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Location: Approximately 113,000 Salar live in north central China. More than 70% are located in Xunhua County in southeast Qinghai Province. Other Salar live in towns spread 50 kilometers (31 mi.) east to west and 40 kilometers (25 mi.) north to south. Additional communities are located in neighboring Gansu Province, while 1,447 Salar live in Yining County of Xinjiang — a vast distance from the main body of Salar.¹ Most Salar live in poor, mud-baked shacks.

Identity: Although the Salar hold the distinction of being one of China's official nationalities, they are very similar to the Uygurs of Xinjiang. Their language is virtually the same as Uygur. One expert lists Salar as a Uygur dialect, and notes that "The main difference between the Salar and the Uygurs of Xinjiang is geographical."²

Language: Approximately 80% of the Salar can speak

their language, which is part of the Turkic family. Because the Salar live at the crossroads of several great civilizations, many are bilingual or multilingual in Chinese, Uygur, and Amdo Tibetan. A 1960 study found 7% of the Salar vocabulary was Persian-Arabic, in addition to a few Mongolian and Tibetan loanwords.³

History: The Salar have a colorful tale of their history. They say they originated in the famous city of Sarmarkand, located in today's Uzbekistan. In the eleventh century a tribe known as the *Salar* fled persecution in their homeland.⁴ They were forced to migrate across the mountains of Central Asia. Not knowing where they were going, the Salar strapped a Qur'an to a camel's head and asked Allah to guide them to wherever he wanted them to settle. After many months of travel, a Salar *Imam* had a vivid dream of a beautiful waterfall. The next day the

travelers came to the same waterfall. The camel stopped to drink and turned into a large white stone. Taking it as a divine sign, the tribe stopped there and began to build a community.⁵ In 1781 the Qing armies crushed a Salar uprising.⁶ The Salar suffered massive losses. As many as 40% of their entire population were obliterated in the battle.⁷

Customs: Divorce is a simple procedure for the Salar. The husband merely announces, "I don't want you any longer," and the woman leaves the home. She is free to marry again.

Religion: The Salar were reportedly converted to Islam as recently as 1750 by Muhammed Amin.⁸ By the early 1980s, the Salar worshiped in 73 mosques throughout Xunhua County.⁹ Many more mosques have been opened in recent years. Although they have lived beside Tibetans for centuries, the Salar have resisted all pressure to convert to Tibetan Buddhism.

Christianity: Before 1949 few missionaries reached out to the Salar. In the 1920s an appeal was made for "workers to give their whole time to the Salar."¹⁰ Ralph Covell laments, "Missionaries talked about the Salar... but the rigors of a harsh climate, and a demanding geographical environment [meant] only a few were prepared for the necessary long-term commitment and sacrifices."¹¹ No church has ever been established among the Salar, although today there are a small

number of Salar attending a Han Chinese church in Xining City.



Population in China:
 87,697 (1990)
 113,100 (2000)
 145,900 (2010)
Location:
 Qinghai, Gansu, Xinjiang
Religion: Islam
Christians: 20

Overview of the Salar

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Sar-lar"
Other Names: Sala, Turki Huihui, Turki Hwei Hwei
Population Source:
 87,697 (1990 census);
 69,102 (1982 census);
 34,644 (1964 census);
 30,658 (1953 census)
Location: *E Qinghai:* Xunhua and Hualong counties, and in eight other townships; A few also live in Xining City and in Gonghe, Guide, and Qilian counties.
Gansu: Jishishan County; Dahejia Township;
Xinjiang: Yining County
Status:
 An official minority of China
Language:
 Altaic, Turkic, Eastern Turkic
Literacy: 27%
Dialects (2): Jiezi, Mengda
Religion: Sunni Islam
Christians: 20
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: SLROO

