

**Location:** A 1987 linguistic survey of China listed 112,800 speakers of the Rongmahbrogpa Tibetan language.<sup>1</sup> The main center of the Rongmahbrogpa is the picturesque town of Xiahe in southwest Gansu Province. The language is also spoken in and around Tongren County in neighboring eastern Qinghai Province.

**Identity:** Although ethnically and culturally the Rongmahbrogpa belong to the Tibetan nationality, they speak a language that is distinct from other Tibetan varieties. The name Rongmahbrogpa is a combination of the Tibetan words *Rongba* (villager or farmer) and *Brogpa* (nomad or herder).

**Language:** Rongmahbrogpa — which contains “two or more dialects”<sup>2</sup> — is part of the Northern Bodic branch of Tibetan languages. Although they may not understand each other’s speech, all Tibetans use the same written script. Tibetans from different areas can often be seen exchanging notes to communicate.

**History:** The Labrang Monastery in Xiahe was built by E’ang-zongzhe in 1709. Presently it houses about 1,700 monks, drawn from Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Inner Mongolia. The Amdo and the Hui Muslims have had numerous violent clashes in the past. In 1919 the Hui sacked the Labrang Monastery, burned to death hundreds of monks, and dumped their corpses on the temple grounds. In 1929 Joseph Rock witnessed the carnage of one battle in Xiahe: “154 Tibetan heads were strung about the

walls of the Moslem garrison like a garland of flowers. Heads of young girls and children decorated posts in front of barracks. The Moslem riders galloped about the town, each with 10 or 15 human heads tied to his saddle.”<sup>3</sup>

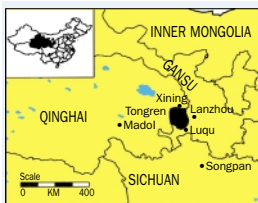
**Customs:** The Tibetan prayer wheel, or *manichorkor*, can be turned by hot air, hand, wind, or water. As it spins, the scroll contained in the cylinder is believed to release prayers to the heavens.

**Religion:** Outwardly the Amdo are Tibetan Buddhists, but the ancient Bon religion has experienced growth in recent years. Bon was characterized by shamans, whose job was to “present the sacrifices, appease the spirits with magic, heal the sick, and even control the weather. The shaman specialized in a kind of ecstatic trance that let him travel to the spirit world and serve as a medium for the ghosts of the dead. In addition to the shamans there were also magicians and healers who had the power to control gods, demons, and locality spirits.”<sup>4</sup>



Paul Hattaway

**Christianity:** The Christian & Missionary Alliance church opened a mission base in the town of Xiahe in the early 1920s. They made little progress against the Buddhist stronghold. One wrote, “The main difficulties as they appear to me are: The food question. The food of the Tibetans is such that for a foreigner it is very hard to partake of, and still harder to digest... yet the itinerating missionary in this district has to eat it, for if he does not, he greatly offends his host and gets no opportunity to preach the Gospel.”<sup>5</sup> The *Jesus* film was translated into Amdo in 1998.



**Population in China:**  
 112,800 (1987)  
 146,800 (2000)  
 180,800 (2010)  
**Location:** Gansu, Qinghai  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism  
**Christians:** 20

## Overview of the Rongmahbrogpa Amdo

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** “Rung-ma-Druk-pah-Ahm-doe”  
**Other Names:** Amde, Labrang Amdo, Rongbabrogpa  
**Population Source:** 112,800 (1987 LAC); Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)  
**Location:** SW Gansu: Xiahe County; E Qinghai: Tongren County

**Status:** Officially included under Tibetan  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Northern Tibetan  
**Dialects:** 2  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism, Bon  
**Christians:** 20  
**Scripture:** Tibetan Bible 1948; New Testament 1885; Portions 1862  
**Jesus film:** Available  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** ADX03

