



Dwayne Grabbill

**Location:** In 1980 R. F. Hahn reported the existence of at least 30 Tuerke households, numbering approximately 120 people.<sup>1</sup> Another source lists a 1991 population of 200 Tuerke.<sup>2</sup> There are probably also some Tuerke living in Kazakstan. The Tuerke in China live near the city of Yining (formerly called Kuldja) within the Ili Valley in the northwest Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Located 700 kilometers (432 mi.) west of the provincial capital, Yining is predominantly a Kazak and Uzbek town. Ethnic unrest between Xinjiang's Muslim population and the Han Chinese creates a tension in this part of the country. "Chinese appear uneasy here and warn against staying out after dark, when knives are fast and streets unsafe.... The local Kazaks and Uzbeks can be a rough bunch (regularly drunk in the evenings and occasionally

involved in street fights) but very friendly towards foreigners, whom they put in a different category from those in authority."<sup>3</sup>

**Identity:** The Tuerke, who are ethnically and linguistically distinct from all other peoples in the region, were only "discovered" by the Chinese in 1956. Their name is a generic term for all Turkic peoples. They are also known as the *Ili Turki*, named after their location.

**Language:** Despite the small population of the Tuerke, their language has been extensively researched.<sup>4</sup> Tuerke is now only spoken by middle-aged and older people.<sup>5</sup> Because younger Tuerke intermarry with the Uygur and Kazak, the use of the Tuerke language is rapidly declining. Some linguists believe Tuerke is a link between the Chagtai and Kypchak dialects of Uzbek.<sup>6</sup> Tuerke

has also been greatly influenced by Kazak and Uygur and has borrowed words from the Arabic, Persian, Chinese, and Russian languages.

**History:** The oral history of the Tuerke states that they migrated from the Ferghana Valley — in today's Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan — about 200 years ago. The Ili Valley has long been a focal point for bandits. The Russians, angered at China's inability to control the border area, invaded Ili in 1871. They returned the region to China in March 1882. In 1962 there were several major China-Soviet military clashes along the Ili River.

**Customs:** Although the Tuerke possess their own set of customs, they are gradually replacing them with those of the Kazaks and Uzbeks. The Tuerke are fond of dancing and telling folk tales. In keeping with Islamic regulations, Tuerke women are required to wear veils; these are not the full face veils worn in the Middle East.

**Religion:** All Tuerke are Sunni Muslims. Although they do not have their own mosques, the Tuerke are faithful in observing Islamic law and prayer times.

**Christianity:** The far northwestern part of Xinjiang — which was formerly part of the Eastern Turkestan alliance — was one of the most missionary-neglected regions in China prior to 1949. There are few Christian communities in the area today, and there are no believers among the Tuerke. Gospel radio programs,

aired in the Uzbek, Kazak, and Uygur languages, are the best opportunity the Tuerke have of hearing the gospel in a language they understand.



**Population in China:**

120 (1980)
189 (2000)
244 (2010)

**Location:** Xinjiang  
**Religion:** Islam  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Tuerke

**Countries:** China, Kazakstan

**Pronunciation:** "Too-er-ke"

**Other Names:**

Ili Tuerke, Ili Turki, T'urk, Ili Turk

**Population Source:**

120 (1980 R. F. Hahn);  
Probably also in Kazakstan

**Location:** NW Xinjiang:

Approximately 30 households in the Ili Valley near Yining in the Ili Kazak County

**Status:** Unidentified;  
Possibly not included under any official minority

**Language:**

Altaic, Turkic, Eastern Turkic

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Sunni Islam

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

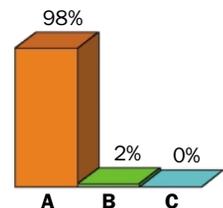
**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** ILI00

## 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