

Population in China:
 29,500 (1987)
 38,300 (2000)
 47,300 (2010)
Location: Gansu
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Zhugqu Tibetans

Countries: China

Pronunciation: “Zhooq-choo”

Other Names: Zhugqu, Hbrugchu, Zhouqu Tibetan, Chou-ch’ua Tibetan, Brugchu

Population Source:
 29,500 (1987 LAC);
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)

Location: SE Gansu: Zhugqu County in Gaanan Prefecture

Status:
 Officially included under Tibetan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Northern Tibetan

Dialects: 0

Religion: Polytheism, Tibetan Buddhism, Animism, Bon

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

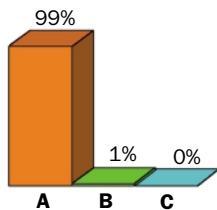
Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: CDA01; KHG05

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

Location: More than 38,000 Zhugqu Tibetans live in Zhugqu County, in the Gaanan Prefecture of Gansu Province.¹ They are the most easterly of all Tibetan peoples in China. The Bai Long (White Dragon) River flows through mountainous Zhugqu County.

Identity: The Tibetans of Zhugqu are counted as part of the Tibetan nationality, but along with several other groups in southern Gansu — such as the Baima and the Boyu Tibetans — they are a specific ethnolinguistic group with their own language and customs.

Language: The Zhugqu language is a form of Khampa Tibetan, although it has great differences with other Khampa varieties farther to the south. The Zhugqu Tibetans cannot understand the speech of their neighbors, the Jone Tibetans, even though both are reported to be Khampa languages.

History: The Zhugqu Tibetans have a long history. A Chinese writer remarked, “Their forebears fled from the horrors of war (during the Southern Song Dynasty, 1127–1279) and eventually settled here and in surrounding areas, where they have multiplied over the generations.”²

Customs: The homes of the Zhugqu Tibetans are one-story, built of mud, stone, and wood. Due to the lack of level ground, “nearly every household has a flat platform which serves many purposes.... Some people, when they walk out their own door, are in fact standing on the neighbor’s roof.”³ Every year, usually in

the fifth lunar month, the Zhugqu Tibetan men celebrate the Arrow-Planting Ceremony. Women are not allowed to participate. The men ride horses up to the mountaintop and plant prayer flags on the summit. “A respected elder of the tribe directs the sacrificial rites. Each in turn lays roasted flour, butter, barley and tea on to a pile of heaped-up cypress branches, which are then set alight and burned. These are offerings to the mountain god.”⁴

Religion: The Zhugqu Tibetans are polytheists. Their pre-Buddhist belief of Bon includes the belief that mountains are holy. They believe powerful demons live inside the highest mountains. “They pray to the mountain god to make their hopes and wishes come true: peace, security, thriving livestock and abundant harvests.”⁵ There

are different legends explaining the origin of the Arrow-Planting Festival. One states that there was a “certain man of dignity and fame who, after he died, was found by the gods to be too bad for heaven but too good for hell. Accordingly, he stayed on the earth, creating a great deal of mischief and disturbing the peoples’ peace. Eventually a Living Buddha took pity on him and settled him on the mountain, directing him to give up evil and devote himself to good.”⁶

Christianity: The Zhugqu Tibetans have never been reached with the gospel. Few members of this group have any awareness of the existence of Christianity. There are no Christian communities in the region, and no record exists of any missionary activity among them at any stage throughout their long history.



Paul Hattaway