

The 1991 *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Chinese Linguistics* lists a population of 2,000 Wutun people in China.¹ They live in three main villages: Wutun Xia Zhuang, Wutun Shang Zhuang and Jiangchama, located in the Longwu District of Tongren County in the eastern part of Qinghai Province.

The Chinese government does not recognize the Wutun as a separate people group but includes them under the Tu nationality. The Wutun resist this classification and insist on their own identity. There are also ethnic Tu people in the same area, but the two groups cannot understand each other's languages. Neighbouring Tibetans

refer to the Wutun as *Sanggaixiong*, meaning 'the centre of the lion'.

The Wutun language is a mixture of Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan. Their vocabulary contains just under 60 per cent Chinese and 20 per cent Tibetan words. Most linguists believe that Wutun is either 'a variety of Chinese heavily influenced by Tibetan or perhaps a Tibetan language undergoing relexification with Chinese forms'.² Most Wutun men are able to read Chinese, while the Tibetan script is used for religious purposes.

According to Wutun oral history, a long time ago a Tibetan king sent soldiers from Lhasa to where the Wutun now live to drive off other groups in the area. The soldiers stayed and married local women. Together

they eventually became the Wutun people. The Wutun children began to speak their mother's language and could not speak Tibetan—the language of their fathers—so they lost their original language.³ Today all Wutun family names are Tibetan-language names and not Tu names.



Dwayne Graybill

The Wutun are skilled artists. Buddhist scenes and the Buddha himself are the most common subjects of their paintings. They claim their artistic skills came about because the original soldiers studied art in Nepal.⁴

Tibetan Buddhism is the only religion among the Wutun. They are fanatical believers. Their whole ethnic identity is bound up in their faith. Although they do not have their own temples, the Wutun frequent Tibetan temples in the Tongren area. Like all Buddhists, the Wutun believe

that they will end up in a state of bliss after death. But, being better and more privileged, they believe they will go there directly, while other Buddhists achieve enlightenment only after going through many trials and testings.⁵

The Wutun have an almost complete lack of knowledge about the existence of Christianity. In the 1920s and 1930s there were Christian and Missionary Alliance workers nearby. In 1996, a 74-year-old Wutun man told a visitor, 'When I was a small boy I heard something about this Jesus religion, but I did not understand. There are no believers in any other religions among us Wutun except for Buddhism. We are not interested in any new religions because we know that we have the best and only true religion in the world.'⁶



Population:
2,450 (2000)
3,070 (2010)
3,782 (2020)
Countries: China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Wutun

Other Names: Wutunhua, Wutu, Sanggaixiong

Population Sources:
2,000 in China (1987, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Chinese Linguistics*)

Language: Mixed Language: Chinese-Tibetan-Mongolian

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 100%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

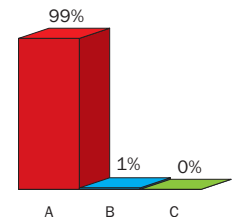
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: WUH

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