

Location: Approximately 140,000 Kirgiz were counted in the 1990 Chinese census. In addition, 2.23 million Kirgiz live in their new homeland, Kyrgyzstan. Others live in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and in a small refugee community in Turkey. In China, 80% of the Kirgiz are located in the more than 20 counties within the Kiziksu Prefecture in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.¹

Identity: In the 1950s the Kirgiz were granted status as one of China's official minority groups. The name *Kirgiz* means "44 lasses."² The Kirgiz believe they are descended from 44 maidens. The Kirgiz in China still retain their tribal identities. "To this day one can distinguish the following tribes: Kipchak, Naiman, Taijit, Kaisaik, Chongbash, Qielik, Kuqu, Salu, Salbash, Mengduzi, Menggular, Ketay, Buwu, and Sayak."³

Language: Kirgiz is a Turkic language. They used to have their own script, called the *Yenisei* script, until it was lost in the eighth century.⁴ No trace of it remains today. The Kirgiz language in China contains two dialects: Northern and Southern Kirgiz. Both dialects have the same vocabulary but employ different pronunciations.

History: In AD 751 the Chinese armies were defeated by the Arabs in a significant battle at Talas, in what is now Kyrgyzstan. One historian wrote, "This encounter... was one of the most fateful battles in history. It marked the end of Chinese control over Central Asia.... It also marked

the beginning of Arab conquest of Central Asia. Soon the area was permanently converted to Islam."⁵ By the early 830s the Kirgiz had clashed with the Uygurs for control of Central Asia and defeated them. In 1944 the Chinese Nationalist government ordered the closure of many Kirgiz pasture lands, under the pretext of "border security." The Kirgiz, outraged at losing their livelihood, formed a government that gave birth to the Puli Revolution.

Customs: The Kirgiz have a famous epic, the *Manas*, that describes their past. The *Manas* is a virtual encyclopedia describing the customs, habits, and philosophies of the Kirgiz, as well as recording their struggle for independence and freedom. Most Kirgiz in China are involved with the production of carpets, horse gear, cloth, and wool.

Religion: In reality — although they are outwardly Muslims — most Kirgiz follow a form of shamanism and black magic, where power through seductive signs and wonders is exerted. Demonstrations of this evil power are often aired on public television in



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Kyrgyzstan. The Snake god, in particular, is held in great fear.

Christianity: Swedish missionaries in Xinjiang listed 163 baptized believers by 1933, "mostly Uighers and Kirgiz, with some Chinese."⁶ In 1933 the missionaries were arrested and brought before Abdullah Khan, who "personally kicked and beat them. He threatened to kill them, claiming that their religious teaching was destroying the faith of many of his people."⁷ Most of the new Kirgiz believers were murdered. Those whose lives were spared were imprisoned for many years. There are just a few known believers among the Kirgiz in China today, although some ministries are targeting them.



Population in China:
138,600 (1990)
178,800 (2000)
230,600 (2010)
Location: Xinjiang
Religion: Islam
Christians: 10

Overview of the Kirgiz

Countries: Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkey
Pronunciation: "Kerr-geez"
Other Names: Kirghiz, Kara, Ke'erkezi
Population Source:
141,549 (1990 census),⁸
113,999 (1982 census),⁹
2,230,000 in Kyrgyzstan;
175,000 in Uzbekistan;
64,000 in Tajikistan;
25,000 in Afghanistan;
1,137 in Turkey
Location: SW Xinjiang: 80% live in Kiziksu Kirgiz Prefecture.¹⁰

Status: An official minority of China
Language: Altaic, Turkic, Western Turkic, Aralo-Caspian
Literacy: 59%
Dialects (2): Northern (50,000), Southern (50,000)
Religion: Islam, Polytheism, Ancestor Worship
Christians: 10
Scripture: New Testament 1988; Portions 1818
Jesus film: Available
Gospel Recordings: Kirghiz #03374
Christian Broadcasting: Available (FEBC, TWR)
ROPAL code: KDO00

