

Han Chinese, Wu

The 1987 *Language Atlas of China* listed 70.1 million speakers of the Wu Chinese language.¹ Wu is spoken over a widespread area (137,500 sq. km or 53,600 sq. mi.) in six provinces of eastern China. The majority are located in Zhejiang Province (43 million), southern Jiangsu Province (19.3 million) and the city of Shanghai (13.9 million). Smaller numbers are also located in Jiangxi, northern

Fujian and southern Anhui provinces.

The Wu Chinese language is more commonly referred to as the Shanghai dialect, but in fact Wu is spoken in a far greater area than just Shanghai. Wu consists of 14 dialects, all of which are very different from Mandarin Chinese. Most Wu, however, are bilingual in Mandarin because it has been used in

all media and education for the past 50 years.

The history of the Wu-speaking people dates back to at least the 7th century BC. Leo Moser says, 'When the kingdom of Wu (also called Gou-wu) first appeared in Chinese annals . . . it was obviously a very foreign state to the Proto-Chinese. The language spoken by the people of Wu at that time was not what we would call a sub-language of Chinese. . . . It could have been a Sino-Tibetan language. . . . A widespread assumption is that it may have been related to the Tai languages.'² Over the centuries the Wu were influenced by other Chinese-speaking people groups from every direction, until today the Wu language is related to—though separate from—Mandarin Chinese.

The golden era of Wu culture came during the Southern

Song Dynasty (1127–76), 'when the region formed the geographical core of what was surely the most highly cultured state in the world. The Wu-speaking peoples have thus left a major legacy for all human civilization. The Southern Song, with its capital at present-day Hangzhou, played a particularly important role in transmitting Buddhism and other cultural and artistic values to Japan.'³



Most Wu Chinese do not practise any religion, although in recent years there has been widespread interest in the magical practice of Qi Gong. Buddhism is the religion of millions of Wu people, especially those living in rural areas, although its influence is waning as the majority of young people are now atheists. Still, the Wu region is home to several

famous Buddhist monasteries and centres.

There were Nestorian churches in the region between Nanjing and Shanghai as early as AD 1279. At one time the Nestorians had seven monasteries in and around the city of Zhenjiang,⁴ now in Jiangsu Province. In the 1800s, almost all missionaries to China commenced their work in Shanghai, which was the first port of entry for foreigners. As a result, the region has one of the highest concentrations of Christians in all of China today. There are at least six million believers among the Wu, both government-sanctioned church members and illegal house church gatherings. A significant number of Catholics also live in this part of China. Shanghai is one of the strongest Catholic centres in China.



Population:

81,947,000 (2000)
92,600,000 (2010)
101,211,800 (2020)

Countries: China, USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand

Buddhism: Mahayana

Christians: 6,000,000

Overview of the Wu Chinese

Other Names: Wu, Shanghai Chinese, Shanghainese

Population Sources:

70,100,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*) also in the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

Dialects: 14 (Piling, Suhujia, Tiaoxi, Hangzhou, Linshao, Yongjiang, Taizhou, Oujiang,

Wuzhou, Chuzhou, Longqu, Tongjing, Taiguo, Shiling)

Professing Buddhists: 30%

Practising Buddhists: 8%

Christians: 7.3%

Scripture: Bible 1908; New Testament 1868; Portions 1847

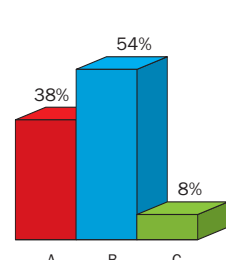
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Chinese: Wu, Chinese: Shanghai

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: WUU

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