



**Population in China:**

4,000 (1987)  
5,500 (2000)  
7,100 (2010)

**Location:** Qinghai

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism

**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Tongren Bonan

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:**

"Bow-nahn-Tong-ren"

**Other Names:** Tongren, Buddhist Bonan, Qinghai Bonan

**Population Source:**

4,000 (1987 LAC);  
Out of a total Bonan population of 12,212 (1990 census)

**Location:**

S Qinghai: Tongren County

**Status:**

Officially included under Bonan

**Language:** Altaic, Mongolian, Eastern Mongolian, Mongour

**Dialects (5):** Tongren, Nianduhu, Dunmari, Gajiuri, Bao'an Xiazhuang

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism, Bon

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

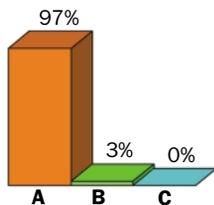
**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** PEH02

**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

**Location:** Tongren County, in the eastern part of Qinghai Province, is home to more than 5,000 people of the Bonan nationality. Tongren is a crossroads for many different peoples, including the Salar, Tu, Hui, Amdo Tibetans, and Wutun.

**Identity:** The Buddhist Bonan in Tongren consider themselves a separate people from the Muslim Bonan in Gansu. Their languages are now also different. Using the definition of a people group as "a significantly large ethnic or sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another,"<sup>1</sup> the Tongren Bonan definitely qualify as a distinct people group.

**Language:** The Bonan language in Tongren County of Qinghai is distinct from the main body of Bonan across the border in Gansu Province. The Gansu Bonan language has been influenced by Chinese, while Tongren Bonan has been heavily influenced by Tibetan and Tu. Various linguists note that sound structure and grammar also differ between the two areas. While the Tongren Bonan can communicate in their own language with the Tu in Tongren, they cannot with the Tu who live farther north.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a language similar to Tongren Bonan "is spoken by some Han and Hui who had until the 1950s been referred to as the *Tongren Turen* (natives)."<sup>3</sup>

**History:** The Tongren Bonan are the descendants of Mongolian troops who were stationed in the region during the Mongolian world

empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. After the collapse of Mongol rule in 1368, most soldiers retreated to Mongolia, but a few remained behind. After centuries of intermingling with other nationalities, they became a distinct group called the *Bonan*.

**Customs:** The Tongren Bonan observe all Tibetan festivals and have culturally become almost indistinguishable from the Tibetans. "Those Bonans who retained their Buddhist faith became strongly acculturated to their neighbors... as a result, only a small number of persons remain in Tongren who from an ethno-linguistic point of view can still be considered Bonan."<sup>4</sup>

**Religion:** The Tongren Bonan are Tibetan Buddhists. In the early nineteenth century,

a portion of the Bonan converted to Islam. This caused deep friction among the two Bonan groups. The Muslim Bonan were forced to migrate into Gansu Province where they remain to this day.

**Christianity:** The first foreign missionaries among the Tongren Bonan were workers affiliated with the Christian & Missionary Alliance. They commenced work in Bao'an Township around 1910. Despite being in the Bonan neighborhood, the missionaries' primary target were the Tibetans, not the Bonan. By 1922 the mission was closed due to lack of workers.<sup>5</sup> It opened again, but after years of slow and unfruitful progress the work gravitated towards the more receptive Han Chinese.<sup>6</sup> Today, there are no known Christians among the Tongren Bonan.



Dwayne Graybill