

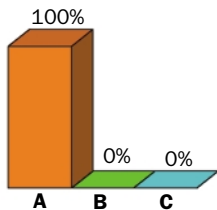


**Population in China:**  
 200 (1990)  
 250 (2000)  
 310 (2010)  
**Location:** Xinjiang  
**Religion:** Islam  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Taklimakan Uyгур

- Countries:** China
- Pronunciation:** "Tahk-lee-mar-khan"
- Other Names:** Uyгур: Taklamakan, Taklamakan, Taklemakan
- Population Source:** "More than 200" (1990 *China Daily*)
- Location:** *Xinjiang:* In the heart of the Tarim Basin in the Taklimakan Desert
- Status:** Officially included under Uyгур (since discovered)
- Language:** Altaic, Turkic
- Dialects:** 0
- Religion:** Islam
- Christians:** None known
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** None

### 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

**Location:** Deep in the heart of what many consider one of the most inhospitable places on earth lies one of the most fascinating stories of China's peoples. A tribe of "more than 200"<sup>1</sup> Uyğurs live in the heart of the Tarim Basin in the desert of *Taklimakan*, a Uyğur word which means "those who go in never come out." A vast expanse of shifting sand and wasteland in China's northwest, it covers an area of 337,000 square kilometers (131,400 sq. mi.) — about equal in size to the combined area of the eleven other deserts in China.<sup>2</sup> Surface and subterranean streams, "fed by water from the melted snow on the Tianshan and Kunlun Mountains, flow quietly on or beneath the desert, forming here and there ponds and small lakes. Oases big and small crisscross the desert."<sup>3</sup>

**Identity:** In early 1990 a Chinese oil exploration team<sup>4</sup> came across a village of people living around an extremely remote oasis in the heart of the desert. They were described as having a "gentle culture, living primitive lives in extreme isolation."<sup>5</sup> Experts discovered this tribe had been out of touch with the world for 350 years. "As a result, they... knew nothing of the historical fact of the Qing Dynasty (China's last dynasty) or about anything else up to the present time."<sup>6</sup>

**Language:** They were unable to communicate in standard Uyğur, so scholars were called in to attempt to speak with the tribe. They found the tribe speaks a variety of ancient Uyğur.

**History:** It is not known why the ancestors of the Taklimakan Uyğur fled deep into the desert three and a half centuries ago. It may have been to escape the marauding bandits who infested the area at the time. The Xinjiang authorities — never slow to spot a money-making opportunity — sold the rights to film the tribe to the London-based Third Eye Television for US\$2.8 million.<sup>7</sup> This will no doubt have a massive impact on this tribe which had never seen a machine or electric appliance before. They will probably be consumed into mainstream Uyğur culture before too long.

**Customs:** At the time of their discovery, the Taklimakan Uyğurs "told the time by the sun, had no form of government or authority structure, and no schools or writing system. They lived around an oasis,

farming animals and growing crops for their existence."<sup>8</sup> Temperatures in the desert are as harsh as anywhere in the world. Andir, in the western part of the desert, once registered a temperature of 67.2° Celsius (153°F).<sup>9</sup>

**Religion:** Despite their isolation, reports indicate that the Taklimakan Uyğur were still Muslims when they were discovered.

**Christianity:** The Taklimakan Desert is surrounded by the ancient Silk Road, which witnessed the arrival of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity in China. At the Dunhuang oasis which skirts the desert, startled archaeologists in the early 1900s began to unearth hundreds of Nestorian Christian documents.<sup>10</sup> Accessible by helicopter only, the Taklimakan Uyğur are the epitome of an unevangelized people group.



Dwayne Graybill