



**Population:**  
 39,800 (2000)  
 49,800 (2010)  
 61,300 (2020)  
**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** none known

## Overview of the Mongour

**Other Names:** Mongor, Monguor, Mongou, Minhe Tu

**Population Sources:**  
 30,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)

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

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 70%

**Practising Buddhists:** 55%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

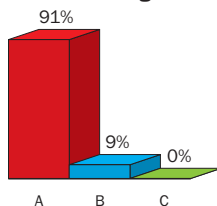
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Tu: Minhe

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** MJG

## 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

A 1987 Chinese study reported 30,000 speakers of the Mongour language.<sup>1</sup> This figure has grown to about 40,000 today. The Mongour live primarily in Minhe County in the eastern part of Qinghai Province in western China. Minhe, formerly known as Shangchuankou, lies on the Huang Shui River. Minhe is situated east of the provincial capital Xining, a considerable distance from Huzhu County where the majority of the Tu people live.

Although the Mongour have been officially included as part of the Tu nationality, they speak a very different language and have a separate identity from the Tu. As one researcher explains, 'The Tu call themselves Mongol, except those living in Minhe, who form a minority, where the word is pronounced *Mongour*. This term has mistakenly been used by some Western scholars as the general name for all Tu.'<sup>2</sup>

The speakers of Mongour cannot communicate with other Tu in their own language and must revert to Chinese to be understood. 'Differences [between Tu and Mongour] are mainly phonological, but there are also lexical and grammatical differences.'<sup>3</sup> While Tu has many loanwords from Tibetan, Mongour contains numerous loanwords from Chinese. Mongour is considered 'the most divergent Mongolian language of all'.<sup>4</sup>

When the ancestors of today's Tu and Mongour people first came to Qinghai, the area was occupied by Tibetans, Uyghurs and a group called the Shato. By the late 1300s, the Tu had divided into 16 clans. Eight clans were called *Tu* (White Mongol), five *Shato*, one *Black Mongol*, one *Turkish* (Uyghur) and one Chinese.<sup>5</sup>

The Mongour have several unique sexual customs. One is called 'marriage to the pole', whereby a girl stays with her family and takes in lovers. Any children born to her take her family's name. Another is the 'marriage to the girdle'—a Mongour girl sleeps with a guest, who upon departure leaves his girdle behind. In case the girl becomes pregnant, she would be 'married to the girdle'.<sup>6</sup> After child delivery, the mother and baby stay confined to a room for one month. Men are barred from entry and only the closest female relatives are



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allowed to enter.

Although the Mongour are nominally Buddhists, shamanism seems to hold most sway in their religious practices. Two types of shamans are active among the Mongour. 'White shamans' are used to heal sickness, while 'black shamans' bring vengeance on enemies. Another highly regarded religious figure is the *kurtain*. This is a person who allows himself to be possessed by an evil Daoist spirit.

By the 1920s Catholic missionaries were active in the Mongour region, but no church remains today. Missionary Frank Laubach issued a warning to the church in the 1930s: 'Millions in China will soon be reading. Are we going to give them reading matter? Will they be flooded with the message of Christ or with atheism? Will they read love or hate? This is the most stupendous, most arresting, most ominous fact, perhaps on this planet.'<sup>7</sup>