

More than 150,000 Torgut Mongolians live alongside Kazak and Uygur communities in north-west China's Xinjiang Region.¹ Many live in the verdant Junggar Basin. The Junggar landscape consists primarily of grasslands, which are amply watered by the region's abundant rainfall. An unspecified number of Torgut also live in Russia 'between the Volga and the Don [rivers], east of the Caspian and north of the Caucasus'.² The Torgut language as spoken in China

may now differ so markedly from the Torgut spoken in Russia that the two should be considered separate ethnolinguistic peoples.

Although the Torgut are a sub-group of the Kalmyk-Oirat, in China they view themselves as ethnically separate even though their languages are basically the same. They have been described as 'a law unto themselves, with

their Tibetan religion, Mongolian language and unspeakable customs'.³

Torgut history closely mirrors that of the Kalmyk-Oirat. They migrated from Xinjiang to Russia in 1628, where they lived until 1771 when Russian pressure forced most Torgut to flee back to China. Thousands died of starvation or were killed and plundered by bandits on the return journey to Xinjiang.⁴

Folk dancing is a favourite pastime of the Torgut. The *bielgee*, or 'dance of the body', originated during the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty. Large public gatherings were outlawed because the Manchus feared a Mongol uprising. Traditional dances had to be performed privately inside the yurt, where there was little legroom. The dancers expressed themselves by using their arms,

legs and other parts of their bodies in rhythmic movements.⁵

Although all Torgut claim to be Tibetan Buddhists, many practise shamanism. The black magic and secret arts of the Mongol shamans were vividly described 700 years ago, when Marco Polo challenged the Great Khan to become a Christian. He replied, 'On what grounds do you desire me to become a Christian? . . . You see that these sorcerers do what they will. When I sit at

the table the cups in the middle of the hall come to me full of wine or other beverages without anyone touching them, and I drink from them. They banish bad weather in any direction they choose and perform many marvels. And, as you know, their idols speak and give them predictions as they ask. . . . If I am

converted to the faith of Christ and become a Christian . . . these sorcerers, who with their arts and sciences achieve such great results, could easily compass my death'.⁶

There is no church today among the Torgut of China, despite the past efforts of self-sacrificing missionaries. During the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, 'seven Alliance missionaries and seven children tried to flee on camels. . . . Robbers intercepted them and took everything, even their clothes. In the trauma two of the missionaries gave birth. French missionary priests found the fourteen and the two infants naked in the desert and subsisting on roots. The priests gave them covering and took them back to the Catholic mission station. . . . The Boxers killed them with guns and swords, then set fire to the church'.⁷



Create International



Population:
146,000 (2000)
188,300 (2010)
232,000 (2020)
Countries: China, Russia
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Torgut

Other Names: Torgot, Torgut Mongolians, Xinjiang Mongols

Population Sources:
106,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)
also in Russia

Language: Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern, Oirat-Khalkha, Oirat-Kalmyk-Darkhat

Dialects: 0

Practising Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 60%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

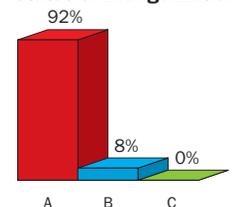
Jesus film: none⁸

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: KGZ03

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