

Unreached Peoples: China's Minority Groups

#5 the Dong

by Paul Hattaway

The Dong people, a Chinese minority group, are one of the least evangelized peoples in the world, and their complex interwoven belief system makes it challenging to introduce the gospel, but prayer and mission efforts can begin to reach out to them.

Scripture: Romans 10:14

Topics: "Unreached Peoples", "Evangelism"

Description

This sermon sheds light on the Dong people, a Chinese minority group living in remote areas with unique traditions and challenges. Despite their rich culture, they are steeped in superstitions and animistic beliefs, making it difficult to introduce the gospel. The Dong's hunger for freedom and eternal life is highlighted, emphasizing the need for evangelism and prayer to reach this unreached group with the message of Christ's love and salvation.

Transcript

Amidst miles and miles of rice paddies in the inland provinces of China, a curious structure stands out. This authentic covered bridge was built without a single nail by the Dong people, the fascinating craftsmen. Have you ever heard of the Dong people? The 2.5 million who belong to this Chinese minority group are among the least evangelized peoples in the world.

They live in remote areas in the Chinese provinces of Guizhou, Guangxi, and Hunan. Because of the isolation of their remote villages, the Dong have had little contact with outside groups. Government restrictions prevent outsiders from visiting many Dong villages.

The areas where the Dong make their homes are full of fresh green mountains and clear rapid flowing rivers. For many years, the Dong have constructed wooden waterwheels that gracefully raise water from the river into bamboo irrigation pipes to nourish the rice fields. Surrounding the village, terraced rice paddies are formed on steep inclines like a work of art.

They grow regular rice as well as a special variety called sticky rice. In other areas, Dong homes are made of stone, but here they build traditional wooden homes that have changed little over the centuries. These homes are often three stories high.

The third floor is kept for food storage, and the first floor is set apart for farm animals. It is on the second floor that the Dong families live. Cooking is done in the center of the home over an open fireplace.

The Dong are eager to offer delicacies to their guests. One such treat is puffed rice and peanuts on top of an oil tea mixture. In the areas more accessible by roads, the clothing of the Dong is gradually changing as they travel to urban centers for trade.

But in the most remote areas, men, women, and even children will be seen going about their daily work in their traditional costumes. The homespun cloth soaks in pig's blood before being dyed indigo. The sound of the drum calls the community to the village square in front of the drum tower.

Each Dong village has at least one drum tower. The ornate roofs of the tower show off the superb craftsmanship of which the Dong are known. It is here in front of the drum tower that the Dong people gather for special cultural events.

A Dong proverb says, food keeps the body fit while singing gives the spirit a lift. The words of the songs hold much of the history and belief system passed on for centuries in a culture that is still today without a written language. Dances are often part of the courtship process.

The Dong practice monogamy and have traditionally married partners of their own choice. More recently, however, they have chosen to follow the ancient pattern of the majority Chinese, marriages arranged by parents. In either case, brides often do not actually move in with their new husbands until they are pregnant with their first child.

Though music is an important part of daily life, it produces only a temporary joy. The superstitions and fears of an animistic religion follow the people home when the festivities are over. Enshrined in the middle of this covered bridge are idols that require worship.

Superstitions keep the Dong people in fear of spirits that they believe can live almost anywhere. Animistic folk beliefs form the main religion of the Dong people. In order to maintain harmony between nature and people and between good and evil, the spirits must be kept happy with sacrifices.

If a hole is dug in the wrong place and a spirit is not satisfied, then the Dong people fear that some evil will surely happen. If a ritual was not done properly, perhaps some disaster may occur. Someone could become sick or die or a crop may fail.

Buddhism and ancestor worship play a role in their lives as well. This interwoven complex belief system makes reaching these people with the gospel all the more difficult. All of mankind hungers to know the living God.

The Bible tells us that they are aware in their hearts of God and desire to know him. But the Dong people don't know that there is freedom that is available to them. Freedom from burdens of fear and superstition and freedom in the knowledge of a glorious eternal life that most have never heard of.

There was some evangelistic outreach to the Dong in the 1920s and 30s. In 1938, one Chinese couple claimed to have baptized more than 100 people. The current missionary research estimates the number of Dong practicing Christianity today to be less than one percent.

There is no scripture available in the Dong language, an oral language that has never had a written form. Today, Dong children study Mandarin Chinese in school. At least half of the Dong population is literate or semi-literate in this majority Chinese language.

A number of Christians who have seen the spiritual need of the Dong firsthand are currently praying for the best strategy to reach them with the gospel. Although their villages are often off limits to outsiders, the Dong people themselves are a very friendly and open people group. If you could go to China and somehow get to a Dong village, you would be warmly welcomed.

But you can begin to reach out to the Dong right where you are. You or your family could commit some time each week to pray for the Dong. Your church or a group of churches partnering together could choose to focus their mission commitment on the Dong people, beginning with prayer.

Perhaps in prayer, God will provide a creative strategy to help start a church among the Dong. The people are waiting.

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