



**Population in China:**

373,872 (1990)  
482,300 (2000)  
622,100 (2010)

**Location:** Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Ningxia

**Religion:** Islam

**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Dongxiang

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** "Dong-shee-ung"

**Other Names:** Tunghsiang, Santa, Tung, Mongolian Huihui

**Population Source:**

373,872 (1990 census);  
279,397 (1982 census);  
147,443 (1964 census);  
155,761 (1953 census)

**Location:** SW Gansu: Two-thirds of Dongxiang live in Dongxiang County in the Linxia Hui Prefecture. Smaller numbers live in Hezheng County and Linxia city; a few live in Lanzhou City and Dingxi District. A few Dongxiang also live in Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Ningxia.

**Status:**

An official minority of China

**Language:** Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern Mongolian, Mongour

**Literacy:** 12%

**Dialects (3):**

Suobana, Wangjiaji, Sijiaji

**Religion:** Islam

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

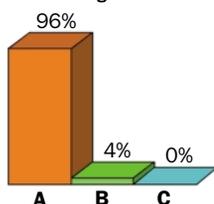
**Gospel Recordings:**

Dongxiang #04866

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** SCE00

**Status of Evangelization**



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Were evangelized but did not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to any form of Christianity



Dwayne Graybill

**Location:** The majority of the more than 480,000 Dongxiang live in one long, spread-out valley in the southwestern part of Gansu Province. The Dongxiang region is a desolate, arid place with a moon-like landscape, even though it is bordered by the Tao River to the east, the Daxia River to the west, and the Yellow River to the north. Approximately 55,000 Dongxiang also live in the Ili Prefecture in Xinjiang and in parts of Qinghai and Ningxia.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** The Dongxiang are one of China's official minority groups. They were called *Mongolian Huihui* prior to 1949, when their name was changed to the *Dongxiang* (East District) people. They call themselves by the Islamic term *Santa*. Other Muslims in China do not consider the Dongxiang to be a part of the Islamic faith because of their involvement in drug and prostitution rackets. One visitor to the Dongxiang described them as "very mean people, with hard faces."<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Dongxiang speak a Mongolian language. "Quite a few words in the Dongxiang lexicon resemble words of the same meaning in Modern Mongolian, and some are even identical to words presently used in Inner Mongolia. Many other words are close to the Middle

Mongolian spoken in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries."<sup>3</sup> Only 12% of the Dongxiang are literate in Chinese.

**History:** In the thirteenth century China was subdued by the Mongols. Genghis Khan, in a bid to control the land he had taken over, moved some of his garrisons into China. These soldiers intermarried with local women and gradually developed into their own distinct ethnic group called the Dongxiang.<sup>4</sup> Some place-names seem to support this theory. For example, *Zhayintan* (Encampment Beach), is said to be the site of an old Dongxiang garrison.<sup>5</sup>

**Customs:** The Dongxiang are primarily employed as farmers. Their main crops are potatoes, barley, millet, wheat, and corn. They are also renowned across China for producing traditional rugs.

**Religion:** Not long after the Dongxiang first arrived in China, they were converted to Islam. By 1949, when the Communists took over China, there was one mosque for every 30 Dongxiang homes and one paid Muslim worker for every nine families.<sup>6</sup> Sixty to seventy percent of Dongxiang belong to the Old Sect, which emphasizes worshipping at the tombs of Muslim saints. "The remainder belong to the New Sect, a fundamentalist and reformist group."<sup>7</sup> There were numerous brutal wars between the two Dongxiang sects in the last century.

**Christianity:** There has never been a single known church or Christian among the Dongxiang. In the 1940s some missionaries briefly visited the Dongxiang area but were unsuccessful in converting anyone to Christ. In 1993 a Hong Kong-based organization conducted mass literature evangelism in the main Dongxiang town.<sup>8</sup> The nearest church to the Dongxiang is a Han Chinese fellowship in Linxia. The Christians there, however, believe "it is impossible to reach the Dongxiang."<sup>9</sup>