

Kalmyk-Oirat

Approximately half a million Kalmyk-Oirat people live in several different countries in Central Asia. The majority (210,000) live in Mongolia, followed by Russia (174,000), and China (91,300). Smaller numbers of Kalmyk-Oirat live in Ukraine (700) and Uzbekistan (500), while scattered communities can be found in the United States (800), Germany, Kyrgyzstan and Taiwan.

In Russia the Kalmyk-Oirat are concentrated in Kalmykia, on the steppes between the Don and Volga rivers, north of the Caucasus Range and east of the Caspian Sea. The Kalmyk-Oirat in China are concentrated in Qinghai Province, as well as parts of Gansu and Xinjiang. In China many researchers combine the Oirat and Torgut groups, but they are profiled separately in this book. Although the Torgut and Kalmyk-Oirat are closely related and speak the same language, they view themselves

as distinct tribes. The Kalmyk-Oirat are one of the main branches of Mongolian people. One expert described the Kalmyk-Oirat as 'physically smaller, more garrulous, friendlier and more inquisitive than [other Mongols]'.¹

The Kalmyk-Oirat have had a terrible history.² From 1755–57, the Chinese Qing armies crushed the Oirat, forcing the survivors to flee to the northern Caucasus Mountains in Russia. Oppression there forced most of

them to return to China in 1771. Only a few survived the long journey to Xinjiang. 'The rest died from famine or fell victim to the hostile raids of neighboring tribes.'³ Those who stayed behind on the Russian side of the border are called *Kalmyk*, which means 'to remain or stay behind'.⁴



Create International

The Kalmyk-Oirat 'burial in the fields' is unique. The corpse is placed on a wooden cart, which is pulled furiously by a horse until the body falls from the back of the cart. Wherever it falls, it is left to be devoured by beasts and birds of prey.⁵ The Kalmyk-Oirat have been unflatteringly described as 'a squalid race, reputed never to change their clothes or wash. When one coat wears out, a new one is put over it and not until it rots off do they discard a garment.'⁶

The majority of Kalmyk-Oirat are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Shamans still perform many rituals and ceremonies. Some Kalmyk-Oirat practise a crude form of black magic under the guise of Buddhism. Every New Year the Kalmyk-Oirat devote their prayers to Okeen Tenger, their female spirit protector. She is believed to have saved the world from evil by bearing, and later killing, the offspring of the Lord of Evil, Eriik Khan.

The Kalmyk-Oirat are one of the least evangelized Buddhist groups in the world. In Russia there are a reported 1,700 Christians among them, but almost all of these are Orthodox believers who were converted under the influence of Russians. That number includes only about 50 evangelical believers. Today there are no known believers among the Kalmyk-Oirat in China. The New Testament was first translated into Kalmyk-Oirat in 1827, but it went out of print in 1894. Work is presently underway to produce an updated version.⁷



Population:

477,300 (2000)
538,700 (2010)
607,000 (2020)

Countries: Mongolia, Russia, China, USA, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Germany, Taiwan, Kyrgyzstan

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: 1,800

Overview of the Kalmyk-Oirat

Other Names: Kalmuk, Kalmuck, Qalmaq, Kalmytskii, Jazyk, Khalmag, Oirat, Volga Oirat, European Oirat, Western Mongolian, Xinjiang Mongol, Weilate, Durbet

Population Sources:

210,000 in Mongolia (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])
174,000 in Russia (1993, United Bible Societies)
91,300 in China (2000, P Hattaway)
800 in USA (2001, Joshua Project II)
700 in Ukraine (2001, Joshua Project II)
500 in Uzbekistan (2001, Joshua Project II)

Also in Germany, Taiwan, Kyrgyzstan

Language: Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern, Oirat-Khalkha, Oirat-Kalmyk-Darkhat

Dialects: 8 (Buzawa, Oirat, Dörböt, Sart Qlamaq, Jakhachin, Bayit, Mingat, Khoshut)

Professing Buddhists: 85%

Practising Buddhists: 40%

Christians: 0.4%

Scripture: New Testament 1827 (out of print); work in progress

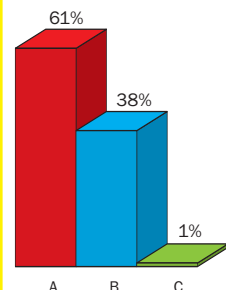
Jesus film: available⁸

Gospel Recordings: Kalmyk

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: KGZ

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