

# Chuanlan



**Population:**

324,800 (2000)  
367,000 (2010)  
401,100 (2020)

**Countries:** China

**Buddhism:** Mahayana

**Christians:** 20,000

Approximately 330,000 Chuanlan people are concentrated within Anshun Prefecture in southern China's Guizhou Province. They inhabit Anshun, Pingba and Zhenning counties. The Chuanlan ('Blue-Dressed People') are also known as Lao Han ('Old Han') and Tunbao by people in Guizhou. In the 1950s the Chuanlan applied to the Chinese government for recognition as a separate minority group. Their application was rejected, and they were included as part of the Han Chinese nationality. This upset the Chuanlan, who reapplied in the late 1970s only to be rejected again.

The Chuanlan are a Chinese group who have remained ethnically, linguistically and socially distinct from other Chinese people. It is commonly believed that their descendants were Chinese soldiers from Jiangxi, Jiangsu and Anhui provinces in east China who were sent to Guizhou to quell rebellions many

centuries ago. The first soldiers settled in Guizhou in the 8th and 9th centuries, thus becoming the first Chinese in the province. A second wave of 5,000 soldiers arrived in the 14th century. The Chuanlan are the descendants of soldiers who remained behind after military campaigns.<sup>1</sup> Many took minority women as wives and formed separate communities. Because of this intermixing, and centuries of separation from other Chinese people, the language of the Chuanlan developed into a unique form of Chinese. It is not mutually intelligible with Mandarin Chinese.

One visitor to the Chuanlan people commented, 'You find stone-built villages

with stone houses and tall watchtowers along a 150 km (92 mile) stretch of karst landscapes. . . . They wear long blue robes with wide sleeves and speak a distinctive language unlike any other, and in all their rites of passage and daily lives they follow their old customs. These people seem old-fashioned, but it is thanks to their ancestors that Guizhou Province was formed and the history of this part of China was changed forever.'<sup>2</sup>

Mahayana Buddhism is the main religion of the Chuanlan people, although somewhat uniquely it is strongly observed by women

but not by many men. 'The gender roles are clear cut—men farm and women keep house, men perform opera and women practice Buddhism and everyone is content with their roles. Various festivals and Buddhist activities form an important part of the women's lives. They play the lead in religious activities while the men are either onlookers or at most help keep order. The reason for this goes back to the

times when the men tended the farms and kept the frontier areas peaceful. Whenever there were battles, their lives could be endangered. Memories of war have made the women firm believers in Buddhism and they seek Buddha's blessings for peace and safety. . . . The people live freely and have firm beliefs.'<sup>3</sup> The Chuanlan's historic reliance on stone watchtowers gave them their alternate name, *Tunbao*, which means 'stone castles' people.

There are many Chuanlan Christians scattered throughout the region. About half are Catholics and half worship in Protestant government-sanctioned or illegal house churches.



Julian Hawken

## Overview of the Chuanlan

**Other Names:** Chuanchun, Ch'uan-chun-tsi, Lao Han, Old Han, Tunbao

**Population Sources:**

324,800 in China (2000, P Hattaway)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 60%

**Practising Buddhists:** 35%

**Christians:** 6.2%

**Scripture:** Chinese Bible

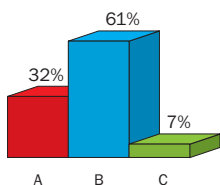
**Jesuit film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Mandarin: Guiyanghua

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

## Status of Evangelization



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to some form of Christianity