



**Population:**  
 127,000 (2000)  
 156,500 (2010)  
 192,700 (2020)  
**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** 10

## Overview of the Rongba Amdo

**Other Names:** Rongba, Rongpa

**Population Sources:** 97,600 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Northern Tibetan

**Dialects:** 2

**Professing Buddhists:** 99%

**Practising Buddhists:** 95%

**Christians:** 0.1%

**Scripture:** Tibetan Bible 1948; New Testament 1885; Portions 1862

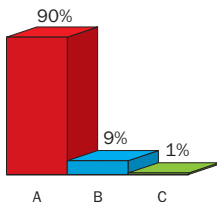
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** ADX02

### 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

A 1987 report listed 97,600 speakers of the Rongba Amdo language living in eastern Qinghai Province of western China.<sup>1</sup> In many locations in the province, Han Chinese and Muslims inhabit the towns, while the Rongba Amdo live in the countryside.

Most are farmers (indeed, the name *Rongba* means 'farmer' in Tibetan<sup>2</sup>), while some dwell in semi-nomadic communities, relocating their tents whenever their livestock need new pasture. They mostly herd yaks, sheep and goats. For centuries, the Amdo roamed the borderlands of the Tibetan-Chinese world. Their menacing reputation struck fear into all who dared to venture, unwelcome, into their realm.

The Rongba Amdo primarily live in Hualong, which is an autonomous county of the Hui Muslims, and in Xunhua County, partly administered by members of the Salar Muslim minority. The northernmost point of Rongba inhabitation is the small township of Ledu. Although many Rongba are nomadic, they still confine their movements within long-established geographical parameters. One family may be allowed to graze its herds up to a certain river, or a mountain pass, and is careful not to take advantage of a neighbour's land, for fear of retribution.

When the Communists took over all of Tibet in the 1950s, thousands of Tibetans were butchered. The official Chinese version of these events is markedly different: 'This rebellion accelerated the destruction of Tibet's reactionary forces and brought Tibet onto the bright, democratic and socialist road sooner than expected.'<sup>3</sup>

The Rongba Amdo language has two dialects and uses more Chinese loanwords than any other Tibetan language in China. Rongba is only partially intelligible with the three other Amdo languages. All Tibetans, however, use the same written script.

The Tibetan New Year, which falls in February according to the Tibetan lunar calendar,

is an occasion for great celebration among the Rongba Amdo. In the past, celebrations commenced the moment the peach tree blossomed. It is a time for relatives to get together and celebrate the past year's events.



Nancy Sturrock

The Rongba Amdo adhere to Tibetan Buddhism, also known as Tantric Buddhism. Marku Tsering has written, 'Tantra's most striking feature is its technique of occult visualization. The tantric master gives each student a deity which the student has to visualize. These deities, most of which appear in wrathful or monstrous forms, are supposed to be able to help the student achieve liberation. As the student visualizes, he tries to become what he sees, and in fact some Tibetan Buddhists claim to be able to actually materialize demons in front of them.'<sup>4</sup>

There are about ten known Christians among the Rongba Amdo today. During the missionary era (which in China lasted until the arrival of Communism in 1949), the Christian and Missionary Alliance had a few workers in the area, but little outreach was made to the Rongba Amdo. In recent years the Chinese house churches have sent evangelists to this group, with little success.