

The Prinmi of China



The Prinmi people live scattered over an area reaching from Southern Sichuan Province to Northern Yunnan Province. In Sichuan, they are classified as Tibetan; in Yunnan, they are classified as Prinmi. The area ranges in altitude between 1800 to 4500 meters above sea level. Many villages in the southwest of Sichuan are still remote and inaccessible by vehicle.

The Prinmi are mainly agriculturalists who grow a variety of crops (maize, potatoes, wheat, (highland) rice, barley, oats, beans, squash and turnips) and practice animal husbandry. Animals include pigs, chickens, cattle, horses, mules and to a lesser extent goats and sheep. In some of the higher pastoral areas, Prinmi make a living as yak herders. The yaks are raised for their milk which is turned into yak butter, a basic ingredient in yak butter tea.

In recent years, many young people have gone all over China in search of unskilled labor jobs and a large percentage of the children have left the village to go to school. Thus, in some villages those segments of the population are not present for most of the year.

The further north one travels, the stronger the Tibetan Buddhist influence gets. People are in fear of ghosts which can inflict sickness, and worship mountain deities which in turn extend protection. Families normally have a household shrine on the side of the mountain where offerings and prayers for protection are made. In some areas households have a special room upstairs dedicated to the Buddha. Religious specialists include Buddhist monks (lamas), reincarnations of the Buddha (living Buddha's), shamans who interact with the more animist layer of the culture, and spirit mediums. The majority of Prinmi practice cremation and souls are said to return to the land of the ancestors.

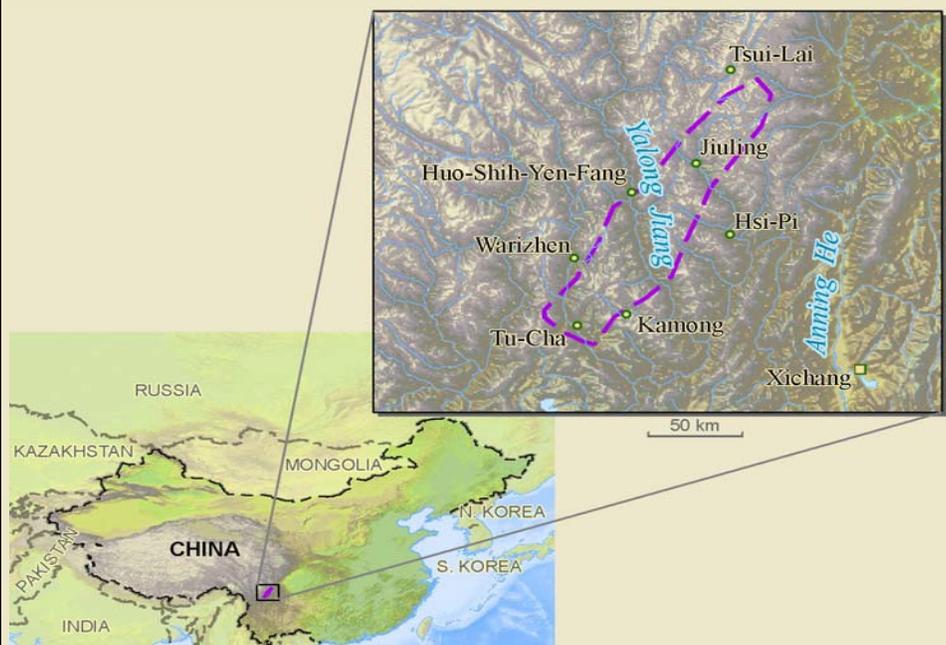
Primary Religion:
Tibetan Buddhism

Disciples (Matt 28:19):
Less than 1%

Churches:
2

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):
None

Population (date):
35,000 (1999)



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Call Themselves Christian

Less than 1%

Response to the Gospel

The church is growing slowly. Time is needed to invest in discipleship and leadership training. In many villages the response is antagonistic. Some people have responded positively, but refrain from making a clear decision due to social and cultural pressure.

Hindrances to Scripture Distribution

No mother tongue Scripture is yet available. There is no officially approved alphabet, but there has been some work done to create a writing system. Literacy in the mother tongue has yet to be developed. The few Prinmi believers attend multi-ethnic congregations where Chinese is the language used for worship .

Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?

Due to the difficulties in obtaining visas and access to the language area, especially in Sichuan, more local missionaries would be helpful, as long as they invest in learning the language and culture, and treat it as cross-cultural work. Health, church planting, theological and pastoral training, and education sponsorship of minority students are important areas of ministry.

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Group Description

Language & Linguistics

Primary Language of Wider
Communication

Local dialects of Chinese are used as the primary language of wider communication in most of the language area. Standard Chinese is used for writing.

Bilingualism

Many Prinmi, especially men, and especially in less remote areas, also speak Chinese, and depending on the area, may also speak Mosuo, Tibetan, Bai, Naxi, Yi, or Lisu. The language of instruction in schools is Chinese. Some schools in Muli County also teach Tibetan but not Prinmi*. In Muli county, many villages are homogenously Prinmi; in some of those villages monolingual speakers can still be found.

*another name used for Prinmi is Pumi, but note that this is Northern Pumi which is a different language from Southern Pumi.

And yet another name that this language is known by is Ch'rame .