

# Shixing

A 1983 report listed 2,000 speakers of the Shixing (pronounced 'sher-shing') language in China, 'living along the fast-flowing Shui Luo River and its downstream tributary, the Chongtian River',<sup>1</sup> in the First District of Muli County in southern Sichuan Province.

This group is one of the most remote and isolated people groups in the world. One prayer guide states, 'They live a good six days' travel from Chengdu and the only

foreigners that have travelled here are linguists and a few professional mountain climbers. . . . The few people who have travelled there for research travel from Muli City. It takes one day of riding a bus on a terrible road, and two days of travelling by horse and foot.'<sup>2</sup> Mountain

trails leading to the Shixing villages rise to an altitude of 4,680 metres (15,000 ft.). One early visitor to the area described the remarkable variation in terrain: 'We found the stifling heat in the gorges of the Shou Chu next to unbearable, especially as we passed from cool forest regions to a temperature of over 100° Fahrenheit within a couple of hours. . . . We found wild flowers, anemones, blue poppies and many primroses of all colours, forming a veritable carpet of exquisite designs.'<sup>3</sup>

The name *Shixing* means 'iron people'. The Northern Pumi call their Shixing neighbours *Xumi*, or *Sumu*. Recently the Shixing language has been found to belong to the

Qiangic linguistic branch. When explorer Joseph Rock visited the Shixing in 1930, he remarked that their language 'seems to be a mixture of Nashi [Naxi], Tibetan and Hsifan [Northern Pumi]; yet it is not understood by any of the three'.<sup>4</sup>

The area inhabited by the Shixing has a long and rich history. Their villages are 'guarded by watchtowers erected by powerful Naxi kings several hundred years ago'.<sup>5</sup> The

Naxi's interest in the region may have been due to the abundance of gold once found in the Shui Luo River. The great Naxi king, Mutien Wang, extensively mined the river.<sup>6</sup>

The Shixing live isolated lives farming rice and maize on thin strips of land leading down to the river. Their villages are 'peculiar conglomerations of huts built one against the other, with flat roofs, permitting one to step from house to house over the entire village'.<sup>7</sup>

All Shixing are Tibetan Buddhists; they were converted centuries ago. Outside many of their homes one will find *mani* piles (pyramids of white stones) that are engraved with the

sacred Tibetan prayer, *Om mani padme hum*—'Hail the Jewel of the Lotus'. In the past the Shixing lived under the rule of the Northern Pumi king in Muli and his powerful religious rulers.

The Muli region in south-west Sichuan Province is one of the most gospel-neglected places on earth. No missionaries are known to have worked there in the past. There has never been a known believer or Christian fellowship among this group. The nearest believers to the Shixing are some minority Christians in northern Yunnan, but they are still a considerable distance away over some of the most remote terrain in the world.<sup>8</sup>



**Population:**  
2,780 (2000)  
3,430 (2010)  
4,200 (2020)  
**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** none known



China Advocate

## Overview of the Shixing

**Other Names:** Shihing, Shuhin, Xumi, Shishing, Sumu

**Population Sources:**

2,000 in China (1983, Sun Hongkai)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Tangut-Qiang, Qiangic

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 100%

**Practising Buddhists:** 45%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** SXG

## Status of Evangelization

