

Approximately nine million Mongol people live in the vast grasslands and deserts of Central Asia. Almost six million Mongols are scattered across a wide area of northern China.¹ Approximately three times as many Mongols live in China as in the nation of Mongolia. An additional 200,000 live in Russia, and smaller numbers live in Kyrgyzstan, Taiwan and the USA. The main Mongol language in China is similar to Khalkha (Halh) Mongol in Mongolia, 'but there are phonological and important loan differences'.² The name *Khalkha* means 'shield'.³

During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongols brutally established the largest empire the world had ever seen, stretching from Southeast Asia to Europe. They instituted the Yuan Dynasty and ruled China from 1271 to 1368. The terrified Europeans called the Mongols *Tatars*, meaning 'people from hell' (*Tartarus*).

At the mercy of their vast and windswept landscape, the ancient Mongols based their religion on the forces of nature. The moon, stars and sun were all revered, as were rivers. The majority of Mongols follow Tibetan Buddhism, which was first introduced from Tibet in the 16th century. It has 'welded them together, has leavened their civilization with religious ideals, and has made them kind and hospitable. . . . But, on the other hand, it has robbed their manhood of its energy and natural ambition. . . . Until the power of



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Lamaism, with its overgrown, dissolute, and corrupting priesthood, is broken, there can be no hope of arresting the sure decay of the Mongols or of preventing their ultimate extinction.⁴ In the past many Mongols were Christians, converted by Nestorian missionaries between the 7th and 14th centuries. Even a chapel outside the Great Khan's royal tent 'resounded with the sound of public chants and the beating of tablets loudly announcing the appointed hours of Christian worship'.⁵ Hulagu Khan's wife was described

as 'the believing and true Christian queen'.⁶ The Keirats, a Mongol tribe, numbered 200,000 believers in 1007,⁷ while there were about 30,000 Mongol Catholics recorded in China by 1368.⁸

At times during the 13th and 14th centuries it seemed that the Mongols were on the verge of adopting Christianity as their religion. Kublai Khan issued this challenge to Marco Polo: 'Go to your Pope and ask him to send me a hundred men learned in your religion, who in the face of these sorcerers . . . will show their mastery by making the sorcerers powerless to perform these marvels in their presence. . . . Then I will be baptized, and all my magnates and barons will do likewise, and their subjects in turn. . . . Then there will be more Christians here than there are in your part of the world.'⁹

In 1992 there were about 2,000 Mongol believers reported in China.¹⁰ Today there are believed to be between 30,000 and 50,000 believers.¹¹ In Mongolia the early years after the collapse of Communism in 1990 witnessed some exciting developments, with thousands of Mongols professing Christian faith, but in the years since the growth has plateaued as the foreign-dominated church struggles to find a place in Mongol culture. Today there are about 18,000 Christians in Mongolia, most of whom are young adults.¹²

Population:
8,456,200 (2000)
10,564,000 (2010)
12,816,200 (2020)

Countries: China, Mongolia, Russia, Taiwan, Kyrgyzstan, USA

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: 31,000

Overview of the Mongols

Other Names: Mongolian, Khalka, Khalkha, Hahl, Hahl Mongol, Halh, Menggu, Meng Zu

Population Sources:

5,811,400 (2000, P Hattaway)
2,395,800 in Mongolia (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])
200,000 in Russia (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])
Also in Taiwan, Kyrgyzstan, USA

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

Dialects: 9 (Chahar, Ordos, Tumet,

Shiilingol, Ulanchab, Jo-Uda, Jostu, Jirim, Ejine)

Professing Buddhists: 55%

Practising Buddhists: 35%

Christians: 0.4%

Scripture: New Testament 1952; Portions 1979

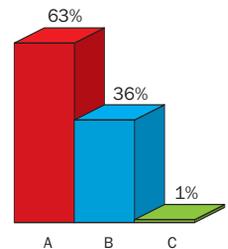
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Mongolian, Inner Mongolian Chahar, Sheeringgul: Hohot

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: MVF (Mongolian, Peripheral) and KHK (Mongolian, Halh)

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