

Location: Almost 600,000 Tibetans belong to the Gtsang Tibetan dialect group. They are located in a wide geographical area, stretching east to west over roughly the entire length of the Tibet-Nepal border. Gtsang is spoken in the cities of Xigaze and Gyantse, the second and fourth largest cities in Tibet. The main attraction of Gyantse is the immense pagoda, or *Kumbun*, built by Rapten Kunsang Phapa (1389–1442).

Identity: The Gtsang Tibetans are part of the Tibetan nationality, but they speak a language only partly intelligible with other Tibetan varieties. Captain O’Conner, the British trade agent at Gyantse in the early 1900s, described the Gtsang Tibetans as “superstitious indeed to the last degree, but devoid of any deep-rooted religious convictions or heart-searchings, oppressed by the most monstrous growth of monasticism and priest-craft which the world has ever seen.”¹

Language: Gtsang Tibetan — which has 19 dialects² — is a variety of Central Tibetan. It is largely intelligible with Lhasa and Ngahri Tibetan. Despite their differences in speech, all Tibetans use the same Sanskrit-based orthography. In the seventh century, King Songtsen Gampo sent his minister, Thonmi Sambhota, with a delegation to India where he produced the script.

History: Xigaze, the capital of Tibet from 1618 to 1642, is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, Tibet’s

second most powerful ruler after the Dalai Lama. In 1954 the city was nearly destroyed by floods. After putting down a revolt in 1959, the Chinese imprisoned 400 monks in the Tashilhunpo Monastery.

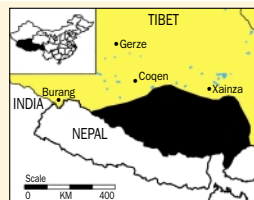
Customs: The Xigaze New Year Festival is held in the first week of the 12th lunar month. Thousands of visitors have flocked to Gyantse since 1408 for the annual Horse Racing and Archery Show.

Religion: The Gtsang region is home to several Buddhist sects, including the *Nyingmapa* (Ancient), *Kagyupa* (Oral Transmission), and *Sakya* (Gray Earth) schools. After the death of the Panchen Lama in 1989, the Chinese filled his position with their own choice of successor. In May 1995 the exiled Dalai Lama announced a new Panchen Lama who was immediately rejected by the Chinese. Monks at the Tashilhunpo Monastery, and a number of lay Tibetans, rioted in protest. Eighty monks were interrogated by the police, and the city of Xigatse was sealed off for several days. Tensions have remained high since then.



Paul Hattaway

Christianity: Jesuit missionary Antonio de Andrade arrived in Tibet from India in 1624 by disguising himself as a Hindu pilgrim. “Andrade outwitted hostile local officials, made his way north to the Himalayas, endured altitude sickness and snow blindness, fought his way over a 17,900-foot pass into Tibet, and finally reached Tsaparang.... There he impressed the king and queen with his piety, and they gave him permission to return, establish a mission, and preach the Gospel.”³ A revolution in Tsaparang in 1635 abruptly ended the Jesuit mission. Today there are just a handful of Gtsang Tibetan Christians.



Population in China:
457,700 (1987)
595,700 (2000)
733,900 (2010)

Location: Tibet
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: 20

Overview of the Gtsang Tibetans

Countries: China, Nepal, India

Pronunciation: “Git-zung”

Other Names: Xigatse Tibetan, Xigatze, Gyantse, Sagya, Tsang

Population Source:
457,700 (1987 LAC);
Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census);
50,000 in Nepal (1987 D. Bradley); Also in India

Location: *S Tibet:* A large area roughly north of the entire length of Nepal, including Xigaze and Gyantse counties

Status:
Officially included under Tibetan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Central Tibetan

Dialects (19): Dolpo, Reng Pungmo, Tichurong, Kag, Lo, Nar, Gyasumdo, Nubri, Tsum, Kachad, Langtang, Kagate, Jirel, Halung, Kyidgrong, Dingri, Zhiskartse, Gyalrtse, Nadkarrtse

Religion: Tibetan Buddhism, Bon
Christians: 20

Scripture: Tibetan Bible 1948; New Testament 1885

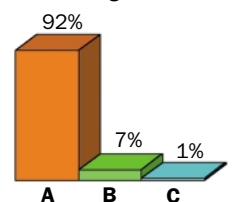
Jesús film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: TIC01

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Were evangelized but did not become Christians
C = Are adherents to any form of Christianity