

The Impact of Jesus on Asia
Asian Christians
Mako A. Nagasawa

This Tuesday, we'll be hearing our very own budding Broadway performers play the parts of the Apostle Thomas, Pandita Rambai (considered the greatest woman of India of her time), Queen Liliuokalani (the last reigning monarch of Hawaii before the U.S. took it over), Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (considered the father of modern China), Ahn Chang-Ho (one of the defenders of Korea and architect of the Korean Declaration of Independence), Benigno and Corazon Aquino (the couple who were instrumental in the overthrow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines), and a Vietnamese Christian who shall remain nameless for now due to danger from the government. What do all these people have in common? They all gave their lives to Jesus, and were used by him in amazing ways. Come hear what they have to say about whether Christianity is a "western religion" or not.

Cast

Narrator

Thomas

Pandita Ramabai

Queen Liliuokalani

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen

Philip Ahn

Benigno & Cory Aquino

Anonymous Vietnamese Christian

Narrator: Tonight we're going to consider the question 'Do we believe a white man's religion?' But we're going to do it through an unusual way. We're going to hear stories told by Christians in Asia, some of whom you have known, and others you may not know. After these people tell their stories, we'll break up into smaller groups and have an opportunity to discuss it for ourselves.

Thomas: My name is Thomas. I'm Jewish. People called me 'doubting Thomas' because I doubted Jesus a few times. As if no one else did! But you know, Jesus appeared to me, *just for me*, and invited *me* to touch the holes in his hands and his side. I knew at that moment that Jesus is *my* Lord and *my* God. Jesus is God in the flesh, and He came to restore us to God.

But after Jesus rose up to heaven and gave us his Spirit, a number of years later, we all decided to split up the known world. I got to head east. Did you know that you could sail from Egypt to India in 40 days' time sailing on the South West Monsoon winds?¹ Amazing! I got off the ship on the coast of India. It was another world! [with a hungry look] So these were the fantastic spices that drew traders from all over Greece and Rome, Turkey [Asia] and Syria! Roman ships filled with gold would come here just to buy spices. Boy, did I eat some good food! Sag paneer and tandoori chicken with nan bread...mmmmm.

But I noticed that some people didn't eat much. They were part of the lower castes, and some were called 'untouchables.' I began to talk about the love of Jesus, who cleanses us all. Slowly a small Christian community formed in a region called Kerala. We worshiped Jesus. I had some background as a builder and an architect of sorts, and eventually the local prince entrusted me to build a small palace for him. It was amazing to be entrusted with a project like that. He told me I could borrow money from the treasury to do it. So...I did. But as soon as I left the treasury, I saw beggars and the 'untouchables'. So I gave them the money! How could I not? I felt Jesus, who lived in me by his Spirit, move in my heart to be generous towards them.

Well this happened a few times. The prince's father, the king of that area, became upset that I had borrowed so much money without building the palace. But at around the same time, the king's only son died. The body of that young prince was going to be put on the funeral pyre for burning according to Hindu custom. But I remember what Jesus did when he met people who had died. I said, 'He's not dead, but only is asleep.' Some people laughed, some people just looked up with a surprised look on their face. I took the lifeless hand and told the young man to get up. Jesus raised that young man back to life. He got up and told his father that in the heavenly world I, Thomas, had built a beautiful palace for the king, made up of all the people who came to Jesus. And all the money from the treasury went towards the poor.

Narrator: Thomas landed in Cranganore, India in 52 A.D. Over the course of 20 years, Thomas formed, visited and encouraged small village communities again and again. He founded seven churches at different centers in Kerala on the Malabar Coast. These Christians became the foundation of the Church in India and are known as St. Thomas Christians even today. In 1498, when the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama landed on the Malabar coast, there were an estimated two million Christians across the land, and they had 1,500 churches.

Throughout Kerala, you can find Christian families that are proud to claim descent from ancestors who were baptized by Thomas, and songs that speak of these traditions. Today, Kerala is now a very unusual state in India. About 30% of its population is Christian. The caste system is downplayed and in some places non-existent. According to metrics defined by the United Nations, if Kerala were its own country, it would rank sixth in the world in terms of quality of life, judging by literacy, infant mortality, degree of equality and inequality, and life expectancy. This is the impact of Jesus.

¹ according to the first century annals of Pliny the Elder and the author of Periplus of the Erythraean sea.

Pandita Ramabai: My name is Pandita Ramabai. I grew up in India. My father longed for inward peace. In his search for it, he traveled from shrine to temple to sacred site, hoping to appease the gods. Before long, his money, jewels, and lands were gone, wasted on gifts to idols. When the money ran out, the priests no longer smiled at us. We went hungry. On cold nights my brother and I buried ourselves in sand, lacking even a blanket. We were full of doubt, hungry for truth, and starving--but too high-caste to beg or work. The one bright spot in my life was the love of my father who insisted I learn Sanskrit. In a land where women were reckoned lower than pigs, he took abuse for this decision. But I vindicated him; before I was twenty I could quote 18,000 verses of the Purana from memory and knew five languages.

After my father died of starvation, still without peace, my mother and older sister also died. With my brother, I continued the pilgrimages. Four thousand miles later, 'after years of fruitless service we began to lose our faith' in the Hindu gods.

Finally we dropped our quest and settled in Calcutta. Local Hindu scholars, astonished at what I knew, asked me to lecture to high-caste women on their Hindu duties. They nicknamed me 'Pandita,' meaning 'learned.' I studied the sacred writings, but couldn't make sense of them. They agreed only that women were worse than demons. I could not believe this because my father had taught me otherwise. I started an organization to improve the lot of India's women, especially widows, who were often enslaved, forced into prostitution--or burned to death.

I was sure that God was prompting me to go to England, so I went. In England I committed my life to Jesus and was baptized. After training in the United States, I returned to India to educate Hindu girls and work among widows. My efforts were funded by an American Christian committee. I claimed to be religiously neutral but I read the bible and prayed at 5 in the morning, and left my door open. The women investigated the rumor of Jesus for themselves and they also began to follow him. But since my fellow Indians withdrew their support, from 1898 on, I ran the school as an openly Christian school. I turned a family farm into a woman's refuge called Mukti, meaning 'Salvation.'

At Mukti, on September 20th, 1899, I laid the first stone of a building. It was a place of worship. The inscription on the cornerstone said, 'The foundation of this building was laid in Christ.' That spoke of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church and of Christians as stones framed into the building. It quoted Psalm 144:12, and the example of Thomas, the follower of Jesus while he was on earth, '...that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.'

Narrator: Pandita Ramabai was widely regarded as the greatest woman of India in her time. She served not only high caste women, but low caste and untouchables. In 1905, a spiritual revival movement broke out in answer to Ramabai's prayers. Over a thousand girls confessed their sins and turned to Jesus. They said he burned in them like a fire. It was a precursor to the Christian Pentecostal movement which now reaches 500,000 people worldwide.

Queen Liliuokalani: My name is Queen Liliuokalani. I was the last reigning monarch of Hawaii before I was overthrown by the United States government. I was born in Honolulu to the high chief and chieftess. I was the third of ten children. My brother was King Kalakaua. When I was 4, I went to the Royal School, where I became fluent in English and heard the rumor of God's way home through Jesus Christ. I committed my life to him.

When I was 24, I married a ha'ole (pronounced howlie), John Owen Dominis. We didn't have children, and honestly the marriage wasn't that great. We stayed married, though, because of Christian conviction, until he died twenty nine years later. I wasn't interested in marrying again.

When my brother died in 1891, I ascended the throne of Hawaii. My first act was to recommend a new Hawaii constitution, as the native Hawaiians had been deprived by the United States of much autonomy. But American sugar interests in Hawaii began to consider annexing Hawaii to the U.S. It was my right as a sovereign to issue a new constitution. But a group led by Sanford B. Dole, the pineapple man, tried to overthrow me. The American minister in Hawaii, John L. Stevens, called for troops to take control of Iolani Palace and other government buildings. In 1894, I was deposed, the monarchy ceased, and a provisional government was established which later became the Republic of Hawaii. Dole became President of this Republic of Hawaii on July 4th, 1894. It was recognized immediately by the U.S. government.

On January 6th, 1895, a revolt occurred. I was blamed for collaborating with them, because firearms were found on my property, although they were my husband's – he liked to collect guns. Ten days later, I was arrested. I later wrote in my autobiography, 'That first night of my imprisonment was the longest night I have ever passed in my life; it seemed as though the dawn of day would never come. I found in my bag a small Book of Common Prayer... It was a great comfort to me, and before retiring to rest Mrs. Clark and I spent a few minutes in the devotions... Here, perhaps, I may say, that although I had been a regular attendant of the Presbyterian worship since my childhood, a constant contributor to all the missionary societies, and had helped to build their churches and ornament the walls, giving my time and my musical ability freely to make their meetings attractive to my people, yet none of these pious church members or clergymen remembered me in my prison. To this conduct I contrast that of the Anglican bishop, Rev. Alfred Willis, who visited me from time to time in my house, and in whose church I have since been confirmed as a communicant. But he was not allowed to see me at the palace.'

I was later summoned to appear before a United States court of law. As I stood before them, I said this:

'To prevent the shedding of the blood of my people, natives and foreigners alike, I opposed armed interference, and quietly yielded to the armed forces brought against my throne, and submitted to the [arbitration] of the government of the United States the decision of my rights and those of the Hawaiian people. Since then, as is well known to all, I have pursued the path of peace and diplomatic discussion, and not that of internal strife.

'By my command and advice the native people and those in sympathy with them were restrained from rising against the government in power.

As you deal with them, so I pray that the Almighty God may deal with you in your hours of trial.

'To my regret much has been said about the danger which threatened foreign women and children, and about the bloodthirstiness of the Hawaiians...

'They who know the Hawaiian temper and disposition understand that there was no foundation for any such fears...It would have been sad indeed if the doctrine of the Christian missionary fathers, taught to my people by them and those who succeeded them, should have fallen like the seed in the parable, upon barren ground.

'There may be in your consciences a warrant for your action, in what you may deem a necessity of the times; but you cannot find any such warrant for any such action in any settled, civilized, or Christian land. All who uphold you in this unlawful proceeding may scorn and despise my word; but the offence of breaking and setting aside for a specific purpose the laws of your own nation, and disregarding all justice and fairness, may be to them and to you the source of an unhappy and much to be regretted legacy.

'I would ask you to consider that your government is on trial before the whole civilized world, and that in accordance with your actions and decisions will you yourselves be judged. The happiness and

prosperity of Hawaii are henceforth in your hands as its rulers. You are commencing a new era in its history. May the divine Providence grant you the wisdom to lead the nation into the paths of forbearance, forgiveness, and peace, and to create and consolidate a united people ever anxious to advance in the way of civilization outlined by the American fathers of liberty and religion.

'In concluding my statement I thank you for the courtesy you have shown to me, not as your former queen, but as a humble citizen of this land and as a woman. I assure you, who believe you are faithfully fulfilling a public duty, that I shall never harbor any resentment or cherish any ill feeling towards you, whatever may be your decision.'

Narrator: What impresses me about the Queen's statement is her willingness to forgive. Jesus said, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you.' It's pretty clear that her relationship with Jesus shaped her response. Even though her land was taken away from her, although she was shamed to an incredible degree, she still found hope, strength, and peace in Jesus.

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen: I was born in China to the Sun family. They named me Ti-Hsiang. China was ruled at that time by the corrupt Qing Dynasty, many of whom were addicted to opium and oppressed the people. My older brother Sun Mei wanted me to go to Hawaii to study with him. So in 1879, I went to go live in Hawaii. I became one of ten Chinese boys at Iolani College, even though our English was quite bad. It was a miracle we got in.

Iolani was a Christian school. It was very strict, but we had our fun too. We often swam in the waterfalls and ate fresh mangos. There was a Bible class, but our teacher was so boring all of us boys fell asleep. The teacher gave up on the Bible and told us Chinese stories instead. But the Sunday services in the simple wooden building that served as a cathedral was where I became interested in Jesus. I asked my brother if I could be baptized, but he told me 'no.' He thought I was a rebel and handed me over to our father. When I graduated, I won an award and got to meet Hawaii's Queen Liliuokalani – she also believed in Jesus. It was a great honor. Later I went to Hong Kong to study medicine. I became a physician, but more importantly, I was baptized as a Christian there in 1884. I changed my name to Sun Yat-Sen, meaning 'new day.' It made my brother kind of mad, but he dealt with it! I told one friend that 'among the treasured books I carried back with me from Honolulu to China was the Bible.'

Meanwhile China was suffering because of the corruption of the Empress Dowager and the Qing nobles. There was rampant prostitution, opium addiction, mutinies, and the embezzlement. The Empress Dowager's sixtieth birthday embezzled money from the military and left the Chinese navy with only three cannon balls for battle! No wonder Japan defeated our navy in 1895. The Qing Dynasty rejected all requests for reform.

I founded the Revive China Society in 1894. Other Chinese Christians joined me. Ten years later, it became the Revolutionary Alliance, with me as its director. Those days were intense and dangerous, but we saw God work in many ways. I encouraged debates to promote the understanding of Jesus' teaching. I openly declared that I and my family were Christians. I gave my support for the separation of church and state. In 1911 the Wuchang Uprising was a success. Two-third of the provinces declared independence. I was elected the Provisional President of the Republic of China. I implemented democracy and tried to reform the culture and society.

But foreign powers believed only military strongman Yuan Shikai would be able to restore order and unite the provinces. It was humbling, but I gave up the presidency to Yuan in exchange for the resignation of the Qing court. I then devoted my energy to the economic development of the country. Unfortunately, Yuan soon dissolved the parliament and declared himself emperor. He betrayed China. I was asked to lead a campaign to restore the constitution of the republic. That campaign was successful and China was unified.

Narrator: Dr. Sun Yat-Sen is regarded as the father of modern China. He passed away in Beijing on February 22, 1925. Both the Communists under Mao Tse-Tung and the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek claim their descent from Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. But few remember what he said in his will: 'As a Christian I have wrestled with the devil for forty years. You should do likewise and believe in God.' He also said, 'Even when I die I want people to know that I am a Christian.' This is almost never remembered. Christianity may have arrived in China through Thomas in around 64 AD, according to various traditions. We do have a stone inscription dating from 638 AD testifying to an *already* large, established church in the ancient Chinese capital of Sian and influential in the upper levels of the Tang Dynasty. Yet that is also seldom remembered. When Marco Polo came from Italy to China, he found large numbers of Christians, yet we don't often remember that either. When Genghis Khan conquered Mongolia, China, and Persia, his son married a Christian woman. That woman was the mother of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China. Her other two sons became Emperor of Mongolia and Emperor of Persia. She influenced them heavily, and were it not for a later conqueror named Tamerlane who persecuted Christians viciously, Christianity would have remained firmly rooted in China. Even despite that, there are probably more Chinese Christians than American Christians, yet we don't often remember that. I wonder what else we have forgotten?

The Rumor Spreads to China:

John Sung: My name is John Sung. I was born in Fukien, China in 1901. My parents were Christians, my father was a pastor. When I was 14, people called me the "Little Pastor", and I would assist my father in preaching. At 19, I went to study in the U.S. I guess I was pretty smart, because I finished my Bachelors, Masters, and a Ph.D. in chemistry in 6 years. I was also working to support myself.

But the importance of the soul did not escape me. I entered Union Theological Seminary. That brought me to the crisis of my life. Union had abandoned many clear teachings of Scripture and believed that 'God is dead.' I began to doubt everything that I had been taught while growing up. So I prayed and studied the Bible looking for answers.

Suddenly, one night, my soul was transformed. I began to weep and to shout for joy. I raced to tell my teachers and fellow students. The next thing I knew, I was locked in an insane asylum! In the eyes of my teachers, my behavior indicated that I had gone mad. I was allowed to take only my Bible and a pen into the cell with me. In the 193 days that I was locked up, I read the Bible from cover to cover forty times. That was my real theological training.

After my release, I felt God's call to return to China to preach the Gospel. I sailed home in 1927. As the boat neared China, I took all the gold medals and diplomas I had earned in college, and threw them into the ocean. I saved my Ph.D. certificate, though, and gave it to my dad. I liked chemistry, but I never touched the subject again. For the next 14 years, I preached Jesus and spread his rumor of a way home all over China and South-east Asia. I'm told that tens of thousands committed their lives to Jesus, hundreds of churches revived, and many were physically healed.

My active ministry ended only when my health finally broke. An operational wound from my student days never healed. My sense of urgency prevented me from taking time off to undergo the treatment required. When I finally entered the hospital in December 1940, it was too late. The fistulas were about one foot deep! Although my ministry ended too late to save my own life, my sense of God's timing was perfect. War had already engulfed China by that time, and in another year, the rest of East Asia. Had I pressed the ministry with less urgency, much less would have been achieved because later war conditions would have prevented travel. So I completed my task.

Someone asked me while I was in the hospital about the future of the Chinese church. I believed that God showed me that a great revival was coming. But the Western missionaries would all leave first.

Narrator: Subsequent history proved that this was the most profound prediction uttered about the Chinese church in the 20th century. John Sung died in 1944. He has been called one of the greatest evangelists of the 20th century, easily on the same footing as Billy Graham in the U.S. Yet he is seldom remembered.

Philip Ahn: My name is Philip Ahn. I am a Korean-American actor. In the 1970s, I was on the ABC TV series, 'Kung Fu.' I played the wise Master Kan, leader of the Shaolin Temple, the monk who held the rock out for Caine, played by David Carradine. I'm the one who said, 'Grasshopper, as soon as you are able to grab the rock from my hand you may leave the temple.' But I'm not here to talk about myself. I'm here to talk about my father.

My father Ahn Chang-Ho was born in 1876 in Pyongyang, Korea. He was a farmer's son but became one of the leading statesmen and spokespersons for Korea in the world under Japanese occupation and oppression. While he studied for two years at a school operated by the Salvation Army, he committed his life to Jesus. He heard of the rumor that Jesus offers us a way home, and a way to live for our future home. For this reason, he said he could not hate the Japanese; instead he used non-violent resistance and political advocacy. At the same time, my father and many other Christians believed that peace must be the fruit of justice, and therefore Korea's independence was essential.

In 1894, at the age of 18, my father became a member of the Tongnip Hyophoe 'Independence Association,' which promoted independence from Japan and worked to reform domestic affairs and reduce dependence upon foreign countries. But the group's activities were undermined by conservative wealthy Koreans, which strengthened my father's belief that victory must come from within Korea. He returned to his home town and established the Chomjin School, the first private modern school established in Korea.

He was shocked when, in 1911, the Japanese began an imperial policy to annihilate Korean culture through the destruction of religion, literature, historical records, and especially, schools. They promoted the worship of Shinto and Japan. And by 1914, virtually all Korean schools had been shut down. This all but completed the Japanese campaign of cultural genocide. Chances of any part of the Korean culture surviving rested in the hands of the few dedicated patriots. In 1912, my father was elected chairman of the Korean National People's Association, which emerged as the supreme organization for Koreans abroad and played an active role in negotiations with the U.S. government.

In 1919, when the Joseon Dynasty was forcefully absorbed into the Japanese Empire, my father started underground activities that focused on regaining Korean independence. Christians were at the forefront. They helped draft the Korean Declaration of Independence; 50% of signers were Christians, even though only 1% of the population of Korea was Christian at the time. On March 1, 1919, the provisional government declared its independence from Japan and called for general resistance from the Korean population. My father was the first provisional president. During the resistance demonstrations the Japanese police opened fire on the unarmed Korean crowds, killing thousands. Many thousand more were arrested and tortured.

After a bombing incident much later, my father was arrested by the Japanese, though he was not involved in the incident. His 23-year-long fight for national independence abroad ended with his imprisonment in Taejon in 1932. After a brief release from the prison, he was arrested again by the Japanese police. With failing health, he left the prison on bail only to die in a Seoul hospital on March 10, 1938.

Narrator: The message of Jesus entered Korea in 1784, when Korean diplomats brought books back from China. One of those books was called *The True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*, written by a Jesuit scholar living in China named Matteo Ricci. For a hundred years, the message of Jesus spread in Korea without foreign missionaries, to around 70,000 believers. That only increased when Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries came in 1884. By 1910, Protestant Christians were in charge of the only complete educational system in Korea at the time, because only the church provided education from primary to college level. This brought them into direct conflict with the Japanese imperial policy of shutting down Korean schools. Today, belief in Jesus is still growing rapidly in Korea and elsewhere through Korean missionaries. Korean-American actor Philip Ahn died in Los Angeles on February 28, 1978, from complications following surgery for lung cancer.

Benigno Aquino: My name is Benigno ‘Ninoy’ Aquino. I was born in the Philippines to a Filipino Senator. The Philippines were colonized by the Spanish and then by the United States. The U.S. installed and backed Ferdinand Marcos, a dictator, and his wife Imelda Marcos, a woman with a taste for expensive shoes. Marcos had accumulated billions of dollars and 3,500 pairs of shoes while half the country was unemployed and in poverty. I was Marcos’ chief political opponent. In 1973, Marcos wanted to stay in office beyond his two-term limit, so he declared martial law and trumped up charges against me. He threw me into prison for 8 years. While in prison, I was depressed and bitter. But one day I got a package from my mom. It was a book called *Born Again* by Chuck Colson, Richard Nixon’s former Hatchet Man during Watergate, about his conversion to Christ when he was in prison. I was amazed at this story, and I gave my life to Jesus Christ while I was in prison. I felt the bitterness drain away from me. I left prison a transformed man.

In 1983, Marcos called an election that he thought he’d win. My wife Corazon and I were in Massachusetts for medical treatment. I decided to return to the Philippines. My wife Cory was very nervous about this. Shortly before leaving, I testified before a Senate subcommittee. I said, “It is true, one can fight hatred with a greater hatred, but...it is more effective to fight hatred with greater Christian love...I have decided to pursue my freedom struggle through the path of nonviolence, fully cognizant that this may be the longer and the more arduous road...Only I will suffer solitary confinement once again, and possibly death...But by taking the road of revolution, how many lives, other than mine, will have to be sacrificed?”²

Corazon Aquino: When Ninoy stepped off the plane in the Philippines, he was assassinated, most likely by Marcos’ henchmen. When the accused agents were acquitted, I was stunned and outraged. I didn’t know anything about politics because I had been a homemaker and mother of five all my life, but at that moment, I decided to run for President!

Catholic Cardinal Jaime Sin threw his support in behind me. For the Filipinos, many of whom were Catholic, this united the opposition against Marcos. The saying that went around was, “Marcos has the guns but Aquino has the nuns.” During the election, clergy and people locked arms and guarded ballot boxes. But Marcos and his supporters nevertheless stole ballot boxes at gunpoint all over the country. They purchased votes and double stuffed the boxes, destroyed ballot boxes in areas that voted for me, and so on.

A week after the election, the Marcos-dominated National Assembly proclaimed Marcos the winner. But two high ranking officials defected from the party line. The minister of defense and a well-respected general declared the election rigged, stated their support for me, taking with them many officers and soldiers. Marcos came after them with tanks and gunmen through the city of Manila. That’s when Cardinal Jaime Sin got on the radio and encouraged the people to fill the streets. About two million men, women, children, people in wheelchairs, nuns and priests streamed into the streets of Manila. They had no training in demonstrating, so they just sang hymns and prayed. When the tanks and soldiers marched right up to them, they didn’t back down. Instead they put flowers in gun tips and cannon nozzles, and refused to move. The army gave up and Marcos fled the country. I became the first woman President of the country in a bloodless revolution. As my husband said, “It is more effective to fight hatred with greater Christian love.”

² Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*

Anonymous Vietnamese Christian: I am a Christian from Vietnam. I cannot tell you my name, because that would endanger me and the Christians in my country. Let me tell you some of our history. Jesuit missionaries came to Vietnam before 1600. In the mid 1600's, the French Jesuit Alexander de Rhodes wanted to bring the Bible to a wider section of the Vietnamese people. So he romanized the Vietnamese script; we draw on this contribution to this day. Catholics played a role in helping French colonialists occupy the country; that is true. But Catholics also played a role in opposing French colonialism and resisting the oppression. And during a period of civil wars in the late 1700's, the Church was a stabilizing force for many Vietnamese.

Sometime in the early 1800's, Crown Prince Nguyen Phuc Canh became the first Vietnamese royal to believe the rumor of Jesus and the first member of the Nguyen Dynasty to join the Catholic Church. But belief in Jesus also spread particularly quickly among the ethnic minority hill tribe peoples of Vietnam. We estimate that 10% of the population of Vietnam follows Jesus. About 250,000 Hmong (pronounced mung) are Christians, too. And that's in spite of the persecution.

In 1954 when Vietnam was divided many anti-communist Catholics came south and became the mainstay behind Diem and the South Vietnamese government. When the country was united by communists in 1975, many Catholics were treated with suspicion by the new government.

In May 2001, authorities imprisoned Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly, a Roman Catholic priest, for 'undermining state unity.' What he did was condemn Vietnam's religious persecution in a letter to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. He got a 15-year prison sentence.

A year later, Chong Thanh Phia, a 10 year old boy, was murdered for refusing to tell security officers the whereabouts of his father, Giang, a Hmong Christian leader.

In February, 2003 the villagers in Dak Lac province were paraded in front of three executed ethnic minority Christians – whose eyes had been cut out. The authorities threatened the villagers not to follow Jesus – or else. Over the past year Human Rights Watch documented numerous incidents where authorities conduct mass ceremonies forcing Vietnamese hill tribesmen to renounce Christ, sometimes while drinking sacrificed animal's blood.

In March, 2003 a friend of mine, a Christian man, was shot and wounded by Vietnamese security forces while washing at a rivers edge. A few days later the police returned his battered corpse to his family. Human Rights Watch reported his skull had been crushed from apparent beatings whilst in custody.

We are paying a price for believing in Jesus. But we know him to be true. Jesus is our way home to God.

Narrator: Let's give a warm thanks to our special guests.

We had two hopes for having this time with them and hearing their stories. First, we wanted to understand how Jesus has been active and faithful in Asian history. Asians do not just become Christians when they come to the U.S. and become Asian-Americans. Jesus has been present in Asian history for a long time.

Second, we hoped to be inspired. It's important to see what kind of lives people lived for Jesus' sake. They lived lives of integrity, caring for the poor and others that no one else cared about, siding against the powerful to care for the powerless, standing up against the evil coming down on them, but also resisting the evil they were tempted to do. Jesus made all the difference for them. He can make all the difference for us.