

Xiangcheng

More than 11,000 people who inhabit a valley in and around the township of Xiangcheng in China's south-west Sichuan Province speak a distinct language and possess their own unique historical heritage.¹ The region is extremely remote. One visitor described Xiangcheng: 'The town looked magnificent. The solid residential houses were all built with big blocks of stone, but their windows tended to be very small, probably for the purpose of defense, in addition to keeping warm. We were told that in the old days, horse drivers were afraid of bandits here.'² The Xiangcheng build beautiful houses, which have white rocks on the roofs like those of the Qiang people. Xiangcheng homes are square-shaped, two stories high, with colourful decorations around the window frames.

They are very different from the houses of their neighbours, the Khampa.

The Chinese government has not recognized the Xiangcheng as an independent minority but has included them as part of the Tibetan nationality. As a result, few people are aware of their existence. One source states, 'The Xiangcheng people identify themselves as the descendants of Tibetan, Naxi, and Subi people. . . . In his southern



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expedition, Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) brought a great number of Subi people of Mongolian origin here to settle down in Xiangcheng. Ruins of ancient castles can still be found here.³

It appears that the Xiangcheng language is a mixture of several elements. They speak their own language within their families, but most use Khampa Tibetan when speaking to outsiders. Xiangcheng may be a Qiangic language.

For centuries the Xiangcheng area has remained virtually untouched—a remote outpost along the ancient caravan route that linked Yunnan with Tibet and Sichuan. One writer has noted, 'Xiangcheng's geographic location provides a unique strategic location, which perhaps has also nurtured the firm character of the Xiangcheng people. Xiangcheng controls Zhongdian to the south, defends the ancient Yunnan-Tibet route in the west, and blocks the Sichuan-Tibet route from Batang to Dajianlu [now Kangding]. Since ancient times Xiangcheng has been contested by all strategists.'⁴

When Joseph Rock visited in 1930, he found that the Xiangcheng territory was ruled by Sashatimba, a bandit chief

based at the Sangpiliang Monastery. 'Other bandit chiefs assist Sashatimba to rule the land. Together they loot and rob and murder. They even go on journeys of many weeks to hold up caravans or loot peaceful settlements. No Chinese dares to enter the [Xiangcheng] territories.'⁵

The Xiangcheng are zealous believers in Tibetan Buddhism, as evidenced by the numerous Buddhist temples and pagodas throughout the region.⁶ Their remoteness and strong faith in Buddhism has resulted in the Xiangcheng being one of the most untouched people groups in China, although a few years ago one young man believed in Christ and travelled to Kunming City to learn more of the Bible. He has proven a zealous disciple with a strong desire to reach his own people.



Population:
11,160 (2000)
13,750 (2010)
16,900 (2020)
Countries: China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 5

Overview of the Xiangcheng

Other Names: Hsiangcheng, Qagcheng Tibetan, Phygphreng

Population Sources:
10,000 in China (1995, Asian Minorities Outreach)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Unclassified (possibly Qiangic)

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 95%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

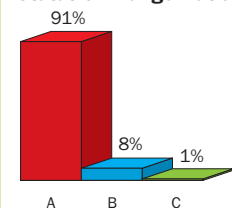
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity