

Approximately 40,000 members of the Sogwo Arig tribe live in a remote part of western China. They inhabit Tsanggar Gonpa, a district within Tongde County in the Hainan Golog Prefecture, and parts of neighbouring He'nan County.<sup>1</sup> Tongde lies to the east of the Yellow River in Qinghai Province. The Qinghai Plateau—at a minimum elevation of 3,500 metres (11,500 ft.) above sea level—is snowbound nine months of the year and turns into a muddy bog the other three months. The area is home to the *Darakar Tredzong* (White Monkey Fortress), considered one of the three most sacred sites in all of the Amdo Tibetan areas.

The Sogwo Arig is a Mongolian tribe living in the midst of countless small Tibetan clans in one of the most remote locations in the world. Over the

course of many centuries, the Sogwo Arig language and culture have gradually been assimilated by the Tibetans. Still today, however, Tibetans in the area know that the Sogwo Arig are of Mongol ancestry and view them as a separate people.<sup>2</sup>

The Sogwo Arig language became practically extinct during the course of the 20th century. Today they speak the Amdo Hbrogpa Tibetan language, but they retain various words in their vocabulary that reveal their Mongolian ancestry.

The Sogwo Arig claim to have been the Mongol rulers of Henan Province. A surprised French explorer discovered this fact in 1906, when the Sogwo Arig prince signed a

letter with the title 'King of Henan'. Vicomte d'Ollone explains, 'When the Mongols were expelled from China, the dynasty of the kings of Ho-Nan [Henan]—kings without a kingdom—retired to their steppes; and when in their turn the Manchus seized the empire [1644] they utilized the Mongols for the purpose of holding the Tibetans in check, for which reason a horde was sent to establish itself in this region.'<sup>3</sup>

The Sogwo Arig continued to be led by a succession of kings until the 1950s, when the Communist authorities stripped the Sogwo Arig royal family of its authority.

Today one of the few remaining Sogwo Arig cultural features is their Mongolian style of *yurt*. Sogwo Arig men will not leave their homes without being armed with their rifle. When they go on hunting expeditions,

they take wooden tripods for resting their weapons on when firing.<sup>4</sup>

All Sogwo Arig are followers of either Tibetan Buddhism or Bon. They worship at crude sacrificial altars, constructed of yak dung piled about three feet high, upon which they regularly offer animal sacrifices to various gods and demons.

Hidden away in communities almost inaccessible to the outside world, the Sogwo Arig are virtually untouched by Christianity. Intrepid evangelists will need to overcome severe weather, rugged terrain, linguistic and cultural barriers and fierce packs of dogs which the Sogwo Arig have trained to attack strangers.



Nancy Sturrock



<b>Population:</b>
37,000 (2000)
47,700 (2010)
58,700 (2020)
<b>Countries:</b> China
<b>Buddhism:</b> Tibetan
<b>Christians:</b> none known

## Overview of the Sogwo Arig

**Other Names:** Sokwo Arik, Arig Tibetan, Alike, A-li-k'oa, Tatze, Sohkwō

**Population Sources:** 35,000 in China (1998, Asian Minorities Outreach)

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

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 97%

**Practising Buddhists:** 65%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

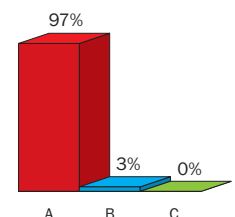
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

## 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