

# A Visual Journey

## BEYOND PRAYER FLAGS AND STATUES

Responding to the Need Among Buddhist Peoples

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*NOTE: As you read this article, make sure to interact with the missions infographic (Missiographic) on the next page.*

#### What is Buddhism?

#### What do Buddhists really believe?

#### How might I explain this religion to a friend at church or someone at work?

#### How are Buddhists responding to the gospel around the world?

These questions are not easy ones to answer. With hundreds of people groups practicing the various types of Buddhism, your answers to the questions above might vary greatly. The top left quadrant of the Missiographic on the next page gives you a small taste of the differences between the three main types of Buddhists.

But while Buddhism itself remains a mystery to many, the countries where Buddhism is practiced are front and center on the global stage. Think about headlines coming out of China, South Korea, Japan, and Thailand. Consider the persecution in North Korea and the huge transitions occurring in Myanmar. In the bottom left quadrant of the Missiographic, you will see in detail where the top ten Buddhist people groups are from.

The millions of people who practice Buddhism desperately need the gospel and many are responding in incredible ways. Take a look at the top right quadrant of the Missiographic to see the growth of the Christian faith in just a few of these countries.

If you are moved by what you see, here are some suggestions for action!

- 1. Praise God for the harvest in China and Korea!** Pray for all those who continue to spread the news in those countries and beyond.
- 2. Shift your own thinking.** Instead of thinking, “Buddhism is not my area of mission interest. That is for other people,” realize that the Buddhist world as a whole is relatively neglected in mission. Ask the Lord whether you are one of the thousands of people He wants to begin taking a more active interest there somehow.
- 3. Take some baby steps.** As you seek God’s guidance, look around for Buddhists you could get to know yourself. Do some internet surfing on information or images about Buddhism. Put a copy of the Missiographic somewhere that will remind you to pray.
- 4. Plant a seed.** Check whether your church or a mission organization you are involved with has any mission stake at all in the Buddhist world—missionaries, projects or short-term teams. If they do, encourage it and show the Missiographic to reinforce the value of it. If they don’t, then use the Missiographic to plant the seed of Buddhist involvement in their minds and pray that God makes it sprout and grow.

Download your own digital copy of this Missiographic at [www.missiographics.com](http://www.missiographics.com).



## Practicing Buddhists by Type



These three types of Buddhism also are mixed with traditional animist beliefs resulting in countless varieties of "folk" Buddhism.

## Growth of the Christian Faith

	Christian 2010	Evangelical 1980	Evangelical 2010	% Evan. Growth 30 Years	Evan./Total Chr. Growth Rates
China	7.92%	0.52%	5.70%	996.2%	1.85
South Korea	30.95%	9.94%	16.80%	69.0%	1.11
Cambodia	3.13%	0.04%	1.60%	3900.0%	1.15
Thailand	1.10%	0.17%	0.50%	194.1%	2.70

Asian Countries with Missions Sending Vision



China and South Korea, two traditionally Buddhist countries, have seen tremendous growth in Christian faith, including a missions zeal to reach out globally.<sup>5</sup>

## Beyond Prayer Flags and Statues Understanding Christian Growth in Traditionally Buddhist People Groups

In light of the complexity and varieties of Buddhism, most Westerners do not go beyond the common images of prayer flags, incense, stone statues and the Dalai Lama. They overlook the mission challenge of the Buddhist world and the amazing ways God is meeting that challenge.

- South Korea sent 21,500 missionaries in 2010<sup>6</sup>
- South Korea and China are in the top 3 mission sending countries<sup>7</sup>
- By 2025, China may be country with most Christians in the world<sup>8</sup>
- China sent 20,000 missionaries in 2010<sup>9</sup>

## Buddhist People Groups

Buddhism is practiced by hundreds of diverse people groups across Asia.

## Largest Unreached Buddhist People-Groups<sup>6</sup>

Japanese = 1.6% Christian Thai (Central) = 0.4% Christian  
Burmese = 0.1% Christian Isan (Thailand) = 0.2% Christian

These are just four of the largest unreached groups; there are many more. The last 20 years have seen a wonderful growth in emphasis on missions to the Muslim world. The need is also great in Buddhist areas.

## What to Do

Learn more about Buddhism through OMF resources: <http://omf.org.us/archives/buddhism>

Seek opportunities to connect with Buddhist neighbors and international students - migration has put many Buddhists in proximity to Christians. There are 3.9 million Buddhists (of all ethnic backgrounds) in North America.<sup>7</sup>

## Why Care

God has been at work in the hearts of the Buddhists and through their culture for centuries, drawing them toward more than they can find in Buddhist mysteries and rituals.

Praise God that he is sending believers out from every people, and pray for the fruit of South Korean and Chinese missionaries.

God is on the move in the Buddhist world, especially through Chinese and South Koreans.

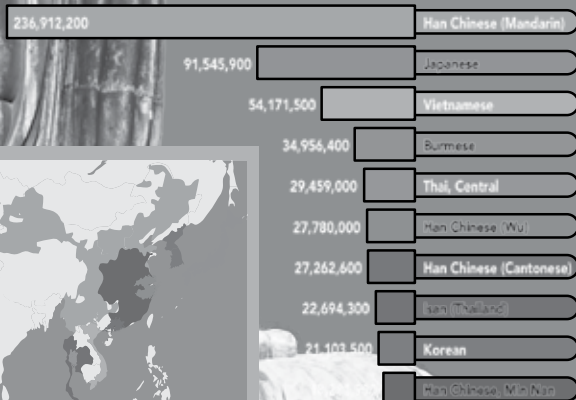
See the compelling story of Brother Yun on YouTube. He is a leader God used in forming a vision to carry the gospel from China. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmbsIU9540k> (start at 21:50)

Read *Developing Indigenous Leaders: Lessons in Missions from Buddhist Asia*, Paul H. DeNeui (editor).

Millions of Buddhists are still unreached, still praying to idols that cannot hear or speak.



## Top 10 Buddhist People Groups (by population of practicing Buddhists)<sup>4</sup>



Sources:

1. Hattaway, *Peoples of the Buddhist World*, 2013 (e-book), page xxiii
2. Hattaway, *Peoples of the Buddhist World*, 2013 (e-book), page xv (2010 projected data)
3. *Operation World Enhanced eBook DVD-Rom 2010*, GMI
4. Johnstone, *Future of the Global Church*, 2012, GMI, Figure 8.13 digital collection, data includes missionaries serving in own country as well as externally.

5. Blumberg, "China On Track To Become World's Largest Christian Country By 2025, Experts Say," [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/22/china-largest-christian-country\\_n\\_5191910.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/22/china-largest-christian-country_n_5191910.html)
6. Hattaway, *Peoples of the Buddhist World*, 2013 (e-book), page xv
7. *Buddhists in North America*, Pew Forum <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-buddhist/>