

Han Chinese, Huizhou

A 1987 study listed 3.12 million speakers of the Huizhou Chinese language living in eastern China.¹ The majority are located in the southern part of Anhui Province—in an area previously known as Huizhou Prefecture—in on the banks of the Xi'nan River. Since 1912, the city of Huizhou has been known as Shexian. In addition, 800,000 Huizhou live in the northern part of Jiangxi Province, especially in Wuyuan, Yuanling and Dexing counties. Small numbers also live in Chun'an County of Zhejiang Province. The Huizhou region was badly hit by the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64) and lost as much as half of its population.²

One linguist believes that the Huizhou Chinese should be treated 'as a separate sublanguage and its speakers as a distinct entity within the mosaic of Sinitic peoples'.³ Huizhou is unintelligible with other Chinese languages. It is spoken in a widespread geographical area of 25,000 square kilometres (9,750 sq. mi.). Its five dialects reportedly 'differ greatly from each other'.⁴ The Huizhou use standard Chinese characters like other Han people, but their spoken language is so different from Beijing Mandarin that 'many common spoken words have no written character with which they can be associated'.⁵

The Huizhou have a reputation as expert merchants and businessmen. A Chinese saying says: 'No marketplace is so small there are no Huizhou people.' By the 16th century, Huizhou merchants 'began to assume a major role in the entire national economy [and] soon came to control much of the nation's rice, lumber, and tea trade'.⁶ Some early Christian missionaries called them the Jews of China, 'evidently impressed by their role in money-lending

and pawn-brokerage and their strong ties to family and clan—even when widely scattered in the pursuit of business opportunity'.⁷

This incredibly strong sense of identity has allowed the Huizhou Chinese to exist as a distinct group to this day. Leo Moser explains, 'The Huizhou man was not a loner; when alone in a distant city, he worked and thought as a clan member. The extended family and related [Huizhou]-based

organiza- tions had financed him. They would rescue him if he was bankrupt or ill. If successful, he was welcomed home a hero. . . . This process filled Huizhou with magnificent houses, ancestral temples, and artistic gardens'.⁸

Mahayana Buddhism was formerly strong in Huizhou, but over

the last fifty years of Communist rule its influence has waned among the population. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), hundreds of Buddhist temples and monasteries were destroyed and thousands of monks sent to prison or forced to leave their religious order. Today, most professing Huizhou Buddhists are elderly people. In the past decade many Buddhists have become Christians. Several former monks are now leaders of the house church in southern Anhui.

Since 1949, Christianity has boomed in the region where the Huizhou live. There are an estimated 250,000 Huizhou believers. The three provinces where Huizhou is spoken contain some of the highest concentrations of Christians in China.



Population:
3,647,300 (2000)
4,121,400 (2010)
4,504,700 (2020)
Countries: China
Buddhism: Mahayana
Christians: 250,000

Overview of the Huizhou Chinese

Other Names: Chinese: Hui, Wannan, Huichou, Hweichow, Huizhou

Population Sources:
3,120,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

Dialects: 5 (Jixi [850,000], Xiuyi [750,000], Qide [700,000], Yanzhou [700,000], Jingzhou [200,000])

Professing Buddhists: 20%

Practising Buddhists: 10%

Christians: 7%

Scripture: Chinese Bible

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Chinese: Huizhou

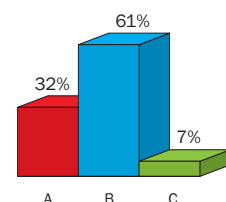
Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: CZH



The Voice of the Martyrs

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