

Buriat, Russia



Population:
 464,200 (2000)
 510,600 (2010)
 561,700 (2020)
Countries: Russia
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 1,000

Between 450,000 and 500,000 Buriat people live around the mighty Lake Baikal in the Republic of Buryatia in Siberia, Russia. The main towns in the Buriat area are Ulan Ude and Irkutsk, which lies west of the lake.¹ Lake Baikal is easily the world's largest lake, containing more than 20 per cent of the world's fresh water. During the harsh winter months, when temperatures plummet to minus forty degrees, Russian railway officials save considerable time and distance for the Trans-Siberian Express by relaying the train tracks across parts of the

Buddhist teaching was placed as a veneer over the existing shamanism. Later, the Russian Orthodox Church converted many Western Buriats to their form of Christianity. There were numerous clashes between the Orthodox priests and the Buddhist lamas. 'Many converted for ulterior motives, such as tax relief. There was a Buriat proverb: "Put a cross on your neck for a piece of land".'⁵

The first Protestant missionaries to the Buriat in Russia were the Stallybrass, Swan and Rahmn families, who worked in Siberia

Overview of the Russia Buriat

Other Names: Buryat, Northern Mongolian, Buriat-Mongolian

Population Sources:

422,000 in Russia (1990, *National Geographic*)

Language: Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern, Oirat-Khalkha, Khalkha-Buriat, Buriat

Dialects: 9 (Ekhirit, Unga, Ninzne-Udinsk, Barguzin, Tunka, Oka, Alar, Bohaan, Bulagat)

Professing Buddhists: 55%

Practising Buddhists: 30%

Christians: 0.2%

Scripture: Portions 1827; work in progress

Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Buriat: Eastern

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: MNB



Nancy Sturrock

from 1818 to 1840.⁶ They reported that the Buriat converts 'rejoiced to know that God did not make any distinctions between rich and poor. They had a new identity as people

frozen lake.² Lake Baikal is 636 kilometres (395 mi.) long and 1,600 metres (5,300 ft.) deep. The grasslands around the lake contain numerous 'wolves, jackals, bears, red deer and eagles'.³

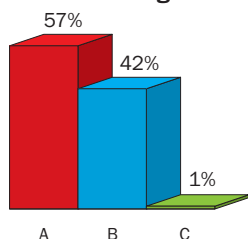
According to the 1990 census, 381,000 out of the 422,000 ethnic Buriat people (90%) could speak the Buriat language. It has nine dialects, which have come about because of the vast geographical spread of the Buriat. Most young Buriat people are bilingual in Russian. The Buriat language in Russia is considerably different from Buriat in China and Mongolia. They use a different script, styled on the Russian orthography, and there are significant vocabulary differences because of the influence of other languages.⁴

The religious climate of the Buriats is complicated. Tibetan Buddhism entered the area in the 1700s, when 150 monks of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Buddhism travelled throughout what today is Siberia.

liberated from the bondage of their past life.⁷ By 1827, the Old Testament and the four Gospels were translated into Buriat.⁸ Early missionary William Swan lamented his team's lack of power to combat the authority of the shamans: 'No Christian missionaries, at least none deserving the name, now pretend to the possession of miraculous gifts.'⁹

Since 1990, a partnership of 26 different mission agencies has been working for the salvation of the Buriat people.¹⁰ In 2002 there were an estimated 1,000 Buriat evangelicals. Most are young people with a modern outlook on life. Few of the elderly Buriat have believed in Christ. Numerous resources are available to evangelize the Buriat. They have the *Jesus* film, Christian radio broadcasts, audio recordings and children's Bible stories, and the Scriptures are presently being retranslated. There are high hopes for a bright future among this precious group.

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