

8 Christianity in East Asia

Early Christianity (1st Century)

- Christianity spreads in Arabia, Persia, India.

Nestorian Schism (431)

- Nestorius was bishop of Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey).
- Disagreement over unity vs. separation of human and divine natures in Christ.
- Disagreement over title of Mary: *theotokos* (“God-bearer”) vs. *Christotokos* (“Christ-bearer”).
- Nestorius accused of heresy, excommunicated, and exiled to Egypt.
- 17 other bishops also excommunicated.
- Nestorian view of Christ accepted by Church of the East (Nestorian Church).

The Church of the East (~431 to Present)

- Also called the Nestorian Church.
- Split from the western church as a result of the Nestorian Schism.
- Main power base was in Persia (present day Iran).
- Spread east into India, Nepal, Mongolia, China.
- Height of power c. 700-1000. During this time, it was the largest and possibly most populous church in the world, more powerful than the Catholic church.
- Islam founded by Muhammad in early 7th century.
- Church of the East collapses under Muslim persecution and war, almost extinct by 1500.
- Survives today in very small “Assyrian Church of the East” in U.S. and groups active in Iraq, Syria, etc.

Early Christianity in China (7th Century)

- Aluoben was a Nestorian Christian from Persia.
- Led the first mission to China in 635.
- Emperor Tang Taizong calls Christianity “religion of light,” commands that it be spread throughout China.
- Oldest church in China is in Xi’an, dates to 640, still standing today.
- Nestorian Monument erected in 781 to celebrate Chinese Christianity.
- “Jesus Sutras”: Early Chinese Christian texts discovered in a cave in Dunhuang. Recently translated into English.
- Persecution in later dynasties diminished Christianity in China.

Christianity in Japan: Francis Xavier (active 1541-1552)

- Jesuit missionary from Portugal.
- Wins converts in Africa, India, Indonesia.
- Meets Anjiro, an exiled samurai, in Indonesia.
- Travels to Japan with Anjiro aboard a pirate ship.
- Third European to go to Japan and first to learn Japanese.
- Preached in Japan 3 years but won few converts due to cultural barriers.
- Christianity in Japan grew rapidly c. 1550-1600.

The Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868)

- Shoguns (warlords) ruled Japan for almost 300 years.
- They hated foreigners and persecuted Christians.
- February 5, 1597: 26 Christians crucified in Nagasaki.
- 1632: 55 Christians crucified.

The Meiji Restoration (1868)

- Emperor Meiji restores the rule of the emperor.
- Modernizes Japan with western technology.
- Establishes a democratically elected parliament (Diet of Japan).
- 1895: Emperor Meiji allows religious freedom in Japan.
- 100,000 Christians counted in Nagasaki, even after 300 years of persecution.

Japan in World War II (1937-1945)

- Shinto (worship of nature spirits and the emperor) becomes state religion.
- Christians refuse to worship the emperor.
- August 9, 1945: U.S. drops atomic bomb near a cathedral in the Urakami district of Nagasaki, an area almost 100% Christian. 70,000 people killed.

Christianity in Japan Today

- Only 1% of Japanese are Christian. Most are atheist/agnostic.
- Total religious freedom exists, but very few missionaries are in Japan.

Christianity in China: The Early Catholic Missions (13th-18th Centuries)

- Marco Polo goes to China in 1271 and was the first European to go to China.
- First Catholic missionaries arrive shortly after Polo in late 1200s.
- Many from the Jesuit (Society of Jesus) order of the Catholic Church.

Matteo Ricci (active 1582-1610)

- An Italian Jesuit missionary to China. Wins many converts.
- Speaks Chinese fluently, wears Chinese dress, understands Chinese culture.
- Rites Controversy: Ricci accused of condoning ancestor worship by accepting Confucian “rites” ceremony.
- Debate continues in the Catholic Church until 1742, when Pope Benedict XIV condemns Chinese rites and forbids further discussion.
- Jesuit missions end by early 1800s.

The Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864)

- Started by false prophet Hong Xiuquan.
- Claims to be the Son of God and gains a massive following.
- Declares independence from China and founds the Taiping or “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.”
- Civil war kills 20 million, one of the deadliest wars in history.
- Severely damages Christianity’s reputation in China even to this day.

Hudson Taylor (active 1853-1905)

- Most famous Protestant missionary to China.
- Arrives during the Taiping Rebellion.
- Speaks Chinese fluently, wears Chinese dress, understands Chinese culture.
- Finds the China Inland Mission which wins 18,000 converts and builds many churches and 125 schools.

The Opium Wars (1539-1860)

- British merchants sell opium in China in violation of Chinese law.
- Opium addiction decimates the Chinese economy.
- Chinese military tries to force the British out but suffers a humiliating defeat.
- British burn Summer Palace and seize control of Hong Kong.

The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901)

- Secret society of the Boxers or “Righteous and Harmonious Fists” attacks foreigners and Christians in China in response to the Opium Wars.
- 200 missionaries and 32,000 Chinese Christians are killed.
- Hudson Taylor loses missionaries and responds with radical forgiveness.
- Hostage crisis in Beijing when Boxers seize international embassies.
- Eight-nation alliance (U.S., Japan, and 6 European) joins to defeat Boxers.

World War II and the Communist Revolution (1927-1949)

- War between pro-republic (nationalist) and pro-communist forces.
- Japanese invade China during the middle of this civil war.
- 32 million Chinese killed.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

- A movement to change the entire culture of China.
- Mao Zedong wants to destroy the 4 Olds: old customs, culture, habits, ideas.
- All religions suffer terrible persecution. Churches are destroyed, and Christians are imprisoned, sent to labor camps, or executed.
- At least 100 million persecuted, and at least 1 million killed.

Christianity in China Today

- 100 million Christians in China.
- Much more freedom and access to the Bible than previously in history.
- Religious freedom allowed, but public evangelism prohibited.
- Only government-approved churches are legal.
- Many Chinese Christians meet in illegal home fellowships.