



Midge Conner

Location: Sixty-five thousand Buriat in China were noted separately in the 1982 census before being officially included in the Mongolian nationality. The majority of Buriat (420,000) live in the Republic of Buryatia in Russia. An additional 48,000 live in the northeastern part of Mongolia. The Buriat occupy a vast tract of land from the grasslands of the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia to deep inside Siberia. The Buriat in China are a scattered group living in the remote Hulunbuir region of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Identity: The Buriat originally consisted of several Mongolian people groups and clans who were recognized as five distinct tribes.¹ The Buriat still share many common traits and customs with the Mongols, but there are many historical and linguistic differences that qualify them as a

distinct ethnolinguistic people group.

Language: The Buriat language spoken in China is different from the Buriat in Mongolia and Russia. The Buriat “speak a highly distinctive dialect of Mongolian.”²

History: The Buriat people claim to be descended from either a gray bull or a white swan.³ For many generations the Buriat in Russia and Mongolia have been considered different from the mainstream Mongolian group. The Buriat in China are relatively recent arrivals, having migrated from Siberia to Inner Mongolia in 1917.⁴

Customs: The *yokhor* folk dance plays an important role in the lives of the Buriat. Young girls imitate the actions and movements of birds and animals. Most Buriat live in mud and wood houses, although some are still nomads.⁵

Religion: Historically the Buriat have been shamanists and polytheists, allowing mediums to control all interaction between the gods and the Buriat communities. To be a shaman, a person had to be seen to possess *utkha*, a mystical spiritual energy. 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.”⁶ There has been a recent revival of shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism among the Buriat. A new religion called *Burkhanism* has also appeared among them in recent years.⁷

Christianity: There are no known Christians among the Buriat in China, although small numbers of Buriat Orthodox believers live in Russia. In 1922 missionaries were challenged to work in the Buriat region of China: “It is a well-watered, fertile region.... The domination of Lama priests does not extend to this region.”⁸ The first Protestant missionaries to the Buriat in Russia were the Stallybrass and Rahmn families who worked in Siberia from 1818 to 1840.⁹ They reported the Buriat converts “rejoiced to know that God did not make any distinctions between rich and poor. They had a new identity as people liberated from the bondage of their past life.”¹⁰ By 1827 the Old Testament and the four Gospels were translated into Buriat.¹¹ The script used is now obsolete. A new translation is in progress.



Population in China:
 65,000 (1982)
 98,900 (2000)
 127,600 (2010)
Location: Inner Mongolia
Religion: Shamanism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Buriat

Countries: Russia, China, Mongolia
Pronunciation: “Boo-ree-aht”
Other Names: Buryat, Northern Mongolian, Buriat-Mongolian, Northeastern Mongolian, Bargu
Population Source: 65,000 (1982 census); Out of a total Mongol population of 4,806,849 (1990 census); 420,000 in Russia (1993 P. Johnstone); 48,000 in Mongolia (1993 P. Johnstone)
Location: NE Inner Mongolia; Hulunbuir District near the China-Russia-Mongolia border
Status: Officially included under Mongolian
Language: Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern Mongolian, Oirat-Khalka, Khaikha-Buriat, Buriat
Dialects (4): New Bargu (47,000), Old Bargu (14,000), Khori, Aga
Religion: Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: None known
Scripture: Portions 1827; Work in progress
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: BXU00

