

Qiang, Cimulin

A Chinese source lists a 1990 figure of 9,800 speakers of Cimulin Qiang living in five districts within Heishui (Black Water) County in north-west Sichuan Province, China.¹ The total Qiang population in the 1990 census was 198,252. This figure is the total of the populations of 11 smaller linguistic groups, of which just four could accurately be described as Buddhist. Qiang is actually the Chinese term for these people. Their self-name is *Rma*. The Chinese character for *Qiang* is a combination of *yang* (sheep) and *ren* (people), with the composite meaning of “people tending sheep”.²



Nancy Sturrock

The Cimulin Qiang language is very different from other varieties of Qiang. Cimulin Qiang, which is a Northern Qiang language, is not tonal, whereas Southern Qiang varieties all have between two and six tones.³ Many of the Cimulin Qiang are bilingual in Tibetan, while others living near the towns are able to speak Chinese. In addition, more than 50,000 speakers of Northern Qiang dialects have been categorized under the Tibetan nationality—and so these days they

have lost their Qiang identity and think of themselves as Tibetans.⁴

Qiang history dates back as far as the Western Zhou Dynasty (1100–771 BC), when considerable numbers of Han Chinese migrated west and formed mixed communities with the Di and Qiang.⁵ They found themselves living in a buffer zone between the Chinese

and Tibetans, and they have absorbed aspects of both cultures.⁶

One of the most important Qiang festivals is called *Jishanhui*, which women are not allowed to attend. A cow or sheep is sacrificed on an altar to the god of the mountains. They pray for a good harvest and for peace for the village.

The Northern Qiang language groups, including the Cimulin Qiang, have embraced Tibetan Buddhism more zealously than the Southern Qiang

because of centuries of influence from neighbouring Tibetans. The Northern Qiang also worship a multitude of Chinese and Tibetan deities, of which the sky god is considered the greatest. In addition, shamans, witches and mediums are located throughout the countryside. In 1994 one Christian interviewed a Qiang sorceress at a

temple reputed to be 1,000 years old. The woman told the visitor, “I have the power to put people into a trance and make their spirits leave their bodies and travel to hell. Usually, we can then call their spirits back, but sometimes it doesn’t work, and the person dies and is trapped in hell forever.” When we told her about a God who has

the power to take her spirit to heaven, she was delighted and wanted to know more.⁷

Most Qiang people, like this sorceress, have absolutely no awareness of the gospel. There are a few Northern Qiang Christians, including some families living in Songpan. ‘There are no church buildings any more, but still Christian believers.’⁸ It is not known, however, if there are any Christians specifically among the Cimulin Qiang group.



Population:

12,600 (2000)
16,300 (2010)
20,100 (2020)

Countries: China

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: none known

Overview of the Cimulin Qiang

Other Names: Chiang; Cimulin, Chi’ang, Cimulin, Tz’u-mu-lin, Ch’iang

Population Sources:

9,800 in China (1998, Liu Guangkun [1990 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Tangut-Qiang, Qiangic, Northern Qiang

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 70%

Practising Buddhists: 25%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

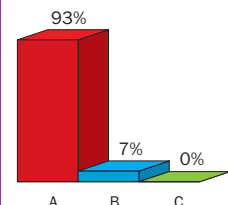
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: CNG03

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