Overview of the Oroqen

Countries: China, Russia
Pronunciation: “Oro-chen”
Other Names: Orochen, Orochon, Olunchun, Elunchun, Ulunchun

Population Source:
6,965 (1990 census); 8,980 (2000 census); 11,590 (2010)

Location:
Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang

Religion: Shamanism

Christians: 30

Population in China:
6,965 (1990)
8,980 (2000)
11,590 (2010)

Status of Evangelization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Evangelization Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Have never heard the gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Were evangelized but did not become Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Are adherents to any form of Christianity</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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<tr>
<td>92%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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Identity: In the 1950s the Oroqen were granted status as an official minority group in China. The name Oroqen means “people of the mountain range.”

Language: Oroqen is a member of the Northern Tungus language family. The Oroqen and Ewenki are said to be able to understand 70% of each other’s language. Some linguists consider the several dialects of Oroqen to be separate languages.

History: The Oroqen were originally part of the Bei Shiwei people. It is believed that they broke away and formed their own identity sometime between AD 420 and 589. A Russian invasion of the area in the mid-1600s, followed by the Japanese occupation in the 1930s and 1940s, drove the Oroqen deep into the mountains and forests of China’s northern border regions.

Customs: For generations the Oroqen lived in traditional tents called xianrenzhu, which they cover with birch bark in the summer and deerskin during the bleak winters, when the temperature can fall below minus 50˚ Celsius (−58˚F). After a death occurs, the Oroqen wrap the corpse in birch bark and hang it at the top of a tree to decompose naturally. The Oroqen are great hunters and fishermen. Oroqen in some areas also raise reindeer. Today, due to the massive migration of Chinese to the northeast hinterlands, the Oroqen culture is being quickly assimilated.

Religion: Shamanism is the dominant religion among the Oroqen. They believe in an intricate system of demons and spirits. The Oroqen word for shaman means “agitated” or “frenzied” person. This name originated from the appearance of the shaman when he goes into a demonic trance to contact the spirit world. The Oroqen worship certain animals, especially the bear and the tiger, which they believe are blood relatives. They call the bear amaha, meaning “uncle” and the tiger wutaqi, meaning “old man.”

Christianity: Because of their reputation for violence and drunkenness, the few efforts to evangelize the Oroqen have met with resistance. In 1994 a Hong Kong-based ministry invited several Oroqen to work for them in southern China. Only one came; the rest chose to steal the train fare. The one who came was soon sent home after he threatened the other workers with a knife. In 1995 the first ever breakthrough among the Oroqen occurred when 30 accepted Christ after hearing the gospel from the newly converted Daur believers in Heilongjiang Province. Recently gospel recordings were produced in the Oroqen language for the first time.