

What in the World is God Doing? (and where?)

A look at ReachGlobal's Taiwan Initiative, and other ministries



About Taiwan

- Same latitude as Hawaii
- Similar in climate
- Some helpful visualizations
- CIA World Factbook
  - ~ 25,000,000 people
  - 95% Chinese descent (Han Dynasty)
  - Indigenous population (16 tribes)
  - 80% urban; 7 million in Taipei
  - Life expectancy 81.6 years
  - Median Age: 45.1 (vs. 38.8 US)
  - Semi-presidential Republic

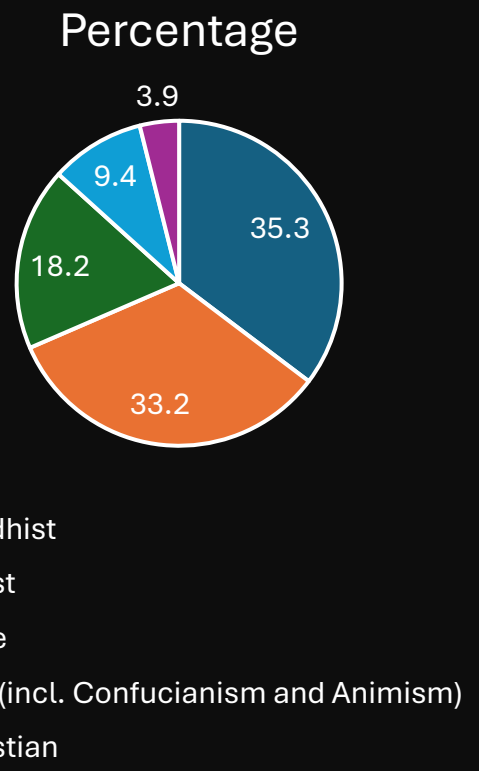


History of Taiwan

- 5000 BC – aboriginal farmers (Taoyuan people)
- 16th Century AD – Dutch & Portuguese (“Formosa”)
- Qing Dynasty settles and rules 1684-1895; Taiwan part of Fujian province until standalone in 1885
- War with Japan; Taiwan ceded as colony
- 1945: Taiwan returns to Republic of China
- 1949: Communists (Mao Zedong) win Chinese Civil War; anti-communists flee to Taiwan
- Chiang Kai-Shek rules 2 million refugees
- 1987: Martial Law finally ends; presidential election in 1996, 1st peaceful transfer 2000

Taiwan Religions

- Not regulated like Mainland China
- Must get a license for new church
- Free to discuss Christian beliefs
- Reach Global
  - Partnership with EFC in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, United States
  - Attempting to plant new EFC church in Taipei
  - Partnering with existing Free Church, using their license to begin ministry
- Valley Church
  - Leased 3-bedroom condo In Taoyuan City (suburb of Taipei near airport)
  - Inviting pastors, missionaries, ministry leaders to stay free of charge and catch vision



Layout of Taipei and Taoyuan







Condo Neighborhood
(+ our contact, Wilson)









Inside and Outside



Ministries Encountered in Taipei

Expected one, discovered four!

- A21 Evangelical Free Church (named after a train stop on the airport line) in Taoyuan City
- Taiwan Initiative staff working with them to plant new multi-lingual church in a different Taipei suburb
- Aroma Coffee Shop (and church); Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA) sponsored
- Homeland Café (and church launching in June); Surge (formerly China Inland Mission now under InterVarsity)
- Northern Seattle Grace Church, EFC, Mandarin/Cantonese/English blend

History of E Free Church in Taiwan (Brochure)











Seasoned Church Moving to the Growing Suburbs

- Mature congregation
- Self-supporting
- Licensed; assisting church planting effort
- Senior Pastor & Intern (Aslan)
- Warm, heartfelt worship
- Fellowship Lunch after
- Small groups during week
- Outreach to parents using Day Care below
- Some English speakers, but service in Mandarin
- Another Rev. 7 experience!

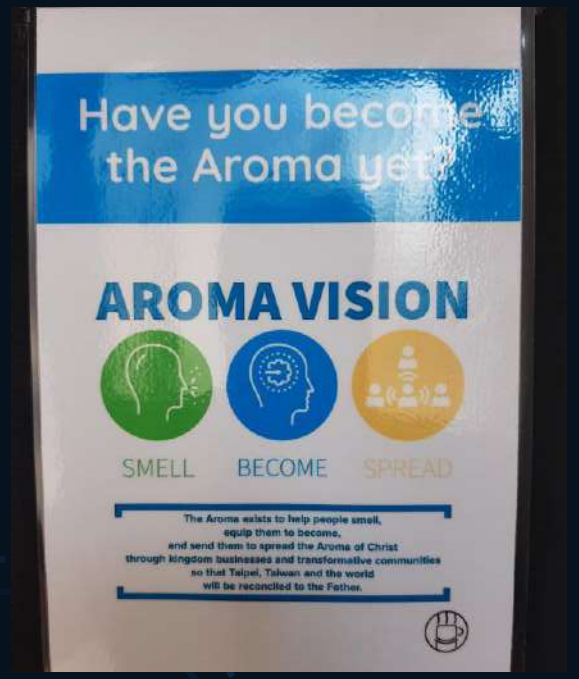
















Coffee with a side of English (+ Sunday church!)

- CMA Church Plant ; began as coffee shop in office building
- Named for 2 Corinthians 2:15 “For we are the aroma of Christ…”
- Senior Pastor (on home visit) with retired couple as subs on a 90 day visa limitation; self-supporting but asked to raise support
- Intern finishing seminary (Andrew); Easter service outdoors
- “English nights” on Tues & Friday; lecture plus vocab & questions
- 20- & 30-somethings eager for English conversation practice.







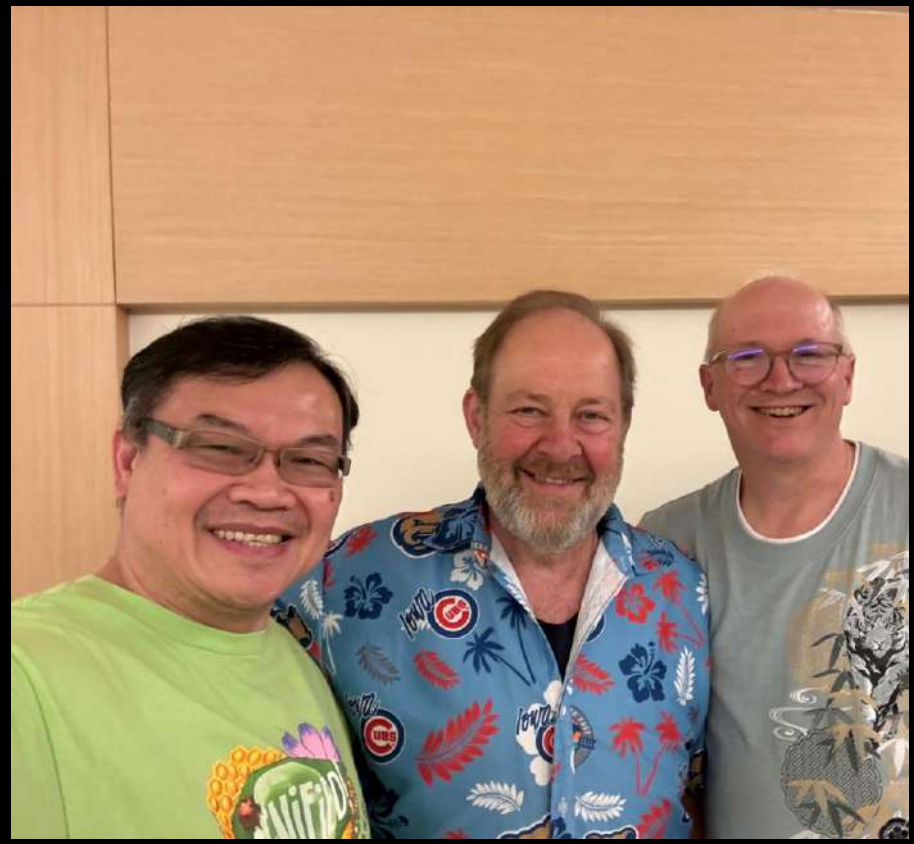


Raise a Family, Run a Café', Start a Church

- Eric (American) there 14 years. Married to Annie (Taiwanese)
- 3 daughters in K-5th
- Rough neighborhood
- Gangs, crime, poverty
- China Inland Mission original agency now rebranded Intervarsity
- Believing neighbors run a pizza place nearby
- Church launch in June

Chinese-American Blended Congregation; Blending Brings 1st Century Problems

- E Free church Northern Seattle
- Cantonese speaking group + Mandarin speaking group + English speaking children
- Hong Kong = Cantonese; Mainland = Mandarin
- Same words but different meanings; cultural divide
  Cantonese = ambitious, free-wheeling, emotional
  Mandarin = traditional, subdued, more passive
- Ken pastors Cantonese group – struggle to unite
- Very like St. Paul's letters to Corinth (Jew vs Gentile)
- Ken from Hong Kong, like Wilson (British passports)
- Visiting A21 E Free church, and aging mother in H.K.



Museums



NATIONAL MUSEUM



CHIANG KAI-SHEK MEMORIAL



TRAINS, TRAINS, TRAINS TO EVERYWHERE

National Museum

- Mythical Animals
- Buddhism / Idols
- Jade Collection













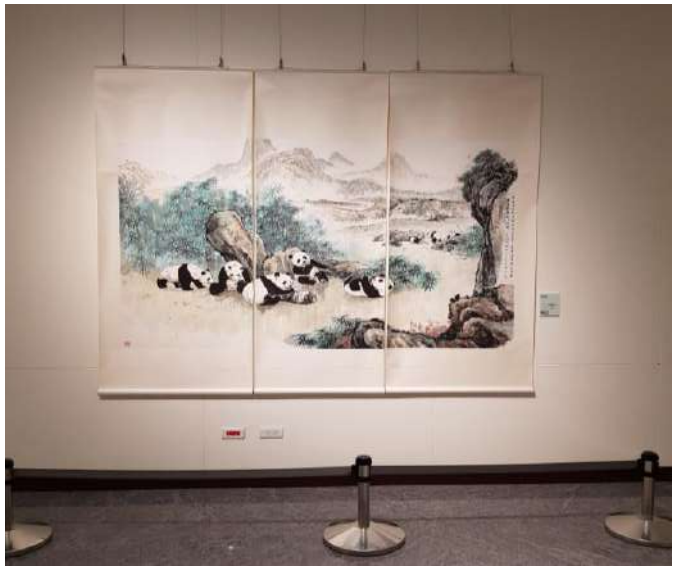




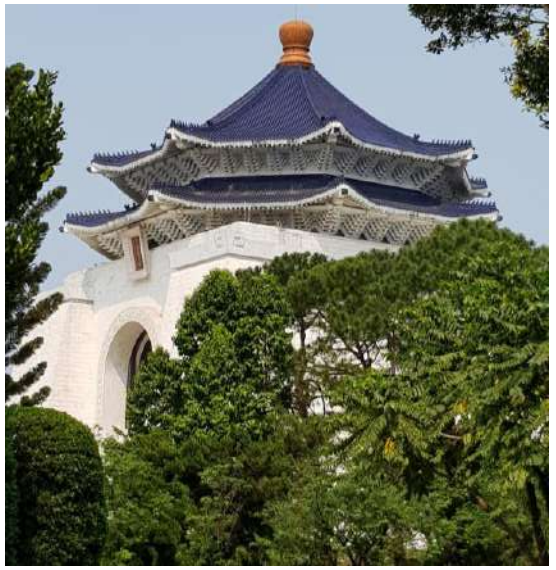


Beauty in the heart of Taipei













Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Park

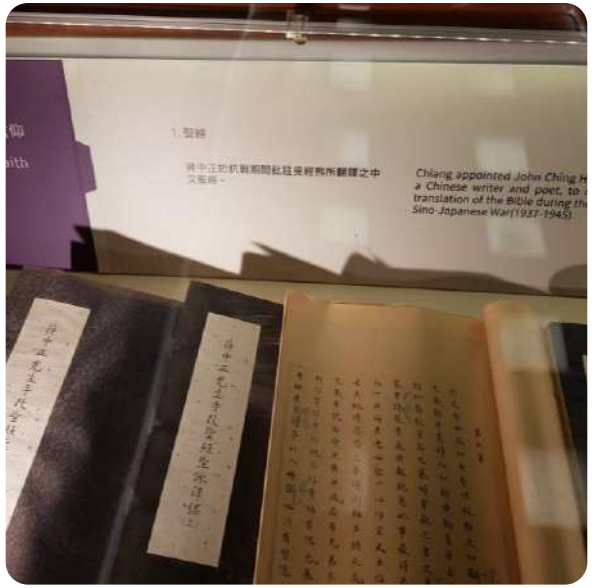
- Polarizing Figure in Taiwanese Politics; both loved and hated
- Virulently Anti-Communist, but an autocratic ruler
- Culture suspicious of state monitoring



Many Sides to Chiang











Trains, trains, and things seen from the trains











Trains, trains, and things seen from the trains











Street Food: Rice, noodle, dumpling and … what? Ick!

- Train Stations
- Night Markets
- Fisherman’s Wharf
- Neighborhood Streets
- Food Court at Outlet Mall
- IKEA Restaurant





Train Station, Church and Neighborhood























Night Markets (E. Coli free with your combo meal)













Fishmarkets (“normal food”)







Fishmarkets (“not so normal” food)

Landmarks and Temples

- Taipei Zoo – Pandas!

- Mountains, Gondolas, Waterfalls and Tea Houses (plantations)

- 101 Tower and Financial District, with Wine Bars & American BBQ















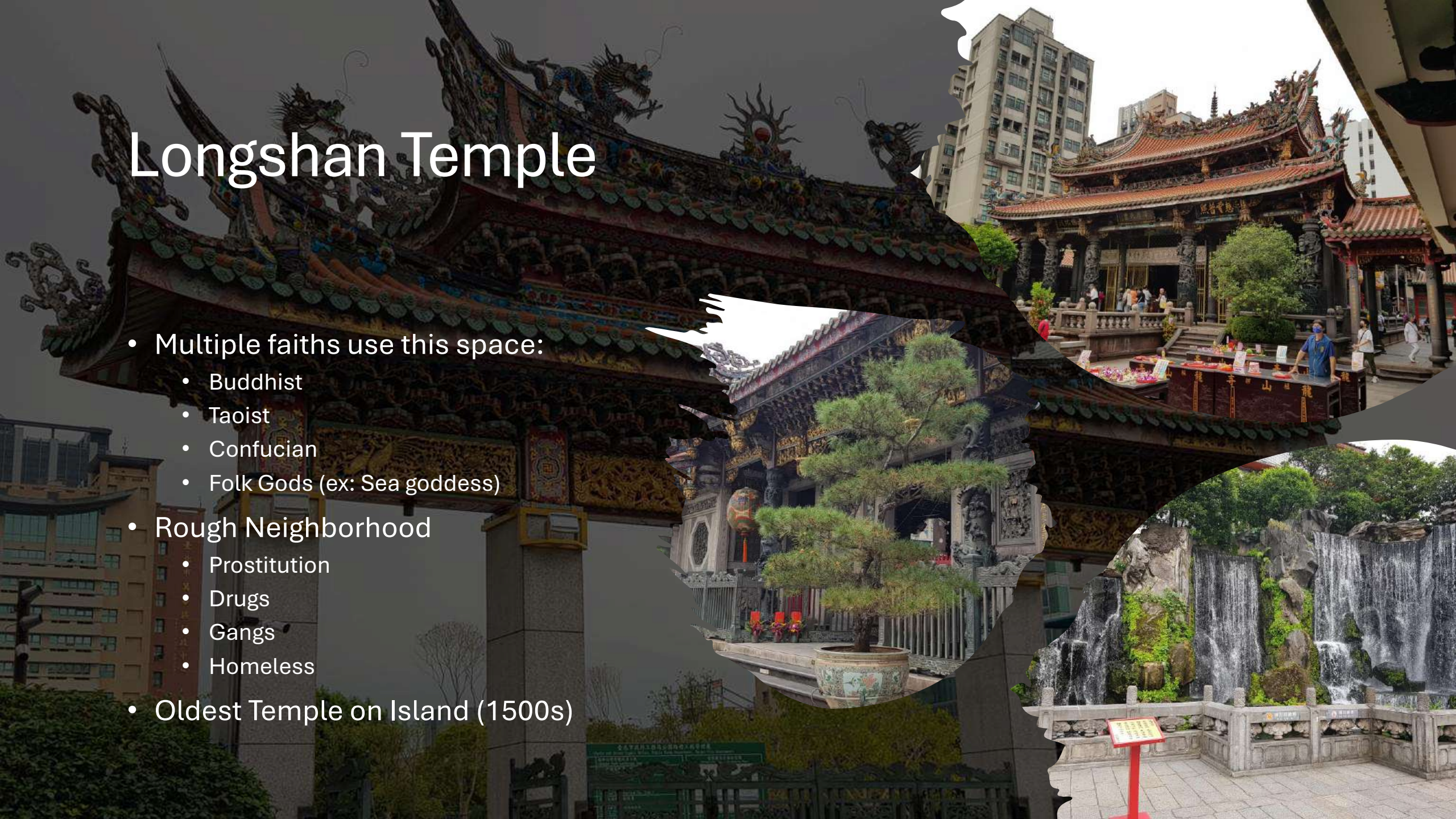




Hipster Downtown and Temples



Longshan Temple



- Multiple faiths use this space:
  - Buddhist
  - Taoist
  - Confucian
  - Folk Gods (ex: Sea goddess)
- Rough Neighborhood
  - Prostitution
  - Drugs
  - Gangs
  - Homeless
- Oldest Temple on Island (1500s)

O Lord, Roll Back the Darkness! Bring Light!









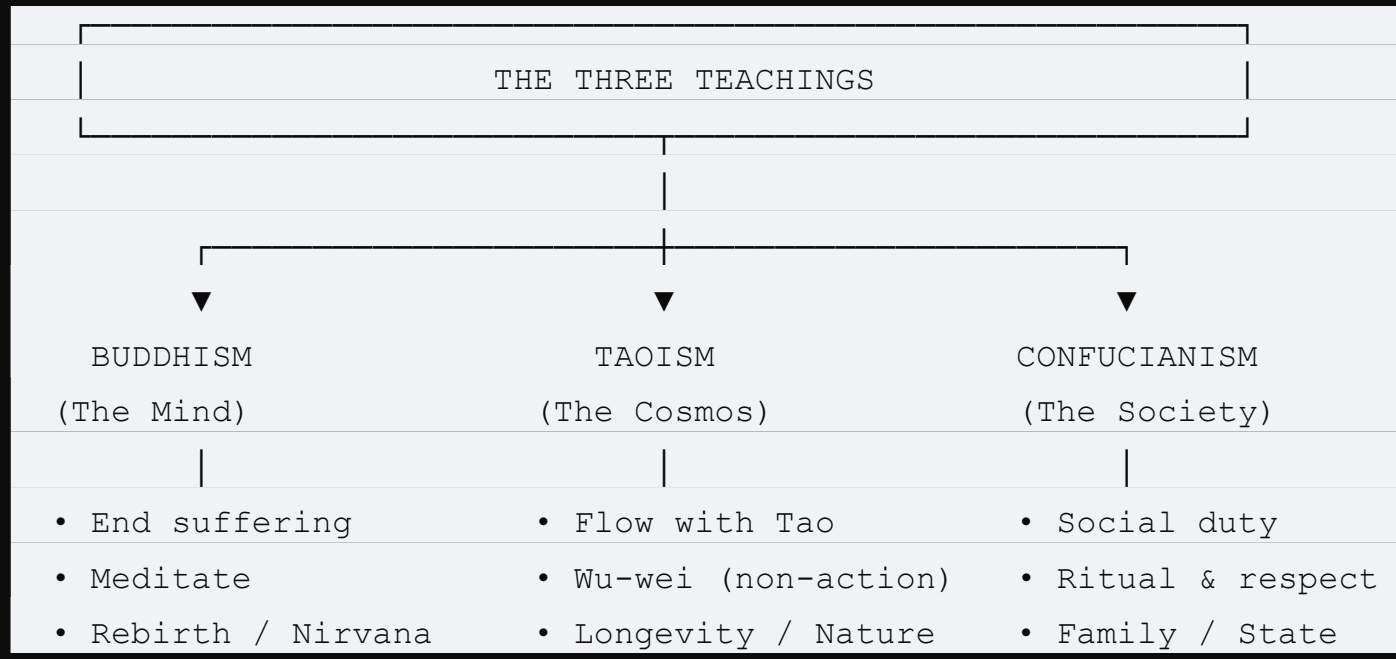


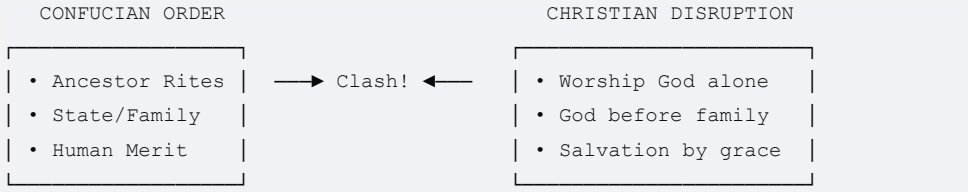




Multiple Faiths – One Temple? How? Syncretism.

- Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism are the "Three Teachings" that shaped East Asian culture.
- Buddhism focuses on **liberation from suffering** via **detachment**
- Taoism emphasizes **harmony with nature** (“the force” in everything)
- Confucianism prioritizes **social order and ethics**
- Saying in China:*“Confucian by day, Taoist by night, Buddhist at death.”*





How Christianity Disrupts East Asian Faiths - Confucianism

- **The Ancestor Controversy:** Confucianism requires filial piety, expressed through bowing and offering food to ancestral tablets. Early Christian missionaries banned this, viewing it as idolatry. This caused massive political outrage, as renouncing ancestor rites was seen as abandoning one's family and state.
- **Loyalty Shifting:** In Confucianism, the highest loyalty belongs to parents and the Emperor. Christianity teaches that the ultimate allegiance belongs strictly to God.
- **Human Nature:** Confucians believe humans are inherently good and can achieve perfection through education and ritual. Christianity introduces the concept of **Original Sin**, stating that humanity is fallen and entirely dependent on divine grace for rescue.

- **The Ultimate Sage:** Christian writers often present Jesus as the perfect *Junzi* (the Confucian ideal gentleman) because of his ultimate self-sacrifice, humility, and moral perfection.
- **The "Helper" Strategy:** A Christian family member may refuse to bow before the ancestral altar but will spend days in the kitchen preparing the elaborate feast for the rest of the family. This demonstrates Confucian love and duty without violating Christian conscience.

How Christianity Disrupts East Asian Faiths - Taoism

- **Translating "The Word":** When the Gospel of John was translated into Chinese, the famous opening line, *"In the beginning was the Word,"* was translated as, *"In the beginning was the **Tao**."* Jesus was presented as the ultimate Tao made flesh.
- During the annual *Qingming* (Tomb Sweeping) Festival, families visit ancestral gravesites to clean the tombs, burn incense, and burn paper money (*joss paper*) for the dead to use in the afterlife. Protestant Christians actively participate in the physical cleaning of the gravesite—scrubbing the headstones and weeding the grounds—**to show filial piety. They place fresh flowers or Christian palm crosses on the grave, hold hands, and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the legacy of their forebears.**

- **Personal God vs. Impersonal Force:** The *Tao* is an indifferent, impersonal cosmic rhythm with no intellect or emotion. Christianity introduces Yahweh: a highly personal, emotional, and relational God who speaks, judges, and loves.
- **The Concept of Sin:** Taoism views illness, chaos, and suffering as an imbalance of natural forces (Yin and Yang) that must be harmonized. Christianity views suffering as the direct result of sin—moral rebellion against a holy Creator.
- **Overcoming Nature:** Taoism seeks longevity or spiritual immortality by flowing *with* nature (*wu-wei*). Christianity teaches that nature itself is broken by sin and that believers must actively resist fleshly desires, looking forward to a brand-new, resurrected heaven and earth.

How Christianity Disrupts East Asian Faiths - Buddhism

- **The Conflict:** While both Christianity and Buddhism focus heavily on the problem of human suffering and life after death, their ultimate goals are completely incompatible.
- **Pressure to Fit In:** Because East Asian societies are deeply communal, a single Christian in a non-Christian family faces intense social pressure. In daily life, individual believers navigate this minefield using highly strategic compromises.
- **Monastic Parallels:** Catholic and Orthodox Christian monastic traditions (monks, nuns, meditation, and fasting) share strong visual and practical similarities with Buddhist monasteries, making them culturally recognizable.

- **Nirvana vs. Heaven:** The ultimate Buddhist goal is *Nirvana*—the extinguishing of the self and the ending of individual consciousness. The Christian goal is *Heaven*—the eternal preservation of the individual soul in a loving relationship with God.
- **Linear vs. Cyclical Time:** Buddhism operates on *Samsara*, an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth governed by Karma. Christianity insists on a linear timeline: you live once, you die once, and then comes the final judgment.
- **The Savior:** In Buddhism, you are your own savior through meditation and the Eightfold Path (though some later sects pray to Bodhisattvas). Christianity completely rejects self-salvation, asserting that Jesus Christ is the *only* bridge to God.

Consequences of Converting to Christianity

Adult children in Taiwan are expected to continue living with parents (even if married with children), often in crowded spaces, and are expected to contribute income to the household and support their grandparents.

For new believers, the family and community they are from can be oppressive to their faith because there is such pressure to conform to societal norms and not bring conflict into the house.

During moments of collective bowing, a Christian family member will remain standing or bow their head in silent, Christian prayer while the rest of the family performs full prostrations to the floor.

As the older generation passes away, younger East Asian Christians who inherit the responsibility of hosting family rituals often systematically phase out the spiritual elements, officially converting them into purely secular, family-reunion dinners. It can be more comfortable socially but suppresses their faith.

10 days in Taiwan - Summary Observations

- There is much darkness, but God is also bringing light to Taipei
- God is using multiple ways to make the Gospel known
- There is an openness to and great interest in the West especially among those under age 40
- English proficiency is seen as advantageous to careers
- Cultural barriers are softening but remain significant, for now
- The Kingdom of God is advancing!



Discussion Questions at Your Tables

1. If you have gone on Mission Trips (short-term or long), where did you go and what did you take away from the experience(s)?

2. If you have given (or still do give) financial support to mission work(ers), where was that work and what did you take away from that experience?

3. If you've done neither… when will you start?

"'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' […] So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:13-17)