



Population:
 1,246,200 (2000)
 1,535,200 (2010)
 1,891,300 (2020)
Countries: China, Bhutan,
 India, Nepal
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 400

Overview of the Eastern Khampa

Other Names: Kham, Khams, Khams-Yal, Khams-Bhotia, Kam, Khamba, Kang, Konka, Konkaling

Population Sources:

956,700 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*)

1,000 in Bhutan (1995, *Languages of Bhutan*)

Also in India and Nepal

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

Dialects: 8 (Dege, Karmdzes, Chamdo, Braggyab, Nyingkhri, Batang, Nyagchu, and an unnamed dialect)

Professing Buddhists: 95%

Practising Buddhists: 80%

Christians: 0.1%

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

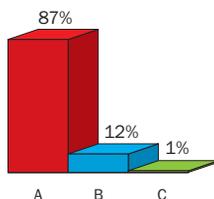
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Kham, Khamba

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: KHG

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

Approximately 1.3 million Tibetans speak the Eastern Khampa language. They inhabit a vast area but are primarily concentrated in China's western Sichuan Province as far east as Kangding; in a large portion of eastern Tibet; and in parts of southern Qinghai Province.

There are at least several thousand Eastern Khampa refugees living in Bhutan, Nepal

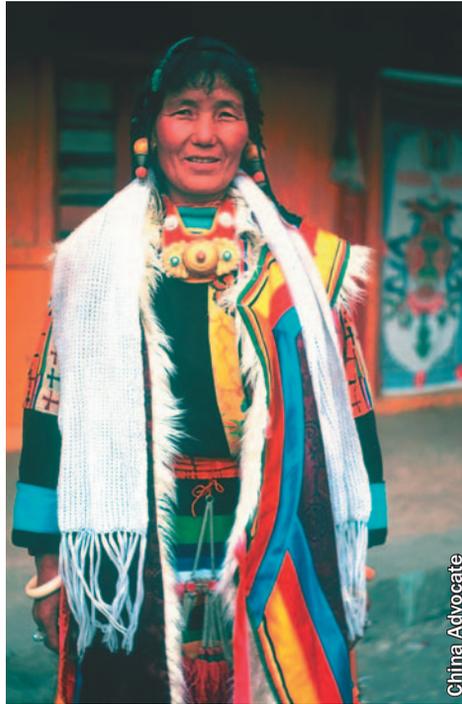
and India today, but their exact numbers are difficult to gauge because in those countries they are usually just identified as Tibetans and no linguistic distinction is made.¹ The Eastern Khampa language is by far the most widely spoken of the Khampa varieties. It is reported to have eight dialects² and 80 per cent lexical similarity with Central Tibetan.³

In China, the Eastern Khampa town of Litang lies 4,700 metres (15,400 ft.) above sea level. Chamdo is another important town—at an altitude of 3,200 metres (10,500 ft.). The Chamdo Monastery was built in 1473 and now houses 2,500 monks. Other main towns include Bayi and Batang—the latter being 2,700 metres (8,856 ft.) above sea level.⁴

The Khampa have a fearsome reputation for being the most hostile and violent of Tibetans. 'Tall and well-built men, fearless and open of countenance, they resemble Apache Indians, with plaited hair hanging from each side of well-modeled heads.'⁵

The Khampa, like all Tibetan groups, are devout followers of Buddhism. They have a long history of conflict with the Chinese, who annexed most of Kham Province to Sichuan in 1720. Until recently, 'No Chinese dares to enter the territory for fear of being murdered.'⁶ Military clashes between the Khampa and the Chinese occurred in 1918,

1928 and 1932. In 1950 the Chinese captured the town of Chamdo without firing a shot. The Khampa fled in terror when the Chinese set off a huge fireworks display on the outskirts of the town. In late 1955 the Chinese authorities ordered the monks of Litang Monastery to produce an inventory for tax assessment. The monks refused to oblige. In February 1956 the Chinese laid



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siege to the monastery, which was defended by several thousand monks and farmers. Chinese aircraft bombed Litang and the surrounding areas. In 1959 the Khampa living in Lhasa organized a revolt against Chinese rule. 'The fighting lasted three days with the Tibetans

caught up in a religious fervor, not caring whether they lived or died.'⁷

Catholic work among the Khampa commenced in the mid-1800s. The Catholic mission at Batang was demolished in 1873 and again in 1905—after two priests had been killed and converts who would not deny their faith were shot.⁸ By 1924 the mission numbered two bishops, 15 French missionaries and 4,800 baptized converts of whom 'about two-fifths were Tibetans'.⁹ Today there are 200 Khampa Catholics near Kangding and some near Batang and Yajiang.¹⁰ Protestant work among the Khampa commenced in 1897. Although the missionaries ran hospitals, schools and orphanages, they saw little fruit. By 1922 the Protestant station at Batang had won ten converts.¹¹