

Location: Approximately 35 million speakers of Xiang Chinese — or Hunanese — live in China.¹ The majority are located in Hunan Province. Others inhabit 20 counties of western Sichuan and parts of northern Guangxi and northern Guangdong provinces.

Identity: The Xiang are traditionally acknowledged as the most stubborn and proud of all Chinese peoples. “The people themselves... are the most clannish and conservative to be found in the whole empire, and have succeeded in keeping their province practically free from invasion by foreigners and even foreign ideas.”²

Language: Xiang is a distinct Chinese language in transition. It is exposed to Mandarin from several directions. Hunanese women once possessed their own writing system. It was taught by women to women and could not be read by men.³

History: *The People’s Republic of China (1949–):* The Communists seized control of China in 1949. Initial euphoria among the people soon vanished as famine, economic mismanagement, and the suppression of all opposition became the norm. The darkest period came between 1966 and 1976 when millions of innocent people were butchered in the name of progress. After Mao’s death in 1976 a power struggle ensued. Deng Xiaoping, who stood alone with an agenda of economic reforms, took power and China gradually reopened to the outside world. A demonstration

held in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, to demand political reform was forcefully broken up by the army on 4 June 1989. Fears that China would revert to the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s proved unfounded, however, and China continued to open up and become a thriving part of the world community throughout the 1990s.

Customs: In 1911 the Xiang were described as “the best haters and best fighters in China. Long after the rest of the empire was open to missionary activity, Hunan kept its gates firmly closed against the foreigner.”⁴ The Xiang are renowned for their theaters and opera.

Religion: Recently there has been an upsurge in religious interest in Hunan, as people seek to fill the spiritual void in their hearts. “A monastery in Hunan... has witnessed tens of thousands of pilgrims arriving to worship the three ‘gods’ of Communist China — Chairman Mao, Zhou Enlai and Zhu De. This pilgrimage has set alarm bells ringing in the local government over the revival of superstition.”⁵



Paul Hattaway

Christianity: In 1861 Welsh missionary Griffith John met a Hunan military mandarin, who “boasted of the glory and martial courage of the Hunan men, and said there was no danger of their ever believing in Jesus or of His religion taking root there.”⁶ The pride of the Xiang has made them the most unreached of all Han Chinese peoples. Today only 80,000, or about 0.2%, of the Xiang are Christians. The entire Christian population of Hunan is numbered at no more than 120,000.⁷ Because of internal strife, the Hunan church has been described as a “disaster area.”⁸



Population in China:
 30,850,000 (1987)
 36,064,000 (2000)
 40,752,000 (2010)
Location: Hunan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Guangdong
Religion: No Religion
Christians: 80,000

Overview of the Xiang Chinese

Countries: China
Pronunciation: “Sheeang”
Other Names: Hunanese, Hunan, Hsiang
Population Source: 30,850,000 (1987 LAC); Out of a total Han population of 1,042,482,187 (1990 census)
Location: Hunan; Sichuan; Guangxi; Guangdong
Status: Officially included under Han Chinese

Language: Chinese, Xiang
Dialects (9): Changsha, Changde, Xiangtan, Yiyang, Yueyang, Linxiang, Shaoyang, Yungshun, Shaungfeng
Religion: No Religion, Buddhism, Daoism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity
Christians: 80,000
Scripture: None
Jesus film: Available
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: HSN00

