

Population in China:
 569,300 (1987)
 741,000 (2000)
 912,900 (2010)
Location: Tibet
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: 50

Overview of the Central Tibetans

Countries: China, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Taiwan, Switzerland, USA, Norway, France, Australia, United Kingdom

Pronunciation: “Zung”

Other Names: Zang, Wei, Weizang, Bhotia, Phoke, Dbus, Dbustsang, Lhasa, Lhasa Tibetan, U

Population Source:
 569,300 (1987 LAC);
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)
 120,000 in India (1995);
 50,000 in Bhutan (1987 D. Bradley);
 2,000 in Nepal (1973)¹

Location:
 Tibet Autonomous Region

Status:
 Officially included under Tibetan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Central Tibetan

Dialects (5): Lhasa, Chushur, Phanpo, Testhang, Luntse

Religion: Tibetan Buddhism, Bon
Christians: 50

Scripture: Bible 1948; New Testament 1885; Portions 1862

Jesus film: Available

Gospel Recordings:
 Lhasa #00690
 Tibetan, Colloquial #04380

Christian Broadcasting:
 Available (FEBC)

ROPAL code: TIC02



Paul Hattaway

Location: Approximately 740,000 speakers of Central Tibetan live in the city of Lhasa and surrounding counties in the Tibet Autonomous Region.² Tourists to Lhasa often find the city falls short of the mystique they desire, although it has certainly improved since Thomas Manning’s description in the early 1800s: “There is nothing striking, nothing pleasing in its appearance. The habitations are begrimed with smut and dirt. The avenues are full of dogs, some growling and gnawing bits of hide which lie about in profusion, and emit a charnel-house smell; others limping and looking livid; others ulcerated; others starving and dying, and pecked at by the ravens; some dead and preyed upon. In short, everything seems mean and gloomy.”³

Identity: Although the Tibetans strongly maintain they are one people and are opposed to any attempts to classify them as separate groups, the Tibetan nationality clearly divides into numerous linguistic components.⁴

Language: Central Tibetan — which contains five dialects — “is more commonly known as central *Bus* (transliterated from *U*, the spoken version of the same word)... Educated people from other areas of Tibet traditionally retained their local variety and

learned the literary variety of Central Tibetan.”⁵

History: Written records of Tibetan history have survived from the seventh century AD, but it is known that nomadic tribes roamed Tibet as early as the second century BC. The cradle of Tibetan civilization is the Yarlung Valley area, about 80 kilometers (49 mi.) southeast of Lhasa. There, according to tradition, the union of a monkey and a she-devil created the Tibetan race. Around AD 600 the warrior-king of Yarlung, Namri Gampo, unified the clans of Tibet. He acquired a princess from Nepal and another one from China to be his wives. Under the persuasion of these two women, he combined the ancient

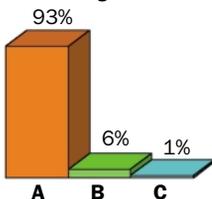
Tibetan religion of Bon with Buddhist teachings.

Customs: For centuries the Chinese have claimed Tibet as an “unalienable part of China,” despite Tibetans being culturally, historically, linguistically, and religiously distinct from Chinese. In the 1950s the Chinese took full control of Tibet.

Religion: The Tibetan Buddhist religion is the life-blood of the Tibetan people. It was placed over the powerful Tibetan religion of Bon, which is a mixture of magic, divination, demon worship, and sacrifices. The patron saint of Tibet is Chenrezig, whose image has up to 11 heads and from 2 to 1,000 arms.

Christianity: Tibet has long been one of the greatest challenges for Christianity. In 1892 Hudson Taylor said, “To make converts in Tibet is similar to going into a cave and trying to rob a lioness of her cubs.”⁶ Timothy, the Nestorian patriarch in Baghdad (778–820), referred to Christians in Tibet and indicated he was willing to assign a missionary to them.⁷ Today there are just one or two small Tibetan fellowships in Lhasa.⁸ Would-be missionaries face opposition from Buddhist monks, the Chinese authorities, and pro-Tibet foreigners living in Tibet.

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