

Update on International Students and Related Ministries in Asia Pacific Region

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The April 5, 2023 edition of the Asia Missions Advance quarterly bulletin featured a brief statistical overview of International Student mobility in the Asia-Pacific region and the wide-open door for the Church to engage in global missions and ministry among International Students. Now three years later in the Summer of 2026, we find that students from other nations, both globally and intra-regionally, continue to select the broad context of Asia as a primary destination for academic pursuits. Asia has ten of the top twenty destination cities for international students with Seoul and Tokyo ranked first and second, followed by Melbourne (5th), Sydney (6th), Singapore (11th), Kuala Lumpur (12th), Beijing (13th), Taipei (14th), Hong Kong (17th), and Kyoto (18th)¹ Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Malaysia are having increasing international student enrollments.

While most Asian nations are experiencing a steady and sometimes significant increase of foreign students enrolling in their higher education institutions, Australia, which was the 2nd leading receiving country of international students in 2023, has seen recent declines of enrollment due to new government regulations and other factors.

Following is a statistical update of both international students and some relevant ministries among them in the Asia-Pacific region:

Australia

In January, 2026, there were 565,601 international students enrollments, with China (23%), India (17%), Nepal (9%), Vietnam (4%), and Bangladesh (4%) as the top sending nations.² Some ISMs include FOCUS of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students [<https://www.afes.org.au/about-us/what-we-do/focus/>]; FOCUS has 84 ISM staff on 29 campuses; Overseas Christian Fellowship (OCF Australia) has been a very significant student-led campus ministry without any staff since 1959 with ministry at 12 centers in five cities [<https://ocfaustralia.org/about-us/>]; Power to Change has approximately 34 staff in 3 cities [<https://powertochange.org.au/>].

New Zealand

In 2025 New Zealand hosted 85,535 international students (+14% increase since 2024).³ The largest specialized mission among International Students is ISMNZ which has 11 Staff (+12 associates), serving in

6 cities, and on 12 campuses. [<https://www.ismnz.org.nz/>]

Taiwan

In 2024, a total of 123,190 students came from abroad for a degree in Taiwan, representing a five-year high and year-over-year growth of over 7% over 2023.⁴ Most students come from Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Campus Evangelical Fellowship (CEF) was established in 1957 and is part of the global IFES network with about 20 staff integrating ministry among Taiwanese and international students in around 95 campuses across 6 regions. [https://www.cef.tw/s_www/en_page/en_page.html]

India

As of late 2025, India hosted approximately 72,218 foreign students from nearly 200 countries, setting a new record for international enrollment. The majority of foreign students come from Nepal, Afghanistan, and countries in Southeast and West Asia. The Union of Evangelical Students of India (UESI) which traces its beginning to 1948 and is part of IFES, has had periodic ISM staff. [<https://uesi.in/>]

Singapore

The number of foreign students has been increasing, with roughly 65,400 recorded at the end of April 2022, rising to 70,800 by June 2023 from over 100 countries.⁵ The Fellowship of Evangelical Students Singapore has 18 staff minister to both international students and local students, on seven campuses that have international students. [<https://fellowship.sg/>]

Japan

In 2025 the number of foreign students significantly increased to 435,200, up +8.2% over 2024. This means that Japan has already surpassed its target of 400,000 international enrollments by 2033.⁶ China, Nepal, Vietnam, South Korea, and Myanmar are the leading nations and over 90% of international students in Japan come from Asia. KGK, as the affiliate campus ministry of IFES in Japan, has ISM staff in Tokyo and Osaka. [<https://www.kgk-japan.org/en/kgkとは>]

Malaysia

As of early 2026, Malaysia hosts approximately

1. ICEF Monitor, August 21, 2025

2. Australian Government, Dept. of Education's International Education Data and Research

3. New Zealand's international student numbers climbing amid strong public support, *ICEF Monitor*, December 4, 2025

4. Taiwan is close to reaching its pre-pandemic benchmark for international enrollment, *ICEF Monitor*, April 2, 2025

5. Foreign students fueling demand for co-living properties in Singapore: JLL report, *The Straits Times*, September 18, 2025

6. Japan surpassed its foreign enrollment target of 400,000 in 2025, *ICEF Monitor*, February 19, 2026

170,000 international students from over 160 countries. The country is experiencing rapid growth in foreign enrollment, with a reported 63% increase between June 2023 and early 2025.⁷

China, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and India are the top countries of origin. The ISM Malaysia Network has 2 staff among 4 campuses in the greater Kuala Lumpur area. The network includes collaboration with FES Malaysia [<https://fes.org.my/>] and SIM (Serving in Mission Malaysia) [<https://www.sim.org/locations/malaysia/>], along with 6 churches.

Nepal

Currently there are about 1,500 International Students but the government is seeking to increase the number to 10,000 in three years⁸ With the growing number of Nepalese students who became believers abroad returning home to Nepal, it is likely that some are caring for international students because they were cared for by Christians.

Korea

As of February 2026, the number of International Students in South Korea has surpassed 310,000 for the first time, reaching a record high of 314,397 and reaching the government's goal to attract 300,000 foreign students by 2027⁹ Leading nations are Vietnam, China, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia. International Student Fellowship (ISF) Korea has about 80 staff on numerous campuses and cities (and even has ISF ministry in 13 Asian countries. [<http://isfkorea.org/about-isf-korea/>]. SEM International currently has 32 staff serving on⁹ campuses across 4 cities. [<http://www.semintl.org/eng/>]

The Philippines

While the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) reported 17,202 International Students in 2024, other estimates suggest total foreign students (including those in English training schools) could be higher, around 40,000, primarily from India, China, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Africa. InterVarsity Philippines, an IFES affiliate, has an ISM staff mobilizing others to engage in ISM in the country.

Thailand

While some sources indicate around 25,000–30,000 foreign students, 2025 data indicates the number of International Students has surged, with some figures exceeding 53,000 by late 2024–2025.¹⁰ Chinese students constitute the majority (over 50%), followed by students from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Tertiary Christian Students (TCS), a member of IFES, has one ISM staff in Bangkok. Ray Calabdan has developed an ISM staff of 15 part-time volunteers in

Bangkok on two campuses. [reyc69@gmail.com]

China

Approximately 380,000 International Students from 191 countries were studying in China during the 2024–2025 academic year, marking a rebound from pandemic-era lows. Asian students comprise the largest share at 61.1%, followed by Africa (16.2%) and Europe (15.6%).¹¹ Some English speaking “International” churches have an outreach among International Students.

It is good to ponder anew, some important questions.

How might the growth of International Student mobility within the Asia-Pacific region be a God-given global missions opportunity? Will the Church in greater Asia be like the tribe of Issachar and understand the times and trends and know what to do about it?

Will the Church be ready and willing to receive the growing influx of foreign students with God's hospitality?

One avenue of participating in sharing God's love with international students is to partner with some existing International Student Ministries (ISMs) of local campus ministries such as those listed above.

Inquiries about ISMs in the region may be directed to Steve Scott (sscott@lausanne.org), the Lausanne Catalyst for ISM in the Asia-Pacific region, who is based in Australia.

Some resources and equipping videos on ISM are the EveryInternational series at: <https://everyinternational.com/>; Lausanne Global Classroom video series on ISM at: <https://lausanne.org/lausanne-global-classroom/international-student-ministry-episode>; and, <https://www.acmi-ism.org/ism-resource-center>.

Additional resources are available at: <https://newwineskins.org/internationalstudentministry-resources#top>.

An additional perspective is found in Asian Students Going Abroad and International Students in Asia, in Asians in Diaspora and Diasporas in Asia, published in 2025 by Langham Global Library.

11. 'Everyone wants to come to China now': Chinese universities draw more foreign students beyond Western countries, *China News Service*, May 1, 2026



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7. International Student Statistics in Malaysia in 2025, *YourUni*, 2025

8. The PIE News, May 6, 2026

9. The PIE News, April 15, 2026

10. The China factor: Growth and risks of students in Thailand, *University World News*, August 7, 2025