

Buriat, China



Create International

The 1982 China language census listed 65,000 speakers of the Buriat language in China. In later censuses the Chinese authorities did not count the Buriat separately but included them under the Mongolian nationality. Large numbers of Buriat people also live in Russia and Mongolia but, because of historical and political influences, the Buriat in each country now speak different languages and should be considered three different groups from an ethnolinguistic standpoint. The Buriat in China are relatively recent arrivals, having migrated from Siberia to Inner Mongolia in 1917.¹

The Buriat in China inhabit grasslands in the Hulunbuir region of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. This remote area is located where the three nations of China, Russia and Mongolia meet. The Buriat originally consisted of several Mongolian people groups and clans who were recognized as five distinct tribes.² The Buriat—who claim to be descended from either a grey bull or a white swan³—still share many common traits and customs with the Mongols.

The Buriat language spoken in China is different from the Buriat in Mongolia and

Russia. They reportedly 'speak a highly distinctive dialect of Mongolian'.⁴ The two main dialects of Buriat in China are known as New Bargu (47,000 speakers) and Old Bargu (14,000). Some sources suggest these two dialects are so different that they may represent distinct languages, but more research needs to be done.

The *yokhor* folk dance plays an important role in the lives of the Buriat. Young girls imitate the actions and movements of birds and animals. Most Buriat live in mud and wood houses, although some are still nomads.⁵

Historically, most Buriat believed in shamanism, allowing mediums to control all interactions between the gods and their communities. To be a shaman, a person had to be seen to possess *utkha*, a mystical spiritual energy. In the 1500s, Buddhist missionaries from Tibet travelled into Mongolia and introduced Tibetan Buddhism. It soon grew in influence, and a mixture of Buddhist teachings and shamanist practices emerged. In the past century many Buriat in Russia and Mongolia became atheists under the Communist system, but a significant number of Buriat in China have continued to believe in Buddhism. A new religion called *Burkhanism* has also appeared among them in recent years.⁶

A few of the Buriat in China have recently become Christians, resulting from Chinese house church efforts originating in a revival in Heilongjiang Province. Just one city, Daqing, has more than 200,000 Chinese believers. They took responsibility for evangelizing westward into Inner Mongolia, boldly preaching the gospel and seeing thousands of people converted in many locations, including Hulun Buir. The new Buriat believers are hampered by a lack of Scriptures and other resources in their language.



Population:
98,900 (2000)
127,600 (2010)
164,500 (2020)
Countries: China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 100

Overview of the China Buriat

Other Names: Buryat, Northern Mongolian, Buriat-Mongolian, Northeastern Mongolian, Bargu, Bargu Buriat

Population Sources:
65,000 in China (1982 census)

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

Dialects: 4 (New Bargu [47,000], Old Bargu [14,000], Khori, Aga)

Professing Buddhists: 70%

Practising Buddhists: 30%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: Portions 1827; work in progress

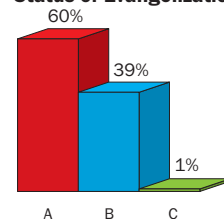
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: BXU

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