



Population:
 200 (2000)
 240 (2010)
 300 (2020)
Countries: Nepal
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Chhairottan

Other Names: Chhairo, Chhairo Tibetans

Population Sources:

200 in Nepal (2000, P Hattaway)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tamangic

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 90%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

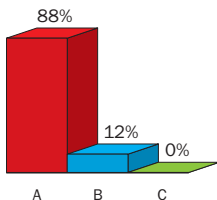
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

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

The 200 Chhairottan people make up one of the smallest ethnic groups in Nepal. They live around the Chhairo village in the Mustang (Lo Manthang) District of Dhawalagiri Zone in north-central Nepal.¹ According to a book published by the Nepal government, the Chhairottan people 'resemble Marphalis and Thakalis in facial features, language and dress codes. Chhairottans are Buddhists though they also practice shamanism . . . The original Chhairottans have migrated from their stronghold at Chhairo village, which is now occupied by a few Thakali households and some ten Tibetan refugee families.'²

The existence of the kingdom of Mustang was first mentioned in 7th-century Ladakhi records. Mustang remained apart from the rest of Nepal for centuries, and numerous wars were waged to try and gain control of the low-lying and easily travelled Himalayan corridor.³ During the 17th and 18th centuries Mustang was continually at war, especially with the kingdom of Jumla to the south-west. 'Jumla managed to take over Mustang only to be repelled when the kingdoms of Ladakh and Parbat came to Mustang's defense. In 1719 Jumla even kidnapped for ransom the future queen (from Ladakh) on her way to marry the king of Mustang.'⁴ The northern part of the Dhawalagiri Zone, which the Chhairottan people share, juts out into Tibet. When the Chinese occupied Tibet in the 1950s, the king of Mustang 'requested allegiance and protection from the partially democratized government of Nepal and became an official part of Nepal in doing so. . . . The now safe Mustang valley became home to over six thousand Khampa resistance fighters, who waged

a guerilla war against the Chinese and were moderately successful in destroying communications and roads in the Tibetan regions around Mustang. Political pressure from China forced Nepal to take action and Mustang was closed in an effort to alienate the resistance army. This . . . resulted in extreme hardships on the people and lands of Mustang to support this vast army.'⁵

The fighting finally stopped in the early 1970s after a taped plea to lay down arms was received from the Dalai Lama.⁶ The king of Nepal was under fierce pressure from Mao Zedong to bring calm to the border area,⁷ so the Nepal military waged



Nancy Sturrock

a brutal campaign against the Khampa, driving most of them back into Tibet where the merciless Communists butchered them. Fearing the local culture will be overrun by hordes of backpackers and camera-clicking tourists, the government has instituted a tax of US\$700 on all foreigners

entering Mustang. This has kept the number of visitors down. One guidebook states, 'Mustang has lured trekkers for many years, but was closed for a time both because of a guerilla war that was waged along the border with Tibet, and because of the ecological sensitivity of the region. The area is part of the Tibetan Plateau, and is high, dry and beautiful. . . . It is only possible to enter with an organized group, and permits are a steep \$700 for 10 days.'⁸ All Chhairottan people are thought to believe in Tibetan Buddhism.