

Location: Approximately 10,000 Bonan inhabit areas of southwest Gansu Province. In addition, 4,000 members of the Tu minority speak Bonan as their first language.¹ The Bonan occupy several townships and villages in Jishishan County. The Jishi Mountains have long been an effective defense against approaching armies. For centuries the Bonan have lived on the edge of both Tibetan and Chinese civilizations.

Identity: The Bonan are the eighth smallest of China's 55 official minorities. After decades of intermarriage with other peoples such as the Hui, Han, and Tu, a distinct people group formed who came to call themselves *Bonan*, which means "I protect you." This name refers to their long history as the soldiers and protectors of the people in the area.

Language: The Bonan speak a Mongol language, altered from their original Mongol tongue by 700 years of isolation. Today, Bonan is more similar to the Dongxiang and Tu languages than to modern Mongolian. A 1960 study of 3,000 words found that approximately 50% of the Bonan vocabulary were loanwords from other languages.²

History: During the Mongolian world empire, large numbers of people from Central Asia were mixed together and sent to China as troops and administrators. These garrisons settled down after the collapse of the empire and gradually formed into their own people groups. It is believed the

Bonan were originally Mongol troops sent to their present location on the edge of Chinese territory to act as watch guards against the fierce Tibetans. In 1862 religious friction between Muslim Bonan and those who had embraced Tibetan Buddhism caused the two groups to split.³ These religious disputes and a quarrel over water rights caused the Muslim Bonan to move east to their present location in Gansu.⁴

Customs: The Bonan are renowned for their famous *Bonan knife*. It is a skillfully made knife with engraved ox-horn handles. Profits from sales of the knife, along with farming and logging, are the main sources of income for the Bonan. The Bonan send the pick of their young people to study at the Northwest Nationalities Institute in the city of Lanzhou.

Religion: The majority of Bonan are Sunni Muslims. They worship in their own mosques and no longer consider the Tibetan Buddhist Bonan to be their brothers. The Bonan are linguistically related to the Dongxiang Muslims in the area and live



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downstream from the Muslim Salar people of Xunhua. First converted to Islam by Muhammed Amin in 1750, Xunhua County contained 73 mosques in the early 1980s.⁵

Christianity: The Bonan are an unreached people group. There has never been a Bonan church nor a single known Bonan believer. Missionaries worked among the neighboring Salar until the 1950s, but no church was established.⁶ Little has changed since the 1920s when a plea went unheeded for workers to the Muslims in Gansu, "to give their whole time to each of these tribes."⁷



Population in China:
 8,212 (1990)
 10,590 (2000)
 13,650 (2010)
Location: Gansu
Religion: Islam
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Bonan

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Bo-nahn"
Other Names: Bao'an, Paoan, Paongan, Baonan
Population Source:
 8,212 (1990 AMO);
 Out of a total Bonan population of 12,212 (1990 census);
 9,027 (1982 census);
 5,125 (1964 census);
 4,957 (1953 census)
Location: SW Gansu: Dadun, Ganhetan and Meipo villages of Dahejia Township, and in Gaoli Village of Liuji Township in Jishishan County

Status:
 An official minority of China
Language: Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern Mongolian, Mongour
Literacy: 24%
Dialects (3):
 Jishishan, Genhetan, Dadun
Religion: Sunni Islam
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: PEH00

