

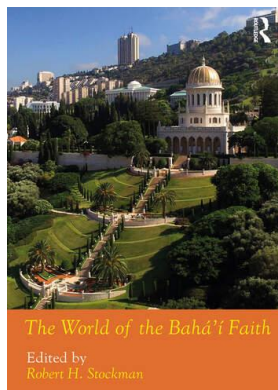
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The World of the Bahá'í Faith

Robert H. Stockman

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Graham Hassall

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NORTHEAST ASIA

Graham Hassall

The establishment and growth of Bahá'í communities in the countries of Northeast Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Macau, Mongolia, and Taiwan) has been influenced by social and religious contexts (principally their Buddhist, Shinto, Daoist, and Confucian traditions) and by tumultuous political and social events throughout the twentieth century (including the rise of nationalist, socialist, and communist thought, independence movements, and military conflict, especially 1937–49). Against this backdrop of warfare, revolution, and intense ideological and territorial contest, Northeast Asian Bahá'í communities have progressed through at least three distinct phases.

The first witnessed the arrival of individual Bahá'ís in China and Hong Kong in the nineteenth century, and in Macau, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea early in the twentieth century. A second phase occurred in 1953–63 as part of the decade-long plan devised by Shoghi Effendi (i.e., the 'world crusade') to complete the spread of the Bahá'í teachings across the globe and to establish the local and national administrative institutions upon which the Universal House of Justice could be formed. In Northeast Asia this resulted in the establishment in 1957 of the Tokyo-based regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of North East Asia, comprising Japan, Korea, Formosa, Macau, Hong Kong, Hainan Island, and Sakhalin Island. A third phase saw the emergence from this regional Assembly of independent national Assemblies in Japan and Korea (1964), Taiwan (1967), and Hong Kong (1974), followed by the gradual elaboration of the communities in their respective social contexts. The emergence of a national Assembly for Hong Kong in 1974 allowed Japan to finally exist as an independent national Assembly.

Political circumstances in China, Mongolia, and Sakhalin led to different paths for those Bahá'í communities. Government control over organized religion in China following the Chinese Communist Party's 1949 revolution required the Bahá'ís resident there, in obedience to the law of the land, to practice their beliefs individually rather than as a community, a circumstance that has continued to the present time (Palmer 2009, 2012). In Mongolia, severe restrictions on entry by foreigners meant that little exposure to the Bahá'í Faith was possible until changes in government policy c. 1990, after which time a community was rapidly established and a national Assembly formed as soon as 1994. Sakhalin Island, a Russian territory, was similarly impossible to access until restrictions on entry by foreigners was eased in the early 1990s.

Origins to 1953

In the period up to 1953 small Bahá'í communities were established in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Formosa (later Taiwan), and Korea.

China

The pace of diffusion of the Bahá'í teachings in China was shaped by circumstances created by the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912, the Republican era, civil unrest and revolution, and then the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have expressed a desire to visit Kashgar—and even to have secured a passport with the intention of setting out on this journey alone—but was prevented from leaving 'Akká by Ibrahim Pasha ('The Bahá'í Cause and the Chinese People' 1922). The Persian Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání is reported to have travelled through Russia to China and Kashgar (Chinese Turkistan) in the 1880s, but few details of his activities have been documented (Mehrabkhani 1981).

Wan and Palmer trace the introduction of Bahá'í teachings to China through a 'cosmopolitan nexus', an 'interconnected web of networks—intellectual reformers, liberal Christians, Esperantists, Confucian modernizers, redemptive society activities, and socialists—that shared overlapping cosmopolitan ideals' (Wan and Palmer 2019: 1790). Chinese citizens who encountered the Bahá'í teachings while resident or travelling in the West for education or conferences included University of Chicago student Chen Hai An (Harold A. Chen); T. J. Chwang, who attended meetings in Chicago before returning to Shanghai in 1916; and Chan S. Liu, who returned from Cornell University to Canton (Guangzhou) about 1921 and became President of the Agricultural College at Sun Yat-sen University. A group of Chinese students were introduced to the Bahá'í principles by Agnes Alexander during a study visit to Japan about 1922 (Redman forthcoming).

Persian Bahá'í merchants who settled in Shanghai from 1914 included Mehdi Rashti, Ali-Hasanoff, H. A. Uskuli, and Hossein Touty (who subsequently also resided in Vladivostok and Mindanao before returning to live for an extended period in Shanghai). Early Western resident Bahá'ís include Bernice Wood, in Shanghai from 1945. Western Bahá'ís who promoted the Bahá'í teachings in China prior to 1949 included Charles Mason Remey, Agnes Alexander, Keith Ransom-Kehler, Martha Root, Hippolyte Dreyfus, Laura Dreyfus-Barney, Raymond Frank Piper, and Mark Tobey (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*). In the course of four visits (1923–24, 1930, and 1937) Root spoke in some 100 universities, colleges, and schools, placed literature in libraries, and presented the Bahá'í teachings to such prominent figures as Sun Yat-sen, President of China, and Dr Y. S. Tsao, President of Tsinghua University (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 386–87; Root 1933).

Holley reported in his 'Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities in the East and West' (Holley 1933: 89) for the period 1930–32 that:

The Cause in China has not yet developed to the point of elective Assemblies; the activities are maintained through the devoted loyalty of a few, but by these few the knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh has been made to penetrate far into the consciousness of the educated class.

The first Chinese Bahá'ís were from the intellectual class, and rapidly produced an initial body of literature. Y. S. Tao translated into Chinese various Bahá'í Writings as well as Esslemont's

Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, and published articles in both the Western Bahá'í press ('The Unity of Civilization' in Bahá'í Yearbook 1925–26: 141–47; 'China's Tribute to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh' in *Bahá'í World* 1933: 420–24) and in Chinese newspapers such as *The North China Daily News*. Tsao's introduction to Esslemont is published in *The Bahá'í World* 1933 (424–27) along with that of Rev. K. T. Chung (427–28). Uskuli established a magazine with articles in Persian, English, and Chinese. Additional publications in Shanghai included *Light of the Age* (1926), *The Most Great Peace*, *Paris Talks*, and *The Goal of a New World Order* (all in 1931). *Some Answered Questions*, translated by Chan S. Liu at the request of Shoghi Effendi, was printed in 1940. Two thousand copies of *The Hidden Words*, with an introduction by Mr Liang, chief secretary of the Legislative Yuan, were printed in 1937, and *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* was ready for the press at the time war broke out in August 1937 (Root 1939).

Although there were Bahá'í communities in Canton and Shanghai, the tense political atmosphere necessitated the relocation or emigration of their members. Uskuli insisted on remaining in Shanghai after the 1949 communist revolution, and died there in February 1956 at age 82 (Suleimani and Suleimani 1970). This cosmopolitan period of the Chinese Bahá'í community was capped by the story of Hilda Yen, Chinese representative to the League of Nations and aviator, who upon becoming a Bahá'í became a founding member of the Office of the Bahá'í International Community, the NGO accredited with the United Nations in 1948 (Wan and Palmer 2019).

Hong Kong

Persian Bahá'ís arrived in Hong Kong (a small island then under British rule on China's southern coast) during the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh to expand a trading empire that Balyuzi (1985, 121) described as 'stretching from Hong Kong to Bákú'. Among them were Hájí Mírzá Buzurg-i-Afnán, a cousin of the Báb; Áqá Mírzá Ibrahim; and Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials*). Pei Tswi, Manager of the Bank of China (about whom little else is known), is listed as the Bahá'í representative in Hong Kong in the 1920s. The only other Chinese Bahá'í known to have resided in Hong Kong prior to 1939, Liu Chan Song, who encountered the Bahá'í Faith while studying at Cornell University, later moved to Kweilin (Quilin), Kwongsi in China. Beginning in 1960, American Bahá'í Bernice Wood, who had lived in Shanghai before 1949, then Bangkok, resided in Hong Kong for nearly three decades.

Early Bahá'í visitors to Hong Kong included Howard Struven and Mason Remey (1910) Agnes Alexander (1923), Lorol Schopflocher (1924), Siegfried Schopflocher (1927), Keith Ransom-Kehler (1932), and Mark Tobey and Bernard Leach (1934). Martha Root was the first to undertake an extensive public teaching campaign. In 1924 and again in 1930 she met prominent citizens and academics, spoke on radio and at the University of Hong Kong, and published 'Long articles about the Bahá'í Teachings in all the leading papers of Hong Kong' (Holley 1933: 95).

Taiwan

In the case of Formosa (Taiwan), early members of the Taiwanese Bahá'í community included migrants from North America (Mr Chu Yao Lung, Mr M. S. Yuan, and Mr Tien Lee Chien) or from mainland China (Mr H. C. Yuan). Local Assemblies were established in Tainan in 1956 and Taipei in 1958, and this small but active community convened its first teaching conferences and summer schools, and commenced translating and publishing Bahá'í literature right away (Sims 1994).

Japan

The first Japanese Bahá'ís encountered the Bahá'í teachings outside Japan: Kanichi Yamamoto in Hawaii in 1902 and Saichiro Fujita in California in 1905. Fujita subsequently served both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi in Haifa before returning to Japan in 1938, then again returning to Haifa in 1955 (*Bahá'í World* 1981: 406). Early Western Bahá'í travellers to Japan included Mason Remey and Howard Struven (1909) and Martha Root (1930, 1937). Agnes Alexander resided in Tokyo from 1914 until the earthquake of September 1923. Within this overwhelmingly Shinto and Buddhist society, the Bahá'í community expanded by small stages. There was some affinity with the teachings of Onisaburō, leader of the Omoto religious community, which espoused world peace, federalism, and the use of Esperanto as a world auxiliary language (Stalker 2018). In 1916 Mr Tokujiro Torii translated and published Bahá'í Writings in Braille and Esperanto. From 1921 Miss Mochizuki (later Mrs Yuri Furukawa) edited a Bahá'í magazine, *Star of the East*. Contact was made with the nation's political and intellectual leaders: in 1929 *The Bahá'í World*, vol. II (for 1926–28) was presented to the Emperor of Japan; in 1932 Chikao Fujisawa, a member of the Secretariat of the League of Nations and Chair of International Politics at Kyushu Imperial University, spoke about the Faith in Tokyo.

Alexander was successful in getting Bahá'í articles into Japan's English-language newspaper *Japan Times and Mail* (*Bahá'í News*, Feb. 1930: 7), and she participated in the first national religious conference of Japan, held in Tokyo (*Bahá'í News*, Nov. 1928: 2). Ransom-Kehler followed up on connections made by Root when she visited Japan for five weeks in 1931 (*Bahá'í News*, Sept. 1931: 6). Although a local Spiritual Assembly was established in Tokyo in 1932 (comprising five women and four men, seven of whom were Japanese), the 1930s were challenging years for the community. Alexander departed in 1933. Martha Root visited in 1937, just before the advent of war. Post-war, the community's re-emergence was assisted by the arrival in 1947 of Japanese American Bahá'í Robert Imagire and other pioneers. Tokyo's Spiritual Assembly was re-established in 1950 (*Bahá'í World* 1950: 593).

Korea

In Korea, the Bahá'í community was similarly established under difficult social and political circumstances. Agnes Alexander first visited Seoul in 1921 while the country was under Japanese occupation (1910–45), but managed to publish articles in Japanese, Korean, and English newspapers and to attract to the teachings a number of young men, who immediately wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá to express their faith. Alexander hosted the first Bahá'í Feast in Seoul on 9 September 1921 (*Bahá'í World* 1926: 122). She visited Korea again in 1923.

Summary

Thus, by 1953, there were Bahá'í adherents in cities across China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. However, prospects for Bahá'í community life were often hampered by the social and political conditions. They were as likely to be connected to Bahá'í friends and institutions internationally as locally, and their local institutions and community activities were yet to be established.

1953–63

The Ten Year Crusade (1953–63), conceived by Shoghi Effendi to complete the tasks given to the Bahá'í world by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His fourteen Tablets of the Divine Plan written in 1916 and 1917, drew the Bahá'í communities of Northeast Asia together to pursue a set of shared

goals in a post-war world of rehabilitation and reconstruction. Progress in this important decade varied between the countries, however, particularly where peace processes were incomplete or had become frozen within the newly established United Nations organization.

At the time of the formation of the Tokyo-based regional Spiritual Assembly in 1957 there were approximately 16 Bahá'ís in Hong Kong, 40 in Korea, 140 in Japan, 9 in Macau, and 21 in Taiwan. This included the Azizi, Earl, Datwani, Katirai, Kazempour, Labib, Moghbel, Momtazi, Marangella, Rafat, Schreiber, Sims, Smits, Tehrani, Vahdat, and other families who entered the region in the 1950s and stayed long-term. In mainland China, China's Bahá'ís did not have formal Bahá'í administration after 1949, and all traces of Bahá'í activity ceased during the Mao era (Palmer 2012). Between 1979 and 1999 small numbers of mainland Chinese became Bahá'ís, mainly when living and studying abroad, or through connection with foreign Bahá'ís living in China (Palmer 2012).

In Hong Kong, pioneers arrived from Britain, India, Iran, and Canada, and following the declaration of some young men in the territory, an Assembly was established in 1956. It was legally registered in 1958. In Taiwan, following the arrival of the Suleimani family, the first local Spiritual Assembly was established in 1956. The Bahá'í community expanded from ten members in 1954 to 488 by 1968 (Palmer 2012).

The island of Macau, close to Hong Kong, was a Portuguese Overseas Province with no resident Bahá'ís when it was assigned to the North American Bahá'ís in 1953. Frances Heller arrived from San Francisco on 20 October 1953, followed by Carl and Loretta Scherer, who arrived from Milwaukee on 8 December 1953. All three were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh (a title given to someone opening a territory for the first time during the Ten Year Crusade). In May 1954 the Azizis arrived, seeking a way to reach another of the remote goals, Hainan island. The first resident of Macau to become a Bahá'í, in July 1954, was Harry Yim, originally from Canton. Other Macauans also joined and a local Assembly was established in 1958. When the Scherers left Macau in January 1959, there were eight Bahá'ís in the colony (a number insufficient to elect a nine-member Spiritual Assembly), and no foreign pioneers. Hong Kong Bahá'ís visited regularly and an Assembly was periodically re-established, including in 1963.

The Chinese island of Hainan, to the southwest of Hong Kong, proved even more challenging to reach. In 1959 John Z. T. Chang spent two weeks on the island and was consequently named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh (Sims 1994), but little is known of the subsequent activities of that Bahá'í community. There was no prospect during this period of Bahá'ís reaching the Russian territory of Sakhalin Island.

Japan's small Bahá'í community required rehabilitation in the post-war period. Barbara Sims, an American who had grown up in Japan in a Christian missionary family, returned to live there in 1953 and remained until her passing in 2002 (Sims 2020). The community grew by small stages. A second local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) was established in Hyogo-ken (adjoining Osaka) in 1954, and by 1963 the Japanese community comprised 13 LSAs, with Bahá'ís spread thinly across the country in approximately 50 other localities.

Challenging post-war conditions also existed in South Korea, where a local Spiritual Assembly was first established in 1956. North American Bahá'ís arrived as pioneers from 1953, including John McHenry, who settled in Kwanju in 1957 to teach at Chosun University. The community expanded to over 2,000 members toward the end of the World Crusade, partly due to Hand of the Cause Dr Muhajir's 1963 visit (*Bahá'í World* 1970: 304).

1964–2021

From 1964 to 2021 the Bahá'í communities in Northeast Asia focused on a series of plans having domestic and regional objectives, which gradually moved from quantitative to qualitative

objectives. The first of these plans, from 1964 to 1973, comprised eleven major goals focused on increasing the number of localities with Bahá'ís, local Spiritual Assemblies, and national Spiritual Assemblies; strengthening legal recognition of Bahá'í communities through recognition of Bahá'í marriage and Bahá'í Holy Days) and legal incorporation of local Spiritual Assemblies and national Spiritual Assemblies); acquiring properties for future Hazíratu'l-Qúds (Bahá'í centres), and Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs (temples); translating Bahá'í literature; and opening up the region's remaining territories with no resident Bahá'ís (Sakhalin, the Ryukyu islands, the Ogasawara Islands, and Mongolia). Additional national Assemblies were subsequently established in Korea (1964), Taiwan (1967), Hong Kong (1974), and Japan (1974), by means of separation from the regional Assembly, which had its seat in Tokyo. Although many of these goals were quantitative, they were a necessary next phase if the Bahá'í teachings were to be sufficiently widespread to take root in such conservative societies.

Into the 1980s, regular visits were made to the region by Hands of the Cause Samandarí, Robarts, Faizí, Furútan, Muhájir, Featherstone, and Rúhíyyih Khánum, on such occasions as international conferences (Nikko, 1955; Sapporo, 1971; Hong Kong 1976), the formation of new regional or national Assemblies; or other consultations with Bahá'í communities and their institutions. Visits by members of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Asia were also significant events in the life of these communities.

China

From the late 1980s, growth of the Bahá'í Faith in China was stimulated through business and educational connections (Wan and Palmer 2019). Some links were established between academics at Beijing University and Landegg Academy in Switzerland. In 1995 there were approximately 150 Bahá'ís in Beijing, with many others scattered around the country. New members included prominent musicians, scholars, and business people, including entrepreneur Zhang Xin (Yuan 2011). The presence of Bahá'ís was well known to the government through official interactions domestically, as well as through such events as media coverage and through visits by Chinese diplomats and film crews to the Bahá'í World Centre (*Bahá'í World* 2004–05: 158; *Bahá'í World* 2001–02: 140). Relations with government were mediated through the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)—an arrangement which is also in place for Hong Kong and Macau—and which has included joint conferences on building harmony and social development, principles that are central to the Bahá'í teachings and also important to the government (Palmer 2009).

Hong Kong

From the 1970s Hong Kong's Bahá'í community expanded with the assistance of active pioneers from Malaysia who included Yin Hong Shuen, Teh Tiek Hoe, and Richard T. K. Lee. Hong Kong's second local Assembly was formed in 1967, on Victoria Island, and the original Assembly was renamed Kowloon. A third Assembly was subsequently formed at Shatin. At this time the community decided that a more broad-based approach to teaching was required, and from 1971 it distributed materials and advertised public meetings among specific islands, rural areas, college campuses, urban areas, civic organizations, and even the communities of boat people. For a number of years the community also convened the Hong Kong Bahá'í Professional Forum. In 1974 a 'national' Spiritual Assembly for Hong Kong and Macau was established on a foundation of five local Spiritual Assemblies—an event which, in turn instigated more detailed plans of action in subsequent years. In 1974 Rúhíyyih Khánum attended Hong Kong's first national

convention as the representative of the Universal House of Justice. By 1991 there were 22 local Spiritual Assemblies in Hong Kong.

According to Palmer, the community comprised some 2,000 members by the late 1980s, but at the commencement of the twenty-first century only some 200 were regular participants. Since that time, transition from a 'congregational mindset' to 'small group community building', based on adoption of grass-roots study circles has gradually expanded the base, and 'blurred' the distinction between the categories 'Bahá'í' and 'non-Bahá'í', indicating a shift toward a more inclusive pattern of social integration (Palmer 2012).

Macau

In 1974 Macau became part of the national Spiritual Assembly of Hong Kong and Macau. Membership had increased to more than 50, and a Bahá'í centre was purchased. Additional local Assemblies were established in 1984 and 1988, and Macau established its own national Assembly in 1989. In 2020 the size of the community was reported as 2,000 (Jing et al. 2020). The community has focused on educational development. The junior youth program *Walking the Straight Path* was developed in Macau (*Bahá'í World* 2004–05: 256). The Badi Foundation, established in 1990, has by 2021 developed several socio-economic development projects both in Macau and on the mainland (Jing et al. 2020). The largest of these, the 'School of the Nations' (www.schoolofthenations.com), has expanded from a modest pre-school program into a full secondary curriculum for 650 students and 100 teachers, operating from a seven-storey purpose-built facility completed in 2008 with government support (<https://news.bahai.org/story/460/>).

Taiwan

A national Spiritual Assembly for Taiwan was established in 1967, and the government officially recognized the Bahá'í Faith as a religion in 1970. The Faith's legal name in Chinese remained 'Ta Tong Giao' ([Datong jiao] Religion of Great Harmony) until 1992 (Bahá'í International News Service, 271: 6). Mass teaching campaigns directly inspired by Rúhíyyih Khánum's September 1988 visit resulted in over 20,000 enrolments. Although the number of active members may have decreased subsequently through lack of consolidation of the new members (Palmer 2012), in 2010 there were a reported 16,000 adherents (members and others who associate with the Bahá'í community) (www.thearda.com/QL2010/QuickList_40.asp). A decision taken by some fifty English-speaking pioneers at a conference in 2000 that all Bahá'í meetings use Mandarin rather than English resulted in higher levels of community engagement. The national Spiritual Assembly of Taiwan established a Bahá'í Office of the Environment for Taiwan in 1990, which contributed actively to environmental education for the next decade.

Japan

By the 1990s the Japanese Bahá'í community included a number of pioneers from America, Iran, Australia, and elsewhere, many working as English-language teachers, academics, or scientists. Amongst the Japanese Bahá'ís were such remarkable members as Kimiko Schwerin, who served on the regional Assembly for North East Asia until appointed as an Auxiliary Board member in 1974, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in 1990, and in 1993 the first Asian member of the International Teaching Centre. A Japanese Association for Bahá'í Studies fostered studies on the correlations between the Bahá'í teachings and Japanese culture through, for example, annual conferences in Sapporo on 'the prosperity of Humankind' and in

Yokohama on 'Japanese Traditions and Moral Education' (*Bahá'í World* 2005–06: 62). There was some engagement in interreligious dialogue, such as with the Airaku church in 2001 (*Bahá'í World* 2001–02: 110), and there were periodic events such as youth dance workshops that visited several Japanese cities. Much of the community's outreach, however, continued to take place through individual friendships. In 2010 there were a reported 16,000 adherents (www.thearda.com/QL2010/QuickList_40.asp).

Korea

There is no information on Bahá'í connections in North Korea. In South Korea, however, a small community has gradually taken root and obtained official status. By the mid-1970s recognition was obtained for Bahá'í marriage and holy days. In 2010, there were some 200 active Bahá'ís in eight major cities. An English-language press article described the Bahá'í community as 'small but vibrant' (*Korea Herald* 2010).

Sakhalin and Mongolia

At the beginning of the 1990s Bahá'ís were first able to enter Sakhalin island and Mongolia, two destinations with highly restrictive entry requirements. Japanese residents Abbas and Rezvanieh Katirai arrived on Sakhalin in 1990 and remained for five years (*Bahá'í World* 2001–02: 306); and British/Australian student Sean Hinton arrived in Mongolia in December 1988, having won a scholarship from the British Council to study Mongolian flute music. The arrival of these pioneers at these remaining 'virgin' goals completed the tasks for the Ten Year Crusade that Shoghi Effendi set in 1953, and their names were inscribed on a 'role of honour' of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh that was buried at the threshold of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in May 1992 during ceremonies marking the centenary of the passing of the Faith's founder.

Drastic political change in Mongolia in 1990 included expansion of religious freedom. The Bahá'í community grew at extraordinary speed and a national Spiritual Assembly was established in 1994. Within a decade the community was convening international events in addition to its normal Bahá'í community gatherings. In June 2001, for instance, the Mongolian Bahá'í Doctor's Association collaborated with Health for Humanity to hold the first Bahá'í International Health Conference in Ulaanbaatar (*Bahá'í World* 2001–02: 80).

Summary

In terms of adherents, the World Religion Database estimates that there were 27,800 Bahá'ís in Eastern Asia in 1970. By 2000 there were 70,700, and by 2020 there were 75,700 (Johnson & Crossing, 2020: 24–25). This was an increase of 3.6% per year during the 30 years from 1970 to 2000 but a slow-down in growth between 2000 and 2020. Throughout, the size of the community has remained at less than 0.01% of the population at large.

However, since early in the twenty-first century, and in keeping with a global approach, emphasis has been placed on the quality of Bahá'í activities and their ability to reach well beyond the Bahá'í community, more than on numerical increases in adherents and institutions. Thus, the Bahá'í communities in Northeast Asia have focused on developing four core activities: children's classes, junior youth programs, study circles, and devotional activities. These core activities, which have replaced institutional growth figures as key statistical indicators, provide platforms for connecting Bahá'í communities with a broader 'community of interest' at local and national levels, in addition to cultivating their spiritual and intellectual life. In December 2020, official

figures for East Asia show a total of 4,308 participants in 1,308 activities—the smallest scope of activities among the ten regions surveyed across the globe (Universal House of Justice 2020).

Both the history and activities of the Bahá'í communities of Northeast Asia are numerically small—particularly in the context of the large nations of which they are a part—but they have attracted scholarly attention, which commenced with historical surveys and has recently focused on sociological investigations. Histories of the Bahá'í communities of Japan, Macau, South Korea, and Taiwan were published by Barbara Sims (Sims 1989, 1991, 1992, 1998). In China, Cai Degui established a Bahá'í research centre at Shandong University in 1996 (Cai 2005, 2010, 2018, 2016). Other academic investigations includes Vermander and Hingley's recent examination of Bahá'í life in Shanghai, which proceeds under guidelines set by Shanghai's religious affairs bureau (Vermander and Hingley 2018). In their examination of Bahá'í practice in Macau, Professors Jing, Zhu, and Han refer to the 'practice of humanitarian spiritual belief', which they interpret as a blending of Bahá'í spiritual beliefs and social practices with a contemporary hermeneutic appealing to the modern Asian mentality:

The importance of religious authority, standardized way of belief, dogma and form is declining day by day, while the authority of personal things, internal feelings, individual experience and current 'life' is on the rise (Heelas 2002). The reality is likely to be that there are fewer and fewer clearly visible forms of religious belief, but more and more invisible religions exist outside the formal religious institutions. This is 'believing without becoming' in the real sense (Hunt 2005). As one example of this broader trend, the Bahá'í in Macau illustrates how religious principles operate invisibly but powerfully through service to others (Jing et al. 2020: 13).

This survey of Bahá'í communities in the nations and territories of Northeast Asia suggested three phases of development, commencing with individual contacts made either in-country or overseas, followed by the arrival of Bahá'í pioneers prepared to adapt to local language, culture, and traditions. These efforts were rewarded by the response of small numbers of local Bahá'ís, whose support allowed for the establishment of local and national Bahá'í institutions. After several decades of relative anonymity as a religious community, recognition was given in a variety of ways, including legal status, interfaith dialogue, and broader engagement with the public through projects in the arts, social and economic development, and scholarship. In recent years these Bahá'í communities, notwithstanding the restraints they experienced within each country, have adapted and adopted local community-building strategies that are providing the basis for Bahá'í activities worldwide, in order to bring the Bahá'í principles to bear not only on their internal functioning, but on the social networks with which they have established relationships.

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