



Population in China:
 27,364 (1983)
 42,400 (2000)
 54,800 (2010)
Location: Xinjiang
Religion: Shamanism
Christians: 200

Overview of the Western Xibe

Countries: China

Pronunciation: "Shee-ba"

Other Names:

Xinjiang Xibe, Xibo, Sibo

Population Source:

27,364 (1983 *Minzu Tuanjie*);
 10,626 (1945 Xinjiang Census);
 Out of a total Xibe population of
 172,847 (1990 census)

Location: *W Xinjiang:* Qapqal (19,365), Urumqi City (2,675), Huocheng (2,658), Yining City (2,497), Gongliu (1,430), Tacheng City (1,111), and Nileke (607)

Status:

Officially included under Xibe

Language: Altaic, Tungus, Southern Tungus, Southwest

Dialects: 0

Religion: Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism, Christianity

Christians: 200

Scripture: None

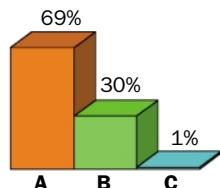
Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: SJ000

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: According to a 1983 study, 27,364

Western Xibe were living in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.¹ This figure was expected to rise to approximately 42,000 by the start of the year 2000.

The majority are located in the Qapqal Xibe Autonomous County, southwest of Yining City. Other Xibe communities are found in Huocheng, Gongliu (Tokkuztara), and Qoqek counties in the Ili Kazak Prefecture.² The Western Xibe region is close to the Kazakstan border.

Identity: There are major cultural and linguistic differences between Western Xibe and the Xibe in northeastern China. The Western Xibe have "preserved their own speech, clothing, and housing much better."³

Language: More than two centuries of separation from the Xibe in Liaoning has resulted in "a fair number of words"⁴ that are different. Many Western Xibe are bilingual or multilingual in Chinese, Kazak, Uygur, Russian, and Mongolian. Xibe is a written language which uses a reformed Manchu script. About half of the Xibe in Xinjiang can speak their language.

History: The Western Xibe are the descendants of a Manchu garrison, 3,000-strong, sent to Xinjiang in the spring of 1763 to rule the territory of the recently defeated Jungars. "The officer in charge of the migration, lining his pockets with the money earmarked for the migration, cut down the time for the journey from two years to one. Many died on the way from exhaustion

and practically all the infants had to be abandoned in the wilderness as they moved on."⁵ Three hundred and fifty babies were born during the arduous year-long trek to Xinjiang.⁶

Customs: The Western Xibe "excel at archery and are known for their remarkable horsemanship. Their enemies know well how lethal their iron arrow-heads really are. Even Nu'erhachi, a leader of the Manchurian aristocrats, was wounded in the skull in a battle against the Xibes when an arrow-head actually pierced his iron helmet."⁷ When a Western Xibe girl is born, the family hangs a red banner at the door as an announcement to their neighbors. When a boy is born, an archer's bow is displayed.

Religion: The primary religion among the Western Xibe is shamanism. Others

follow Tibetan Buddhism, while still others are classified as polytheists who worship the traditional Xibe deities of *Xilimama* and *Haierkan*. Despite being surrounded by Muslims, the Western Xibe have resisted all pressure to convert to Islam.

Christianity: A visitor to Xinjiang recently commented, "Many Xibe have adopted the religion of their Han neighbors which means that some have even become Christians!"⁸ They are the first known believers among the Western Xibe. They are being formed into indigenous Xibe churches. Hudson Taylor once stated, "Why should a foreign aspect be given to Christianity? We wish to see churches of such believers presided over by pastors of their own countrymen, worshipping God in their own tongue, in edifices of a thoroughly native style."⁹



Dwayne Graybill