 and administered Southeast Asia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The Chinese translation of the Book of Mormon was first printed in 1965, and remaining Latter-day Saint scriptures were printed in 1974. In 1969, the mission was named the Hong Kong-Taiwan Mission, and two years later the mission divided, resulting in the Hong Kong Mission administering Hong Kong and Macau.[6] Both seminary and institute were operating by 1974. In 1989, the Church opened an Institute of Religion that could accommodate up to 500 students.[7] In 1996, the Church completed its second temple on mainland Asia and its first high-rise temple in Hong Kong. Church leaders met with the chief executive of Hong Kong in 1997, who assured the Church that religious freedom would remain following the transfer of Hong Kong from British to Chinese administration.[8] In 2005, President Hinckley dedicated a new church administration building in Hong Kong for the Asia Area.[9] Hong Kong is assigned to the Asia Area, and the area offices have been located in Hong Kong for several decades. Home to perhaps as many as 1,000 domestic workers who generally come from Southeast Asia and the Philippines, the Church in Hong Kong provides worship services on every day of the week through its English branches, and permits ordinance work in the Hong Kong China Temple on one Sunday a month for workers who have no other day off from their work responsibilities.[10]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 24,933 (2018)

Membership stood at 346 in 1959 and increased to 3,000 in 1964,[11] 3,085 in 1970, 4,020 in 1975, and 6,193 in 1979. There were 13,000 Latter-day Saints in 1984[12] and 14,000 members in 1987. Membership increased to 18,000 in 1993 and 19,000 in 1997. By year-end 2000, there were 20,702 members.

Slow membership growth continued into the 2000s as membership reached 21,302 in 2002, 21,876 in 2004, 22,556 in 2006, and 23,223 in 2008. Annual membership growth rates ranged from 1% to 2% between 2001 and 2008. In 2009, membership increased by 3.8%. In the 2000s, the China Hong Kong Mission generally baptized approximately 300 converts a year. Church membership growth continued to slow in the 2010s with annual membership growth rates generally ranging from 0-1.5%. Church membership totaled 24,425 in 2010, 24,856 in 2015, and 24,933 in 2018.

In 2018, one in 289 (0.35%) was a member on Church records.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 33 Branches: 5 (October 2019)

The first district was organized in 1965.[13] The Hong Kong Stake was organized in 1976. Additional stakes were organized in Kowloon East (1980), New Territories (1984), Tolo Harbour (1984), and Kowloon (1994). To meet the needs of non-Cantonese speakers, the Hong Kong China (English) District was organized in 1998. In 2006, the Hong Kong China Kowloon East Stake was consolidated with neighboring stakes.

The first two branches were organized in 1955. There were eight congregations by 1959,[14] increasing to twenty-four in 1987, thirty-two in 1993, and thirty-five in 1997. By year-end 2001, the number of congregations reached a high of forty-one. The number of wards increased from twenty-three in 1987 to twenty-four in 1993, twenty-five in 1997, and twenty-eight in 2000.

Ten congregations were consolidated in the 2000s as the number of congregations declined to thirty-nine in 2002, thirty-seven in 2003, thirty-six in 2005, thirty-three in 2006, thirty-two in 2008, and thirty-one in 2010. During this period the English-speaking Peninsula 1st Branch was discontinued, and the English-speaking Victoria 2nd Branch and Mandarin-speaking Victoria 3rd Branch were organized. Cantonese-speaking units discontinued in the 2000s include the Sau Kei Wan Branch, and the Fanling, Kowloon City, Kwai Chung 1st (YSA), Ngau Tau Kok (YSA), Pok Fu Lam, Shun Lee, and Tuen Mun 1st Wards. The Tseung Kwan O Ward was organized and the Tsing Yi Branch became a ward.

The number of congregations rebounded during the 2010s to thirty-three in 2012, thirty-four in 2013, thirty-seven in 2014, forty in 2015, forty-one in 2016, and forty-two in 2017. New units organized during this period included the Kowloon Tong (Mandarin) Branch and the following nine wards: Hung Shui Kiu (2012), Ngau Tau Kok (2013), Pokfulam (2014), Castle Peak Bay (2014), Kowloon City (2014), Tin Sau (2015), Fanling (2015), Po Lam (2015), and Shing Mun (2016). This increase in the number of wards prompted the organization of two new stakes in Hong Kong in 2016: the Hong Kong China Lion Rock Stake and the Hong Kong China Kowloon East Stake. In 2018, the Church discontinued three English-speaking branches in the Hong Kong China District (English). In 2019, the Kowloon Tong (Mandarin) Branch closed.

Activity and Retention

The Church in Hong Kong experiences extremely low member activity rates. The average number of members per congregation increased from 583 in 2000 to 754 in 2009, but then decreased to 592 in 2017 due to the steady creation of new wards in the 2010s. Nevertheless, this members-to-units ratio was at 639 in 2018 following the closure of several English-speaking branches. Active members are generally highly devoted to the Church. There were 200 institute students in 1989 and 81% of institute students attended four years of classes and graduated from the program.[15] In 1992, nearly 3,000 attended a regional conference, the highest attendance for any Church meeting in Hong Kong at the time[16] and accounting for approximately 17% of church membership at the time. Five thousand attended the dedicatory services of the Hong Kong China Temple in 1996, most of whom were from Hong Kong.[17] More than one hundred youth participated in a youth conference in 2000.[18] That same year, 250 non-Chinese members attended a special temple day for the International District.[19] 551 were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008–2009 school year. Active membership in most wards ranged from fifty to one hundred, whereas most branches had approximately fifty active members in the late 2000s. Full-time missionaries serving in one ward in 2010 reported that 40 of approximately 2,000 members were active.

In 2014, 1,500 attended a special meeting commemorating the anniversary of the dedication of Hong Kong for missionary work.[20] In 2018, 4,200 members attended a special meeting with Church President Russell M. Nelson in the largest gathering of Hong Kong members in the history of the Church, albeit some members came from Macau and mainland China for the meeting.[21] In the mid- to late 2010s, returned missionaries reported that church attendance for most wards and branches ranged between 50-100 active members. Returned missionaries who served in the 2010s reported that the China Hong Kong Mission generally baptized between 100-200 new members a year, and that approximately two-thirds of new converts remained active one year after baptism. Nationwide active membership is estimated to range between 3,000 and 3,500, or 12%–14% of total membership.

Finding and Public Affairs

Nearly 2,000 attended meetinghouse open houses held systematically through the four stakes in Hong Kong in 1988. Missionaries obtained over 750 referrals from the open house event.[22] A similar open house finding event attracted 2,524 nonmembers to meetinghouses in 1991.[23] In 1992, the Hong Kong Island Stake held a free musical performance to the public in an effort to invite the general public into a Church meetinghouse and talk with members.[24] 13,000 attended the temple open house in 1996. In 1998, BYU-Hawaii students performed Hawaiian dances that were viewed by approximately 2,000 spectators.[25] Over 700 youth participated in a church basketball tournament in 1999; the number of participants increased to 1,200 in 2000.[26] Local members organized a teacher appreciation program in 1995 that recognized over 6,000 members by 2000.[27] The Church sold one of its oldest buildings at less than market value to the city of Hong Kong in 2004 for the city to turn into a museum. Over 10,700 attended an open house following the sale of the building.[28]

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Chinese (traditional and simplified characters), Tagalog, Indonesian, English.

All Church scriptures and most church materials are available in Chinese (simplified and traditional characters), Tagalog, and Indonesian. The Liahona magazine has monthly issues in Chinese and Tagalog and bimonthly issues in Indonesian.

Meetinghouses

The first church-built meetinghouse was completed in 1966.[29] There were seventeen meetinghouses in Hong Kong in 1988.[30] In early 2011, there were at least sixteen meetinghouses. In 2019, there were fourteen meetinghouses.

Health and Safety

The SARS outbreak in 2003 interfered with the functioning of the church and missionary activity, as the arrival of new missionaries was delayed, and local members held small sacrament meetings in their homes.[31]

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted sixty-three humanitarian and development projects since 1985, the vast majority of which have been community projects.[32] The Church has offered humanitarian and development assistance to mainland China from Hong Kong, such as contributing $20,000 for relief to earthquake victims in Yunnan in 1996.[33] Over 120 members participated in a tree-planting service project in which more than 150 trees were planted in Sai Kung West Park in 1999.[34] Latter-day Saint youth assembled over 400 hygiene and sewing kits to distribute to Mongolia and India in 2000.[35] In 2003, local church membership and missionaries assembled 3,000 hygiene kits to distribute to the needy in Hong Kong in wake of the SARS outbreak.[36] The Church donated 250 wheelchairs to the disabled in 2004.[37]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Latter-day Saints enjoy full religious freedom in Hong Kong and may worship, assemble, and proselyte. Foreign full-time missionaries are assigned regularly. As a result of widespread religious freedom, Chinese from mainland China desiring to be baptized into the Church sometimes briefly visit Hong Kong, are taught by full-time missionaries, and baptized before returning

back to the mainland in a matter of several hours.

Cultural Issues

Materialism, high cost of living, and secularism are major cultural challenges that frustrate mission outreach. Full-time missionaries and members struggle to develop mission outreach approaches that are effective in proselytizing the highly irreligious population that exhibits little familiarity with Christianity. Many converts are not retained, as they fail to develop habitual church attendance and personal gospel study habits. The development of a Latter-day Saint community over the past half century has provided a social outlet for members to associate and rely upon to avoid cultural practices and social pressures not in harmony with Latter-day Saint teachings. Nevertheless, returned missionaries frequently complain that many Hong Kongers view the Church negatively due to misinformation spread by other Christian denominations. Extensive genealogical records handed down for millennia offer excellent opportunities for local members to engage in temple work and use family history research as a segue for member-missionary work and finding. In 2000, one local member obtained a 175-volume set of his family's genealogical records containing over 200,000 ancestor names dating back to 602 AD.[38]

National Outreach

Small geographic size, a long-standing Latter-day Saint presence, and consistent numbers of full-time missionaries assigned have resulted in excellent levels of national outreach, as approximately 94% of the population resides in cities with a congregation. All cities with over 50,000 inhabitants have a ward or branch. Most unreached or lesser-reached cities have fewer than 24,000 inhabitants. Expensive and limited real estate is a challenge for the Church to open additional meetinghouses, resulting in multiple congregations utilizing the same meetinghouses. Long travel distances to meetinghouses for some can reduce church attendance levels.

Hong Kong ranked 30th among countries with the most visitors to the Church's website in 1997.[39] The Church operates a country website for Hong Kong available in traditional Chinese characters at http://www.lds.org.hk/, as well as a Newsroom site at https://www.mormonnewsroom.hk/. The Internet sites provide local news, meetinghouse locations and times, explanation of Church doctrines and teachings, and links to scriptures translated into traditional characters. There is also a Chinese translation of the Church's Come Unto Christ website for individuals interested in learning more about the Church at https://www.comeuntochrist.org/zho?lang=zho. Use of the websites in member-missionary activity can enhance national outreach and provide accurate information on the Internet to the general population.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Full-time missionaries and local members engage regularly in reactivation and less active work. The extremely low member activity rate in Hong Kong appears largely the product of many converts who joined the Church decades ago and became inactive shortly after baptism. The years of the most rapid membership growth appeared characterized by low standards for convert baptisms and a rush to baptize prospective converts quickly with little emphasis on prebaptismal preparation and gospel habits. A lack of daily religious practice in local culture continues to create a challenging environment for convert retention and improving current levels of member activity. Although the creation of many new wards in the 2010s signals some improvement in member activity and convert retention, the total number of active members has not appeared to have noticeably increased. Reactivation efforts by full-time missionaries draw large amounts of mission resources, delaying the progress of mission outreach in other more receptive nations and areas.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The Church has experienced no significant ethnic integration issues in Hong Kong, as the population is homogenously Cantonese-speaking Chinese. English and Mandarin-speaking congregations effectively provide outreach for non-Cantonese speakers and diminish ethnic integration challenges by segregating members by language usage.

Language Issues

Widespread use of Cantonese and English simplify mission outreach and require fewer language-specific resources. Constituting their own district, four English-speaking branches and one Mandarin-speaking branch meet the needs of non-Cantonese speakers. Mandarin-speakers have among the most receptive populations to the Church in Hong Kong, but they appear more transient and with a less developed leadership base in the Church.

Missionary Service

The Southern Far East Mission had 102 missionaries in 1959, including twelve local members serving full-time missions.[40] In 1988, mission leadership credited the support of local church leaders for the doubling of the number of local missionaries in an eighteen-month period serving full-time missions in the China Hong Kong Mission.[41] There were 148 full-time missionaries in the mission that year.[42] The sole Mandarin-speaking branch had ten full-time missionaries assigned in late 2009. As of early 2011, approximately 5,000 full-time missionaries had served in Hong Kong since the establishment of the Church.

Leadership

Local church leadership has been developed but remains limited and strained due to responsibilities fulfilling leadership positions in Hong Kong while simultaneously providing mentoring and support for mainland Chinese Latter-day Saints while in compliance with PRC government regulations. Church employees regularly serve in church leadership positions, such as stake presidencies. Nevertheless, no Church employees were among members of the stake presidencies for the two new stakes organized in 2016.[43] In 1965, six of the eight branches had native Chinese branch presidents.[44] In 1992, Chun Shing Johnson Ma from Kwai Chung was called as a regional representative.[45] Karl S. Fansworth from Victoria was called as a mission president in 1993.[46] In 1994, Chung Hei Patrick Wong from Tai Wai was called as a regional representative,[47] and in 1995 he was called as an area authority.[48] Kat Hing Ng from Tsuen Wan was called as the first Hong Kong China Temple president in 1995.[49] In 1997, Stanley Tak-Chung Wan from the Pok Fu Lam was called to preside over the Hong Kong Mission.[50] In 2002, D. Allen Anderson was called as an Area Seventy.[51] Kuen Ling was called as an Area Authority in 2003.[52] In 2004, Stanley Wan was called as an Area Authority.[53] In 2007, D. Allen Andersen from Victoria was called to preside over the Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Mission.[54] Some Hong Kong natives who have moved abroad have returned to serve in leadership positions in Hong Kong, such as Chung Hei Patrick Wong as president of the Hong Kong China Temple in 2013,[55] Maurice Man-Ho Lam as president of the China Hong Kong Mission in 2015,[56] and Richard Fook-Suen Lee as president of the Hong Kong China Temple in 2016.[57]

Temple

Hong Kong is assigned to the Hong Kong China Temple district. Announced in 1992 and dedicated in 1996, the Hong Kong China Temple administered most of Asia in 2019. In 2010, the Church completed a temple patron housing building capable of accommodating up to fifty individuals who travel long distances from mainland China, Southeast Asia, Mongolia, and the Indian subcontinent. The temple is well-utilized by active Latter-day Saints. There were six endowment sessions scheduled Tuesdays through Fridays and five sessions scheduled on Saturdays in the early 2010s. Local members frequently staff the temple to accommodate the needs of temple patrons traveling from outside of Hong Kong. The temple closed in 2019 for extensive renovations.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Hong Kong experiences one of the lowest member activity rates in the world and had the lowest percentage of members enrolled in seminary in Asia in the late 2000s (2.4% in 2008). Membership and congregational growth trends have most closely mirrored Western Europe, albeit nominal church membership accounts for a greater percentage of the population in Hong Kong than any Western European or Asian country except for the Philippines, Portugal, and Mongolia. Nevertheless, convert retention rates in the 2010s ranked among the highest in Asia based on reports from approximately one dozen returned missionaries who served in Hong Kong since 2010. Hong Kong boasts the fifth most stakes in Asia, and the Hong Kong China Temple has usually been among the busiest temples in nations with fewer than 30,000 Latter-day Saints.

Missionary-minded Christian groups generally report slow or stagnant church growth. Seventh-Day Adventists reported essentially stagnant membership and congregational growth in the 2010s, whereas Jehovah's Witnesses experienced slow membership growth rates and a decline of two congregations in the 2010s. These groups have relied on local members instead of outsourced missionary manpower to sustain growth. Evangelicals have experienced stagnant growth for many years.

Future Prospects

Continued strong church participation and activity among church-going Latter-day Saints in Hong Kong has sustained leadership capable of meeting the responsibilities demanded by stakes, but extremely low member activity rates among the general Church membership threaten the stability of Cantonese wards due to comparatively few active members. Quick-baptize policies and practices and low standards for convert baptisms in previous decades have compromised the harvest of the China Hong Kong Mission and have fueled very low member activity rates at present despite significant improvements in convert retention rates in the 2010s. This has posed long-term challenges for strengthening the local church and has drained the resources of local congregations in efforts to reclaim less active and never-active members still on church rolls. Maintaining increased standards for convert baptism and emphasis on the need to develop consistent gospel habits will be key to the Church's long-term prospects for real growth. Materialism and high cost of living have contributed to low birth rates among Latter-day Saints and exacerbate low receptivity. Local leaders stressing participation in seminary and institute may help address retention and member inactivity issues by providing opportunities for less active members and new converts to socially integrate with active membership and strengthen their testimonies and doctrinal understanding.

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