

# Han Chinese, Pinghua



**Population:**

2,338,000 (2000)  
2,642,000 (2010)  
2,887,700 (2020)

**Countries:** China

**Buddhism:** Mahayana

**Christians:** 10,000

## Overview of the Pinghua Chinese

**Other Names:** Pinghua, Ping, Pinghwa, Penghua, Penhwa, Pengwa

**Population Sources:**

2,000,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

**Dialects:** 2 (Guibei, Guinan)

**Professing Buddhists:** 25%

**Practising Buddhists:** 10%

**Christians:** 0.4%

**Scripture:** none

**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

More than 2.5 million speakers of Pinghua Chinese inhabit the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southern China. They live primarily along the major traffic routes between Lingchuan (north of Guilin) and Nanning in the south, especially in towns along the railway line. 'A northern subgroup (Guibei) can be found extending from Guilin, through Yangshuo and Pingle, to Fuchuan, Zhongshan and Hexian.'<sup>1</sup> This part of China is spectacularly beautiful, with landscapes of karst rocks rising hundreds of metres into the air.

Although the Pinghua Chinese are counted as part of the Han nationality, their language is clearly distinct from all other varieties of Chinese. Pinghua is divided into

two dialects: *Guibei* (Northern) and *Guinan* (Southern). These two dialects reportedly 'show significant disparities, though there are a few common features'.<sup>2</sup> The Northern dialect has five tones, while the Southern dialect has eight. One early visitor noted, 'The dialect that results from this mixture of races is called Pengwa [Pinghua]. A large proportion of the people . . . evidently do not speak Cantonese or Mandarin, or at any rate do not speak it freely.'<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese *Book of History* mentions that, at the dawn of Chinese history in the days of Yao and Shuen, around 2200 BC, a terrible inundation was recorded that had once desolated the land. 'In their vast extent the waters embrace the mountains and over-top the hills, threatening heaven with their floods.'<sup>4</sup> Chinese books today

have reduced these accounts to a bad flood of the Yellow River.

Buddhism is mixed together with animism, ancestor worship and Daoism to form a complex religious concoction among the Pinghua people. The region is wracked with superstition. It could be said that, when it comes to religion, the Pinghua use whatever works at any given time. If this means consulting a Buddhist monk to divine win-

ning lottery ticket numbers, then they won't hesitate to do so. Although about a quarter of Pinghua Chinese profess Buddhism as their religion, few actually practise it. Most young people refuse to follow the ways of their parents and grandparents. At best they are reluctantly dragged along to observe religious rituals on holidays, but few among the younger generations enter into religion with any zeal.

*Guangxi*, which means 'vast west', has traditionally been one of the

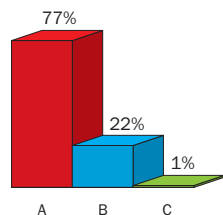
parts of China most neglected by missionaries. In the 1920s workers lamented that there were 'areas inhabited by [minority] tribes where no Christian worker would be familiar with the languages spoken and where the country has not as yet been explored'.<sup>5</sup> Before all foreign missionaries were expelled from China in the early 1950s, the Christian and Missionary Alliance had concentrated their efforts on Guangxi. They had a strategy to plant churches in every part of the province, but they were only able to partially achieve that goal before the Communists came to power.

Today, no more than one per cent of Guangxi's 45 million inhabitants claim to be Christians. The Pinghua Chinese have a small Christian remnant of only about 0.4 per cent of their population.



Julian Hawken

## 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