

# Tibetan, Jone

Approximately 100,000 Jone (pronounced 'Joe-nee') Tibetans inhabit Jone (Zhuoni) and Lintan counties in the south-western part of Gansu Province in western China, 'and east from there in the Bawa area of the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture'.<sup>1</sup> A small number live in adjacent parts of northern Sichuan Province. Some publications have incorrectly given their location as the 'Yunnan-Tibet border'.<sup>2</sup> This group's name was previously spelled *Choni*, and they still appear in many publications by that name. The Tao River flows through Jone County.

A detailed history of the Jone appeared in a 1928 *National Geographic* article: 'The prince represents the twenty-second generation, but is not of direct descent. His ancestors, a Tibetan official family, left their own country and made their way across Sichuan and the Min Shan Range . . . to the Tao River in 1404, conquering and pacifying the tribes and villages on the way. Upon informing the Imperial Court in [Beijing] of their conquest of the territory for the Chinese Empire, they were made hereditary chiefs of Choni and the subjugated tribal lands. At the same time the Emperor, Yung



**Population:**  
100,200 (2000)  
123,400 (2010)  
152,000 (2020)  
**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** 200



China Advocate

Lo, gave them a seal and the Chinese name Yang.<sup>6</sup> Today many Jone Tibetans still have the surname Yang.<sup>7</sup>

Jone formerly contained a huge Buddhist monastery, 'containing 172 buildings and 3,800 monks at its zenith'.<sup>8</sup> The

In 1928 the explorer Joseph Rock discovered the Jone Tibetans. He wrote, 'I—in common with some 300 million Chinese and perhaps as many foreigners—was totally unaware of the existence of the Choni [Jone Tibetans].'<sup>3</sup> A more recent source explains that although the Chinese government officially considers them part of the Tibetan nationality, 'the people of this tribe have their own way of life. Due to their complex tribal structure, their lifestyle, customs, housing and costumes are visibly different from those of most Tibetans, making them a unique branch. As the tribe's women sport a hair-do with three thick plaits, locals call them *Sangemao* in the local Chinese dialect, literally meaning "three bundles of hair".<sup>4</sup>

Jone was the site of an independent Tibetan kingdom until 1928, when Chinese General Fengyu Shang stripped the prince of his title and confiscated his land.<sup>5</sup>

Jone Tibetans' homes show that they are very religious people. 'On the right side of the sitting room an enclave enshrines the statue of a god accompanied by bamboo arrows wrapped with *hada* (a long piece of silk used as a greeting gift among Tibetans and Mongolians), scripture scrolls and similar items.'<sup>9</sup>

A 1922 mission report stated, 'The prince of Choni alone governs 48 clans and we can easily travel among these clans, as the prince is friendly and would protect us. . . . If we had the workers to employ we would press toward the west from the line we are now occupying.'<sup>10</sup> Today there are about 200 Jone Tibetan believers in Lintan County, to the north-west of Jone County. A church was constructed in 1997—the first ethnic Tibetan fellowship in Gansu Province. 'One woman sold her hair, and another family sold their TV to help build the new church.'<sup>11</sup>

## Overview of the Jone Tibetans

**Other Names:** Choni, Chona, Chone, Jone, Cone, Choni Tibetan, Zhuoni Tibetan, Sangemao, Sangemao Tibetans

**Population Sources:**  
77,000 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Northern

**Dialects:** 2 (Nongqu, Hebian)

**Professing Buddhists:** 95%

**Practising Buddhists:** 70%

**Christians:** 0.2%

**Scripture:** none

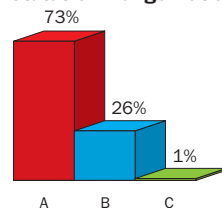
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** CDA (Choni) and KHG06 (Jone)

## 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