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**Location:** An estimated 33,000 speakers of the Sarikoli Tajik language live in China's far northwest corner, near the border with Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan. The majority live in and around the town of Taxkorgan, which means "stone fortress."<sup>1</sup> Although there are more than eight million Tajiks scattered throughout Central Asia — the majority being in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — the Sarikoli Tajik in China are a separate ethnolinguistic group from the Central Asian Tajik.

**Identity:** The Tajik nationality in China speaks two distinct languages: Sarikoli and Wakhi. The Tajik are probably the one group in China most unlike the Han Chinese. They are a

different from the majority language spoken in Tajikistan.<sup>2</sup> The Tajik in China do not have their own written script, but some use the Uygur orthography. The two Tajik languages in China are reportedly different enough that speakers from each group must use Uygur to communicate.

**History:** The history of the Tajik dates back to the biblical time of Abraham. Around 1000 BC the first Persians started to forge a prominent place in history for themselves. The Old Testament records the Persians some 43 times, showing them to have a key role in God's redemptive plan. The Persian King Darius, mentioned in the sixth chapter of Daniel, today lends his name to the Tajik language called

Caucasian people with light skin. Many have green or blue eyes and fair hair. They speak a Persian (Iranian) language which is part of the Indo-European language group. The term *Tajik* is applied to various Iranian-speaking groups of Central Asia in differing ways.

**Language:** Three-quarters of China's Tajiks speak Sarikoli. It is described as "a language entirely

*Dari* in Tajikistan and *Farsi* in Afghanistan.

**Customs:** The Sarikoli Tajiks have lived in tribal and clan structures for centuries. Their homes are built with stone for protection against the extreme cold.

**Religion:** The Tajiks are one of the few groups in China who adhere to the Shi'a sect of Islam. They do not have mosques. Instead, they meet in their homes once a week for prayer and worship. Before the arrival of Islam in the tenth century, most Tajiks were Christians, having been converted by Nestorian missionaries starting in the seventh century. The Apostolic Church of the East — which had eight million Christians throughout Asia — was destroyed, and all trace of Christianity disappeared.

**Christianity:** The Tajik are one of the most unreached groups in China. In the 1920s a lone worker stated, "I am sorry to say that in accordance with my knowledge of conditions I cannot pretend this field to be ready for harvest, however, the need of sowing is utterly pressing. Workers intending to scatter the gospel seed in this country ought to know beforehand that their task is not to gather harvest in joy but to sow in tears."<sup>3</sup> Although today there are more than 400 believers in Tajikistan,<sup>4</sup> the Tajik Scriptures and *Jesus* film,<sup>4</sup> are not understood by the Sarikoli Tajik in China, although gospel recordings are available in their language.



**Population in China:**  
 25,800 (1990)  
 33,300 (2000)  
 42,900 (2010)  
**Location:** Xinjiang  
**Religion:** Islam  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Sarikoli Tajik

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Sar-ree-kor-lee-Tah-jick"  
**Other Names:** Sarikoli, Sarakoly, Sarykoly, Shughni, Tajike, Tajiki, Tadzik, Persian  
**Population Source:** 25,800 (1990 AMO); Out of a total Tajik population of 33,538 (1990 census)  
**Location:** SW Xinjiang: In and around Taxkorgan, near the Afghanistan border; Smaller groups of Tajik live in the Yarkant, Poskam, Kargalik, and Gumad districts.

**Status:** Officially included under Tajik  
**Language:** Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Iranian, Eastern Iranian, Northeastern, East Scythian, Pamir, Shugni-Yazgulami  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Literacy:** 52%  
**Religion:** Ismaili Shi'a Islam, Animism  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** Shughni #03370  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** SRH00

