

The Yongkuk Tangsa tribe is the smallest Buddhist people group profiled in this book. In the 1981 India census their total population was given as just 59. They inhabit the Old Dokpe and Kamlao villages in the Manmao Circle in Changlang District. Changlang is located in the extreme north-eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India, just north of the state of Nagaland and west of the international border with Myanmar. The Yongkuk region is 'covered with thick tropical vegetation with a variety of animal life, including elephants, tigers, bears, deer, monkeys, reptiles and birds'.¹

The name Yongkuk is a compound of two words: *yong* means 'water', and *kuk* means 'upper', or 'higher'. 'The name thus implies "the people of the head waters of a river". The Yongkukus believe they originated at a place in the south known as Masoi Sinrapum. During their migration they crossed the Tennai Wakrup River and the Patkoi range, and established their first village in their present habitat in the Namchik River valley now known as Chhotam Pinjam. Among the Tangsas they are considered the first settlers in the Manchik valley.'²

The Yongkuk language is one of 15 Tangsa varieties in India.³ *Tangsa*

means 'hill people'. Yongkuk is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family, reportedly close to the Nocte Naga language.⁴ They also speak Assamese, Hindi and Nepali with outsiders.



Dwayne Graybill

In the past the Yongkuk Tangsa were a much larger group, but due to intermarriage with people from other ethnic groups their numbers have gradually decreased until today they are threatened with extinction. Despite their tiny numbers, the Yongkuk Tangsas still retain many of their

traditional customs. They are 'experts in spinning, weaving and basket-making. Folk-songs, folk-tales, folklore and folk-dances form part of their cultural heritage. Their musical instruments are the harp, flute, drum and bronze cymbal.'⁵

Out of the 59 Yongkuk Tangsa individuals recorded in the 1981 census, 55 people stated they were Buddhists, two were Christians, one Hindu, and one person was returned under 'other religions' (i.e., animism). Despite this confession of Buddhism, however, researchers tend to suggest that shamanism and animistic rituals are the dominant spiritual strongholds among this group. One source notes, 'The Yongkukus believe in a supernatural power, spirits and deities. They have three types of sacred specialists. They are the *fithang* (spiritual leader and diviner), *walangta* (astrologer and medicine man) and *tangsan* (who conducts the worshipping sessions and sacrifices). The festival of *Lamrong* is celebrated in the month of March in which pigs and chickens are sacrificed in each house to propitiate the deities for better health and a good crop.'⁶

Since the 1981 census, when just two individuals declared themselves as Christians, it is not thought that there have been any new breakthroughs for the gospel among this small group. K S Singh notes, 'Only a few persons of the community have adopted Christianity, and they have given up the traditional faith.'⁷



Population:
77 (2000)
90 (2010)
105 (2020)
Countries: India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 2

Overview of the Yongkuk Tangsa

Other Names: Yongkuk
Population Sources: 59 in India (1981 census)
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Jingpho-Konyak-Bodo, Konyak-Bodo-Garo, Konyak
Dialects: 0
Professing Buddhists: 93%
Practising Buddhists: 30%

Christians: 2.6%
Scripture: Tangsa New Testament 1992
Jesus film: none
Gospel Recordings: none
Christian Broadcasting: none
ROPAL code: none

Status of Evangelization

