

Population in China:

60,740 (1990)
 74,800 (2000)
 92,100 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: 2,000

Overview of the Zhongdian Tibetans

Countries: China, Switzerland

Pronunciation: “Jong-dee-an”

Other Names: Zang, Khampa, Chung-tien Tibetan, Chongtien, Rgyalathang

Population Source:
 60,740 (1990 AMO);
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census);
 A few families in Switzerland

Location: *N Yunnan:* Zhongdian (50,302), Weixi (8,581), and Lijiang (1,849) counties;
 Possibly also located in counties in NW Yunnan

Status:
 Officially included under Tibetan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Northern Tibetan

Dialects: 0

Religion:
 Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity

Christians: 2,000

Scripture: Tibetan Bible 1948;
 New Testament 1885;
 Portions 1862

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings:
 Zang: Xiaozhongdian; Zang: Weixi

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: ATFOO



Paul Hattaway

Location: Approximately 75,000 linguistically distinct Tibetans inhabit villages in Zhongdian, Weixi, and Lijiang counties in the northern part of Yunnan Province. According to the 1990 national census, 50,302 live in Zhongdian County, 8,581 in Weixi, and 1,849 in Lijiang. The extent of their territory seems to extend to the Hengduan Pass between the towns of Zhongdian and Deqen, located farther to the north. Beyond the pass the dialect changes markedly. Hengduan literally means “cut off vertically.”¹ In autumn, the Zhongdian Plateau abounds with colorful flowers. “Azaleas in full bloom on the sheep pastures provide a cheering contrast while, higher up, maple saplings signal in a blaze of reds and oranges.”² A few Zhongdian Tibetan families have reportedly migrated to Switzerland.³

Identity: The Zhongdian Tibetans wear a different traditional dress from the Deqen Tibetans and all other Tibetans. Zhongdian women prefer to wear a cone-shaped headdress which they wrap inside a scarf.

Language: Researchers who have traveled into Tibetan areas of northern Yunnan Province report that the dialect variation between Zhongdian and Deqen is different

enough to seriously affect mutual intelligibility between Tibetans from the two areas. Zhongdian Tibetan, which is related to the Khampa Tibetan group, has experienced much greater exposure to Chinese than the Deqen Tibetan language.⁴

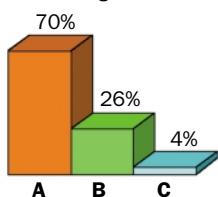
History: Local legends say the ancestors of the Zhongdian Tibetans were Qiang people who came to Zhongdian, fought and overcame the locals in battle, and eventually became assimilated to Tibetan ways. This would explain the linguistic, clothing, and cultural differences they have today with other Tibetan groups.⁵

Customs: The inhabitants of the Zhongdian area live in two-story wooden houses. Except for a few new roads and electricity lines, life has not changed much in this remote part of China.

Religion: The great majority of Zhongdian Tibetans adhere to Tibetan Buddhism. The large Jietang Songlin Monastery, which houses several hundred monks, is located just to the north of Zhongdian Township.

Christianity: French Catholic missionaries commenced work among the Zhongdian Tibetans in the late 1800s. Today, a large French-style cathedral still stands at Tchronteu, near Weixi.⁶ “The purpose of the monks of Saint Bernard was to minister to all in need who traveled over the high mountain trails in trade and commerce. Their most valuable helpers were huge Saint Bernard dogs — half Swiss and half Tibetan. In the city of Weixi, the monks, helped by the Cluny Sisters of Saint Joseph and two Tibetan nuns, ran a mission school attended by children from Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.”⁷ A Catholic priest is responsible for 9,500 Tibetan believers in his area. Of these, about 7,500 belong to the Deqen Tibetan group and 2,000 to the Zhongdian Tibetans.

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