

**Location:** The Boyu Tibetans live in the large Boyu Village in Zhugqu County. Zhugqu is within the Gaanan Prefecture in poverty-stricken Gansu Province. They live atop a 3,000-meter-high (9,840 ft.) mountain. "Boyu is located at the heart of a complex of high peaks and deep ravines, and the paths along which they climb lead through magnificent scenery... dotted with all kinds of flowers: azaleas, camellias, peonies, wolf-berries."<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** The Boyu Tibetans are a distinct ethnolinguistic people group. As one visitor remarked, "their language and costume is now very different from Tibetans elsewhere."<sup>2</sup> During festivals, Boyu women wear special dress, unique among all Tibetan peoples. "A breastplate is made of around five to six thousand coral beads, and an enormous silver medallion at waist level — known as *meilong*.... The body of the medallion is scattered with motifs executed in colored enamels, including Tibetan Buddhist symbols and talismans to ward off evil spirits."<sup>3</sup> The Boyu are ethnolinguistically distinct from other Tibetans in the area.

**Language:** The Boyu tribe arrived in Gaanan at a different time from other Tibetan groups presently in the prefecture, bringing with them their own distinct language. The Boyu language may be from the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman.

**History:** The Boyu women's special costume "is thought to be associated

in some way with the army of Tubo, the Tibetan kingdom which was founded by Songtsen Gampo in 629 and lasted for around two hundred years.... Legend has it that the forebears of the Boyu Tibetans were soldiers from the hinterland of Tibet who were sent to guard the border areas. However, they began to farm the land and eventually decided to settle there."<sup>4</sup>

**Customs:** The Flower-Gathering Festival of the Boyu is unique to this one small area. It takes place annually on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar. "They believe if they drink the spring water on the mountain before the sun touches it... it will keep them free from disease. And if they bathe in the water, all evil will be kept from them."<sup>5</sup>

**Religion:** During the Flower-Gathering Festival the Boyu worship *Lianzhi*, the goddess of flowers. One of their legends relates that the Boyu lived in abject poverty in ancient times. Touched by their misery, "the gods eventually took pity and sent a young girl, *Lianzhi*, from heaven to teach



Paul Hattaway

them how to reclaim land and grow crops, how to spin and weave cloth.... This went on until one year... she went into the mountains to gather flowers... and never came back.... The people made offerings to her and named her the *Goddess of Flowers*."<sup>6</sup>

**Christianity:** There are no known Christians among the Boyu Tibetans today, although the Christian & Missionary Alliance worked in nearby Min Xian prior to 1949. The missionaries, who first arrived in 1889, included William Christie, W. W. Simpson, Robert Ekvall, Calvin Snyder, and William Ruhl.<sup>7</sup>



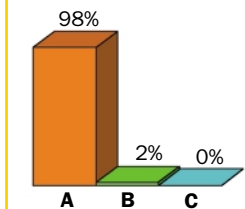
**Population in China:**  
 3,000 (1997)  
 3,260 (2000)  
 4,200 (2010)  
**Location:** Gansu  
**Religion:** Polytheism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Boyu Tibetans

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Bo-yuu"  
**Other Names:** Boyu  
**Population Source:**  
 3,000 (1997 AMO);  
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)  
**Location:** SE Gansu: In and around Boyu Village in Zhugqu County of Gaanan Tibetan Prefecture

**Status:** Officially included under Tibetan  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Unclassified  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Polytheism, Tibetan Buddhism, Animism  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None

### Status of Evangelization



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Were evangelized but did not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to any form of Christianity