

Despite having an approximate population of only 50,000, the Nghari Tibetan language is spoken over a vast area of western Tibet. Nghari Prefecture, which has an area of 306,000 square kilometres (119,340 sq. mi.), lies north of the Himalayas at an average altitude of 4,500 metres (14,760 ft.) above sea level.<sup>1</sup> An unspecified number of Nghari Tibetans are also located in northern Nepal.

Almost all Nghari Tibetans are nomads, struggling to survive in the bleak conditions.<sup>2</sup> Their lifestyles have changed little over the last 1,000 years and they still have little technology or machinery. The inhabitants of the Nghari region of Tibet are also known as the *Chang Tang* (Northern Plain) Tibetans. Although they are ethnically Tibetan, they speak a language different from other Tibetan varieties. The Nghari Tibetan language group has seven dialects, named after their principal towns of habitation.<sup>3</sup>

The Tibetan alphabet consists of 30 consonants and four vowels, in addition to six symbols used for Sanskrit words.

Western Tibet is a holy site for the followers of the four religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Bon. Every year, thousands of pilgrims flock to the sacred Mount Kailas, a 6,714-metre (22,021 ft.) peak near Tibet's border with India and Nepal. Immersion in one of two holy lakes south of Mount Kailas is believed to release people from their sins for a lifetime. Pilgrims who trek to the top of the 5,640-metre-high (18,500 ft.) Dolma Pass are believed to be born again in the process. Folk Tibetans believe in a

hell divided into eight hot and eight cold levels. Sinners are made to suffer until they have worked off their demerits. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), ten of the 13 monasteries in the region were demolished.

The favoured kind of burial for most Tibetans is 'wind burial'. The corpse is cut into small pieces and laid out on an exposed rock for vultures and ravens to eat. In the 1980s tourists in Lhasa secretly tried to take photographs of the ritual, an act considered a major offence by Tibetans. 'An



Julian Hawken

Australian tried to hide up the mountain and take telephoto pics. Whilst hopping around on the skyline, he scared the birds away—an exceptionally evil omen. The irate burial squad gave chase brandishing knives and showered him with rocks.' Another group of tourists was 'bombarded with rocks, chased with knives or threatened with meaty leg-bones ripped straight off the corpse'.<sup>4</sup>

The first recorded Tibetan church was built by Jesuit missionaries in Lhasa in 1726. Twenty-seven baptized converts and 60 inquirers attended the church. 'At the end of April, 1742, a new convert named Pu Tsering publicly refused to bow before the Dalai Lama. . . . This threw the town into an uproar. . . . Twelve of the Christians were flogged with 20 lashes each. The missionaries fled to Nepal, but their church was attacked by a mob who destroyed everything except the church bell.'<sup>5</sup>

Today there are no known Christians among the Nghari Tibetans.



**Population:**

49,900 (2000)  
61,500 (2010)  
75,700 (2020)

**Countries:** China, Nepal

**Buddhism:** Tibetan

**Christians:** none known

**Overview of the Nghari Tibetans**

**Other Names:** Nghari, Ngharis, Mnggharis, Drokpa, Drokwa, Drokba, Chang Tang Tibetans, Chang Tang Nomads

**Population Sources:**

38,400 in China (1987, *Language Atlas of China*) also in Nepal

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Central

**Dialects:** 7 (Rutog, Gartok, Zamda, Burang, Coqen, Gerze, Xigaze)

**Professing Buddhists:** 100%

**Practising Buddhists:** 60%

**Christians:** 0%

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

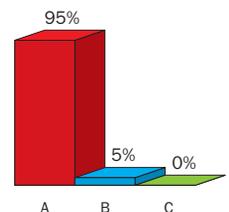
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** TIC03

**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