

Dunhuang 敦煌

Although Dunhuang (“Brilliant Sincerity”) barely qualifies as a city by Chinese standards, and is has one of the smallest populations of any city profiled in this book, few places in China hold as much historical significance or could be considered such a strategic spiritual stronghold as this slow-paced and impoverished outpost in a remote, arid corner of the nation.

Dunhuang’s 130,000 people inhabit the northwest part of Gansu Province in northwest China. An oasis surrounded by barren desert on three sides, Dunhuang sits near the juncture of Gansu, Xinjiang, Qinghai and Inner Mongolia. The Dang River gives life to the city, otherwise it would have vanished from maps centuries ago, buried under the eerie Gobi Desert sand dunes. Although the official population for Dunhuang is not high, the locals usually find themselves outnumbered by the hordes of tourists and pilgrims who visit the city.

Dunhuang’s place as a famous location in Chinese, and Christian, history results from its strategic location as one of the last stops on the ancient 7,000 km (4,300 mile) Silk Road before the traveler heading northwest entered the Taklimakan Desert. For those heading south it was the last place of respite for those who had success-

Population:
114,907 (1990)
131,515 (2000)
150,500 (2010)

Province:
Gansu

Major Ethnic Groups:
Han 99.7%
Hui 0.1%
Manchu 0.1%
Mongol 0.1%

Christians:
1,200 (0.9%)

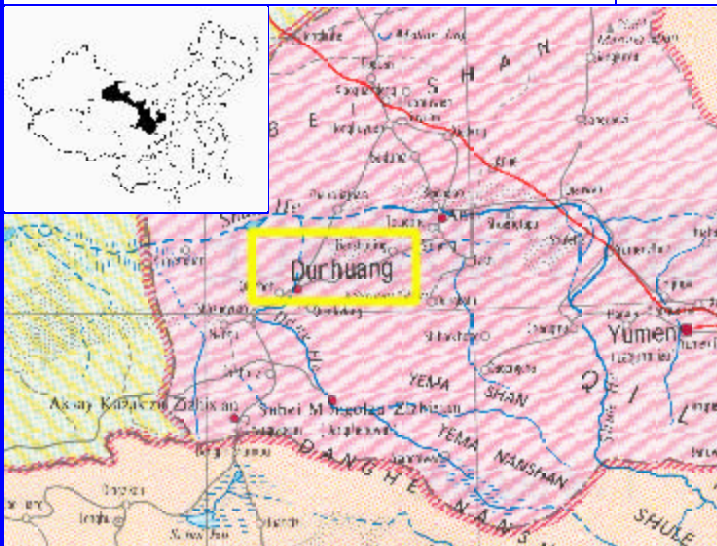
fully endured the journey.

Dunhuang, where people have lived since about 1300 BC, was the first major town in “barbarian” territory. It was situated outside the Great Wall and the “protection of Chinese civilization.”

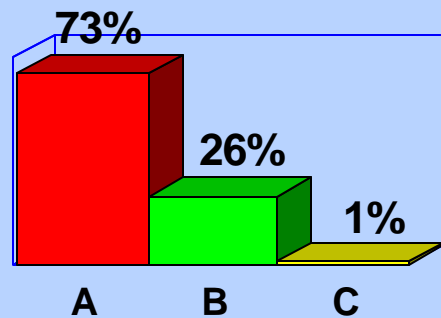
For two thousand years the Silk Road allowed new merchandise, ideas and religions to enter China. Buddhism entered China from India. Centuries later Islam entered China down this same road. In the 7th century, Christian traders from a sect known as the Nestorians also came to Dunhuang, spreading a new strange teaching about a God who

died on a Cross. They also stopped at Dunhuang en route to the Chinese capital in Xian, where they arrived in 635. The Gospel gained a foothold and spread its influence over the next 700 years, before it was eliminated by brutal persecution.

The “downtown” part of Dunhuang is very small, just three square kilometers. It contains a small Hui community of more than a thousand Muslims. Numerous hotels and guest houses catering to visitors on every budget crowd the city. Most come to Dunhuang to visit the famous Buddhist Mogao Grottoes, a series of 492 caves located just southeast of the city. Most of the caves contain Buddhist art, statues, relics and manuscripts (see the *Macheng* profile



Status of Evangelization
(Awareness of Christ and the Gospel)



A = have never heard the Gospel or the Name of Christ
B = were evangelized but have not yet become Christians
C = Adherants to any form of Christianity



for more information).

In 1990, archaeologist Peng Jinzhang working in a cave in the northern part of the Mogao Grottoe complex, discovered writing on white linen paper in a script he could not identify. Scholars at Beijing University found the language was Syriac, and the pages were copies of the Psalms. Peng's other discoveries confirmed that a Christian community had lived, worshipped, preached and died in Mogao, in the midst of one of the Buddhist world's most hallowed sanctuaries. Marco Polo stopped at Dunhuang on his way to China in the early 1200s. He wrote, "The people are for the most part idolaters, but there are also some Nestorian Christians and Saracens."

Today the residents of Dunhuang have long lost any sense of Christian history. In fact, it could be said that the city has received little Gospel witness for the past 700 years! The people in Dunhuang either seem to be blinded by the Buddhist spirit that has dominated the area for so long, or by the more recently-arrived spirit of materialism. Few seem interested in the claims of Jesus Christ. Less than 1% of the city is Christian.

Despite its relatively small size, Dunhuang is a strategic city for Christian workers to prayerfully consider.

Pray for Dunhuang

- 1** Pray against the strongholds that have bound Dunhuang since ancient times. Pray God will be glorified there.
- 2** Pray the Gospel will reach thousands of pilgrims who come to Dunhuang.
- 3** Ask God to lift up the Name of Jesus to millions living along the Silk Road.

Overview of Dunhuang (based on 1990 census)

Pronunciation : "Dun-hwang"
Old Spelling :
Location : NW Gansu Province, NW China
Population : 114,907 (1990 census)
Males : 58,249 (50.69%)
Females : 56,658 (49.31%)
Households : 28,309
Average Household : 4.1 people
Divorced People : 312
% divorced of Population: 0.27
Centurions (1990) : 0 people aged 100 or more
Immigrants to City : 4,950
From same province: 3,334 (67.4%)
From other provinces: 1,615 (32.6%)

Employed People : 70,471 (61.3% of total population)
Main Industries : Agriculture 74.8%, Professional 6.1%
Education : University: 2.2%
(highest level attended): High School: 45.9%
 Primary school: 33.8%
 Never attended any school: 18.1%
Population under 15: 29,057 (25.3%)
Adult Illiteracy : 19.2% (men 12.8%; women 25.6%)
Major Nationalities : Han 113,744
 Hui 1,070
 Manchu 30
 Mongol 18
 Others 45 (8 groups)
Christians (2003) : 1,200 (0.9%)