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Location: A 1992 study listed 2,000 speakers of the Akto Turkmen language in China.¹ They live in two large villages, Kosarap and Oytak, south of Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Little has changed in the area since Marco Polo described Kashgar 700 years ago: “The inhabitants live by trade and industry. They have very fine orchards and vineyards and flourishing estates. Cotton grows here in plenty, besides flax and hemp. The soil is fruitful and productive of all the means of life. This country is the starting-point from which many merchants set out to market their wares all over the world.... The inhabitants have a language all of their own.”²

Identity: Although the Akto Turkmen are considered

part of the Kirgiz nationality, their language and customs are more closely related to that of the Uygur. They claim originally they came from Samarkand, which lies in present-day Uzbekistan. The Akto Turkmen are a unique ethnolinguistic group. Their customs and physical features are also distinct from all other groups in Xinjiang.

Language: Some linguists describe Akto Turkmen as a dialect of the Turkic Uygur language, but the Akto Turkmen vocabulary is interspersed with approximately 500 words that are seldom used in standard Uygur.³

History: The history of the Akto Turkmen is uncertain. They claim to have migrated long ago from Samarkand to their present location in

China. The Akto region is a part of China that has been rocked with conflict. In April 1990 an “armed counter revolutionary rebellion” occurred in Baren Township of Akto County. “There were over twenty deaths, mainly of members of Islamic minorities. Later in 1990... fifty mosques were closed down and the construction of 153 others was halted.”⁴

Customs: These people are skilled shepherds and goatherds despite the harsh landscape where they must raise their animals. Their clothing, food, and housing all reflect their seminomadic, pastoral lifestyle. The diet of the Akto Turkmen consists mainly of animal by-products, complemented with cabbage, potatoes, and onions. They store their butter in dried sheep or cattle stomachs.

Religion: The Akto Turkmen are Sunni Muslims who observe both Uygur and Kirgiz religious festivals, along with some rituals they have retained from their pre-Islamic religion of shamanism. Most Akto Turkmen can read the modified Arabic script used by their Uygur neighbors.

Christianity: No record exists of any mission work being conducted among the small but proud Akto Turkmen people group. They are strongly bound to their Islamic beliefs, which form their ethnic identity, and to their own ancient form of shamanism and black magic. Few Akto Turkmen have had the opportunity to hear the gospel and intelligently respond to the claims of Christ. Probably

the best opportunity for the Akto Turkmen to hear about Christ is through the Uygur gospel radio broadcasts that have aired in the region for the past several years.



Population in China:
 2,000 (1992)
 2,460 (2000)
 3,180 (2010)
Location: Xinjiang
Religion: Islam
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Akto Turkmen

- Countries:** China
- Pronunciation:** “Ahk-toe-Turk-men”
- Other Names:** Akto
- Population Source:**
 2,000 (1992 B. Grimes);
 Out of a total Kirgiz population of 141,549 (1990 census)
- Location:** SW Xinjiang: Kosarap and Oytak villages in Akto County, south of Kashgar
- Status:**
 Officially included under Kirgiz
- Language:**
 Altaic, Turkic, Eastern Turkic
- Dialects:** 0
- Religion:** Sunni Islam, Shamanism
- Christians:** None known
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** None

