



Paul Hattaway

Location: A 1987 report listed 97,600 speakers of the Rongba Amdo language living in eastern Qinghai Province.¹ In many locations in the region the towns are inhabited by Han Chinese and Muslims, while the Rongba Amdo lead nomadic lives in the countryside. The Rongba Amdo primarily live in Hualong, which is an autonomous county of the Hui Muslims; and in Xunhua County, partly administered by members of the Salar minority. The Tibetan population in China has been kept comparatively low by disease and infanticide. Modern health and hygiene practices have caused the death rate for Tibetans to fall from 28 people per 1,000 in 1951 to 9 per 1,000 in 1990.

Identity: The Rongba Amdo are part of the Tibetan nationality. The name Rongba means “farmer” in

Tibetan.² When the Communists took over all of Tibet in the 1950s, thousands of Tibetans were butchered. The official Chinese version of these events is markedly different. “This rebellion accelerated the destruction of Tibet’s reactionary forces and brought Tibet onto the bright, democratic, and socialist road sooner than expected.”³

Language: The Rongba Amdo language has two dialects and contains more Chinese loanwords than any other Tibetan language in China. Rongba is only partially intelligible with the three other Amdo languages; however, all Tibetans use the same written script.

History: For centuries the Amdo roamed the borderlands of the Tibetan-Chinese world. Their

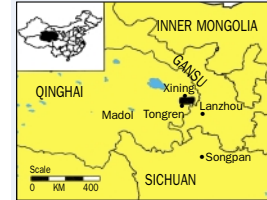
menacing reputation struck fear into all who dared to venture, unwelcomed, into their realm.

Customs: The Rongba Amdo are largely unconcerned about the outside world. They celebrate the Tibetan New Year in February, according to the Tibetan lunar calendar. In the past, celebrations commenced the moment the peach tree blossomed. It is a time for relatives to get together and celebrate the past year’s events.

Religion: The Rongba Amdo adhere to Tibetan Buddhism, also known as Tantric Buddhism. “Tantra’s most striking feature is its technique of occult visualization. The tantric master gives each student a deity which the student has to visualize. These deities, most of which appear in wrathful or monstrous forms, are supposed to be able to help the student achieve liberation. As the student visualizes, he tries to become what he sees, and in fact some Tibetan Buddhists claim to be able to actually materialize demons in front of them.”⁴

Christianity: There are about ten known Christians among the Rongba Amdo today. They have historically proven to be a difficult group to penetrate with the gospel. The criteria used in the 1920s for missionaries among Tibetan peoples still applies to would-be laborers today: “In sending out missionaries for work among the Tibetans, candidates with a strong constitution should be chosen, as missionary work in Tibet is more strenuous than in

most places. Missionaries that are afraid to expose themselves to hardship and even danger should not be sent to Tibet.”⁵



Population in China:
 97,600 (1987)
 127,000 (2000)
 156,500 (2010)
Location: Qinghai
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: 10

Overview of the Rongba Amdo

Countries: China

Pronunciation:
 “Rong-wah-Ahm-doe”

Other Names: Rongba, Rongpa

Population Source:
 97,600 (1987 LAC);
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)

Location: *E Qinghai:* Hualong Hui and Xunhua Salar counties, and as far north as Ledu

Status:
 Officially included under Tibetan

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

Dialects: 2

Religion: Tibetan Buddhism, Bon
Christians: 10

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

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: ADX02

