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Location: 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 kilometers (119,340 sq. mi.), lies north of the Himalayas at an average altitude of 4,500 meters (14,760 ft.) above sea level. The Himalayas contain more than 17,000 glaciers. Almost all Nghari Tibetans are nomads, struggling to survive in the bleak conditions.¹

Identity: The inhabitants of the Nghari region are also known as the *Chang Tang* (Northern Plain) Tibetans. Although they are ethnically Tibetan, they speak a language far removed from other Tibetan varieties. Their lifestyles have changed little over the last thousand years and are still devoid of any technology or machinery.

Language: The Nghari Tibetan language group extends into northwestern Nepal. It has seven dialects, named after their principal towns of habitation.² The Tibetan alphabet consists of 30 consonants and four vowels, plus six symbols used for Sanskrit words.

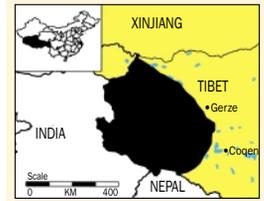
History: Western Tibet is a holy site for the followers of the four religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Bon. Every year, thousands of pilgrims flock to the sacred Mount Kailas, a 6,714-meter (22,021 ft.) peak near Tibet's border with India and Nepal. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) ten of the 13 monasteries in the region were demolished.

Customs: The favored kind of burial for 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 offense by Tibetans. “An 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 were “bombarded with rocks, chased with knives or threatened with meaty leg-bones ripped straight off the corpse.”³

Religion: Immersion in one of two holy lakes south of Mount Kailas is thought to release people from their sins for a lifetime. Pilgrims who trek to the top of the 5,640-meter-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.

Christianity: 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.”⁴ Today there are no known Christians among the Nghari Tibetans.



Population in China:
 38,400 (1987)
 49,900 (2000)
 61,500 (2010)
Location: Tibet
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Nghari Tibetans

Countries: China, Nepal
Pronunciation: “Nah-ree-Zung”
Other Names: Nghari, Ngharis, Mngahris, Drokpa, Drokwa
Population Source: 38,400 (1987 LAC); Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census); Also in Nepal
Location: *W Tibet:* Nghari Prefecture: Rutog, Gartok, Zabda, Burang, Coqen, and Gerze; A few speakers also in Xigaze Prefecture
Status: Officially included under Tibetan
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Central Tibetan
Dialects (7): Rutog, Gartok, Zabda, Burang, Coqen, Gerze, Xigaze
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism
Christians: None known
Scripture: Tibetan Bible 1948; New Testament 1885; Portions 1862
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: TIC03

