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# Linguistic diversity in the Tibetan regions: a set of Language Snapshots

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## Summary

This paper presents language profiles (or Language Snapshots) for each of the minority languages currently known to be used by Tibetans on the Tibetan Plateau in the People's Republic of China, providing an overview of the extensive research that has been carried out on these languages by linguists and others.

Many of the languages are spoken in the Sino-Tibetan frontier region: a large, complex, and diverse transitional region between Tibetan and Chinese cultural realms. Numerous communities with various and complex inter-connections during different historical periods have fostered great degrees of linguistic diversity in this region. Documentation of these languages has historically been a low priority, for a variety of reasons, including physical accessibility to these communities, recognition of the languages at local and state levels, and so on. This paper is a step forward in recognizing and describing the region's minority languages and collating information on the existing work on these languages, with the aim of supporting their maintenance and revitalization, and providing data for further research and applied work.

Minority languages on the Tibetan Plateau are linguistically distinct from Tibetic or Sinitic (Chinese) languages, even though they are all genetically related. The common Tibetan saying ལུང་པ་རེ་ལ་ལྷུ་རྩེ་ལྷོ་བ་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རེ། 'Every valley has a river, and every village has a dialect' reflects the fact that Tibetans recognize linguistic diversity among Tibetan communities.

The Language Snapshots are divided into three sections: Section 2 introduces the Qiangic languages, including Rma, Choyo, Gochang, nDrapa, Prinmi, Minyag (Darmdo Minyag and Shimian Minyag), the Ersuic Branch (Ersu, Lizu, Duoxu), and the Naic Branch (Namuyi, Shuhing, and the three Naish languages: Naxi, Na, Laze). Section 3 covers the rGyalrongic languages, including Situ, Japhug, rDzong-'bur, Tshobdun, Khroskyabs,

rTa'u, and Nyagrong Minyang. Section 4 presents the remaining minority languages spoken by Tibetans, including two creoles (Daohua and Ngandehua), Manegacha, Henan Oirat, Baima, Tibetan Sign Language, five newly recognized languages (Lamo, Larong sMar, Drag-yab sMar, gSerkuhu, Basum) in Chamdo and Nyingtri. The number of identified minority languages may expand, and their classification may change as research progresses, however the endangerment of many languages in the Tibetan region is certain, and the need for their preservation is urgent.

**Summary (Tibetan)**

སྐད་ཆ་འཚོམ་བསྐྲུན་ཞེས་པའི་རྒྱམས་གངས་འདིར་རྒྱུ་ཉི་ཧེ་དམངས་ལྷི་མཐུན་རྒྱུ་ལ་ཁབ་ལས་མཚོ་བོད་མཚོ་སྐད་དུ་གཞིས་ཅག་ས་པའི་བོད་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཚངས་སྤྱུར་པའི་མི་རིགས་དག་གི་སྐད་ཆ་དོ་སྟོན་མདོར་བསྐྲུས་དང་། སྐད་བརྗེ་རིག་པ་བ་དང་ཞིབ་འཇུག་པ་གཞིན་དག་གིས་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་དག་ལ་ཞིབ་འཇུག་རྒྱ་ཚར་བའི་གནས་ཚུལ་དག་ཚུགས་བསྐྲུས་བཅས་བྲིས་ཡིད།

སྐད་རིགས་འདི་དག་གི་ཁོད་ནས་མང་ཤོས་ཤིག་བོད་རྒྱ་རིག་གནས་འབྲེལ་མཚམས་ཀྱི་ས་ཁུལ་ཉེ་གཞི་རྒྱ་ཆ་ཞིང་སྐྱོད་འཛིང་དང་སྐྱ་མང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་གྱི་བར་བརྒྱུས་ས་ཁུལ་དག་དུ་ཡོད། སོ་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་དུས་སྐབས་སོ་སོར་ས་གནས་དེ་དག་གི་ཚོ་ཤིག་པན་རྒྱ་ན་བར་ལ་འབྲེལ་འདྲིམ་བྱུང་བ་དེ་སྐད་ཆ་སྐྱ་མང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་དུ་སྐྱུར་པའི་རྒྱུ་དུ་སྐྱུར་ཡོད། འོན་ཀྱང་རྒྱ་ཆ་ལྡན་པ་གོ་སྐད་ལོག་པ་ལས་ལྡང་རང་གི་སྐད་ཡིག་ལ་བརྟེན་ཅིང་མཐོང་ཅུང་ཆུང་བ་སོགས་རྒྱ་ཆ་དབང་མང་པོ་ཞིག་གིས་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་དག་གི་རྒྱ་ཆ་ལོག་བྱེད་དུ་བཀོད་པ་ཉེ་ཆ་རུང་ཉུང་། རྒྱམ་གངས་འདིས་ས་གནས་དེ་དག་གི་སྐད་ཆ་དོས་འཛིན་དང་འཚོམ་བཤེར་གྱི་ཐད་ནས་གོམ་པ་གལ་ཆེན་ཞིག་སྟོས་ཡོད་ལ། གངས་ཉུང་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཆ་རྒྱ་བསྐྱོར་དང་དར་སྐྱེའམ་སྤུ་མ་ཟེར་བྱིས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ལའང་རྒྱ་ཆ་མི་དམན་པ་ཞིག་བསྐྱར་ཐབས་པའི་རེ་བ་ཡོད།

མཚོ་བོད་མཚོ་སྐད་གི་གངས་ཉུང་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་སྐད་སོ་སོའི་བར་དུ་སྐད་བརྗེ་རིག་པའི་དོས་རྒྱུས་འབྲུང་འཕེལ་གྱི་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་པར་འདྲོད་མོད། དོས་སྤྱོད་དང་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་དག་གི་རྒྱམ་པ་པོ་རྒྱ་སྐད་དང་བོད་སྐད་ལ་ཉུང་པར་ཆེན་པོ་ཡོད། བོད་ཀྱི་གཏམ་དཔེ་ལུང་པ་རེ་ལ་ཚུ་མིག་ཟེ། །ཤུལ་ལུང་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རིགས་ཟེ། །ཞིས་པ་དེས་བོད་མི་དག་གིས་སྐད་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་མང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་ལ་བརྒྱུད་པའི་རྩ་བ་དམིགས་བསལ་བ་ཞིག་བསྐྱར་ཡོད་པར་སྟེ།

སྐད་ཆ་འཚོམ་བསྐྲུན་རྒྱམས་གངས་འདིར་ས་བཅད་གསུམ་སྟེལ་བཅད་གཉིས་པར་ཆའང་དམ་སྤྱོད་སྐད་ལག་སྟེལའང་དམ་སྤྱོད་སྐད་དང་ཁོ་ལུ་སྐད་ཀྱི་འདོག་ཐད་སྐད་འདྲ་དང་སྐད་ལྟོས་མི་སྐད་མི་ཉལ་སྐད་(དར་མདོའི་མི་ཉལ་དང་ཉེ་མན་མི་ཉལ)དང་ཨར་སོ་སྐད་ཚོན་(ཨར་སོ་སྐད་ལའདི་སོགས་སྐད་རྒྱུ་ལུ་སྐད་དང་འཇར་དམ་རྒྱ་སྐད་ཚོན་གཙམ་བྲིས་སྐད་རྒྱུ་ལུ་དེར་སྐད་ཆ་ཚོན་(ཨར་སོ་སྐད་ལའདི་འཇར་དམ་རྒྱ་སྐད་ཚོན་གཙམ་བྲིས་སྐད་ལུ་འཇར་དམ་རྐྱེན་འཇར་སྐད་ལྟོས་སྤྱོད་བཅས་ལས་ལྡང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་དུ་སྐྱུར་ཡོད། འོན་ཀྱང་སྐད་བརྗེ་རིག་པའི་ཉལ་ལུ་རྣམས་དེ་དག་གི་ཁོད་ནས་མང་ཤོས་ཤིག་བོད་རྒྱ་རིག་གནས་འབྲེལ་མཚམས་ཀྱི་ས་ཁུལ་ཉེ་གཞི་རྒྱ་ཆ་ཞིང་སྐྱོད་འཛིང་དང་སྐྱ་མང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་དུ་སྐྱུར་ཡོད། འོན་ཀྱང་རྒྱ་ཆ་ལྡན་པ་གོ་སྐད་ལོག་པ་ལས་ལྡང་རང་གི་སྐད་ཡིག་ལ་བརྟེན་ཅིང་མཐོང་ཅུང་ཆུང་བ་སོགས་རྒྱ་ཆ་དབང་མང་པོ་ཞིག་གིས་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་དག་གི་རྒྱ་ཆ་ལོག་བྱེད་དུ་བཀོད་པ་ཉེ་ཆ་རུང་ཉུང་། རྒྱམ་གངས་འདིས་ས་གནས་དེ་དག་གི་སྐད་ཆ་དོས་འཛིན་དང་འཚོམ་བཤེར་གྱི་ཐད་ནས་གོམ་པ་གལ་ཆེན་ཞིག་སྟོས་ཡོད་ལ། གངས་ཉུང་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཆ་རྒྱ་བསྐྱོར་དང་དར་སྐྱེའམ་སྤུ་མ་ཟེར་བྱིས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ལའང་རྒྱ་ཆ་མི་དམན་པ་ཞིག་བསྐྱར་ཐབས་པའི་རེ་བ་ཡོད།

སྐད་ཆ་འཚོམ་བསྐྲུན་རྒྱམས་གངས་འདིར་ས་བཅད་གསུམ་སྟེལ་བཅད་གཉིས་པར་ཆའང་དམ་སྤྱོད་སྐད་ལག་སྟེལའང་དམ་སྤྱོད་སྐད་དང་ཁོ་ལུ་སྐད་ཀྱི་འདོག་ཐད་སྐད་འདྲ་དང་སྐད་ལྟོས་མི་སྐད་མི་ཉལ་སྐད་(དར་མདོའི་མི་ཉལ་དང་ཉེ་མན་མི་ཉལ)དང་ཨར་སོ་སྐད་ཚོན་(ཨར་སོ་སྐད་ལའདི་སོགས་སྐད་རྒྱུ་ལུ་སྐད་དང་འཇར་དམ་རྒྱ་སྐད་ཚོན་གཙམ་བྲིས་སྐད་རྒྱུ་ལུ་དེར་སྐད་ཆ་ཚོན་(ཨར་སོ་སྐད་ལའདི་འཇར་དམ་རྒྱ་སྐད་ཚོན་གཙམ་བྲིས་སྐད་ལུ་འཇར་དམ་རྐྱེན་འཇར་སྐད་ལྟོས་སྤྱོད་བཅས་ལས་ལྡང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་དུ་སྐྱུར་ཡོད། འོན་ཀྱང་སྐད་བརྗེ་རིག་པའི་ཉལ་ལུ་རྣམས་དེ་དག་གི་ཁོད་ནས་མང་ཤོས་ཤིག་བོད་རྒྱ་རིག་གནས་འབྲེལ་མཚམས་ཀྱི་ས་ཁུལ་ཉེ་གཞི་རྒྱ་ཆ་ཞིང་སྐྱོད་འཛིང་དང་སྐྱ་མང་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་དུ་སྐྱུར་ཡོད། འོན་ཀྱང་རྒྱ་ཆ་ལྡན་པ་གོ་སྐད་ལོག་པ་ལས་ལྡང་རང་གི་སྐད་ཡིག་ལ་བརྟེན་ཅིང་མཐོང་ཅུང་ཆུང་བ་སོགས་རྒྱ་ཆ་དབང་མང་པོ་ཞིག་གིས་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་དག་གི་རྒྱ་ཆ་ལོག་བྱེད་དུ་བཀོད་པ་ཉེ་ཆ་རུང་ཉུང་། རྒྱམ་གངས་འདིས་ས་གནས་དེ་དག་གི་སྐད་ཆ་དོས་འཛིན་དང་འཚོམ་བཤེར་གྱི་ཐད་ནས་གོམ་པ་གལ་ཆེན་ཞིག་སྟོས་ཡོད་ལ། གངས་ཉུང་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཆ་རྒྱ་བསྐྱོར་དང་དར་སྐྱེའམ་སྤུ་མ་ཟེར་བྱིས་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ལའང་རྒྱ་ཆ་མི་དམན་པ་ཞིག་བསྐྱར་ཐབས་པའི་རེ་བ་ཡོད།

## Summary (Chinese)

在这个“语言快照”项目收集并简单描述了中华人民共和国藏族少数民族在青藏高原的民族语言。该快照概述了语言学家和其他学者对这些语言进行的广泛研究。

这些语言中，有不少在汉藏文化交融地区：一个大型，复杂而多样的过渡地区。在不同的历史时期，该区各族群的跨社群接触促进了语言的多样性。由于地理位置的偏远，交通的不便；以及地方政府对这些语言较低的认可度等多种原因，这些语言的文档记录非常稀少。本项目是在识别和描述该地区的少数民族语言方面迈出的重要一步，旨在支持维护和振兴少数民族语言，并为进一步的研究和应用工作提供有利的数据。

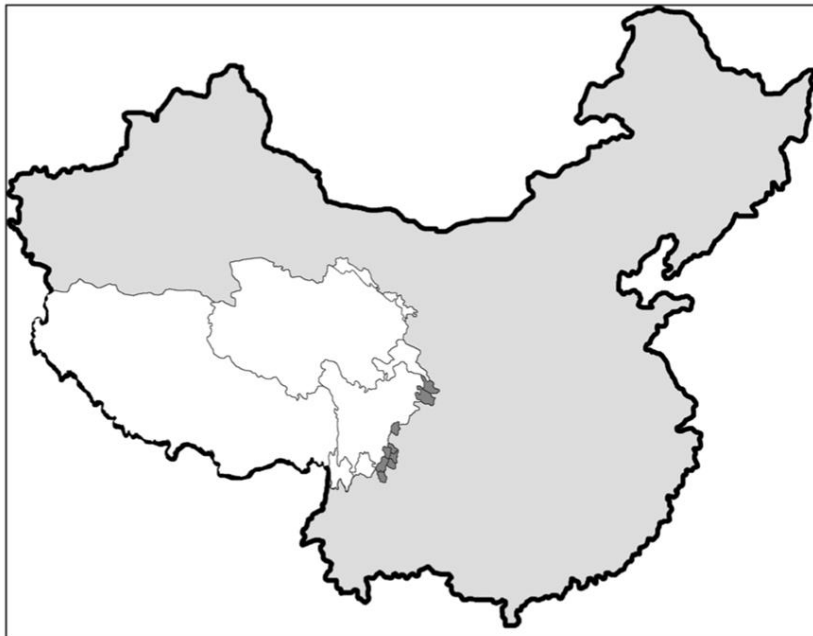
即便青藏高原上的少数民族语言在语言学上有发生学关系，但它们的实际形态却有别于藏语和汉语。藏族俗语ཕུང་པ་རེ་ལ་ཐུ་རྩེ། ལྗེ་བ་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རྩེ། “每个山谷都有河，每个村庄都有方言”反映了藏族人在藏族社区对语言多样性认可意识。

本语言快照分为三个部分。在第二部分介绍了羌语支，包括羌语、却域语、贵琼语、扎坝语、普米语、木雅语（康定木雅和石棉木雅）、尔苏语组（尔苏语、里汝/吕苏、多续语）、纳语组（纳木依语、史兴语）、纳西语种：纳西话、纳话、水田话）。第三部分介绍嘉绒语支，包括四土、茶堡、日部、草登、绰斯甲、道孚、新龙木雅。第四部分包括藏族人说其他的少数民族语言，包括两种克里奥尔语（倒话和五屯话）、青海保安语、河南瓦刺语、白马语、藏族手语以及五种在昌都和灵芝地区最新被辨别的语言（拉莱、拉绒玛、察雅玛、色库、巴松）。随着更多的研究，识别出的语种数量可能会增加，并且分类也可能会发生变化。总而言之，在青藏高原对众多的病危语言的保护是刻不容缓的。

## 1. Introduction

A common misconception, in both popular and academic representations, is that Tibet is a monolingual region. This is due to reasons such as the state's ethnic classification system, the existence of a shared writing system among people who speak and sign distinct languages, and the limited extent of previous linguistic research. However, a growing body of research, summarized by Roche & Suzuki (2018), attests that Tibet is linguistically diverse. This aligns with both global and national patterns of linguistic diversity in low latitudes and rugged terrains with high biodiversity like the Tibetan Plateau, especially the Eastern part of Tibet. This set of *Language Snapshots* is a step forward in recognizing and describing the region's minority languages with the aim of supporting the maintenance and revitalization of individual languages, and providing data for further research and applied work. The term 'Tibetan regions' here not only refers to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), but also all the administrative areas recognized

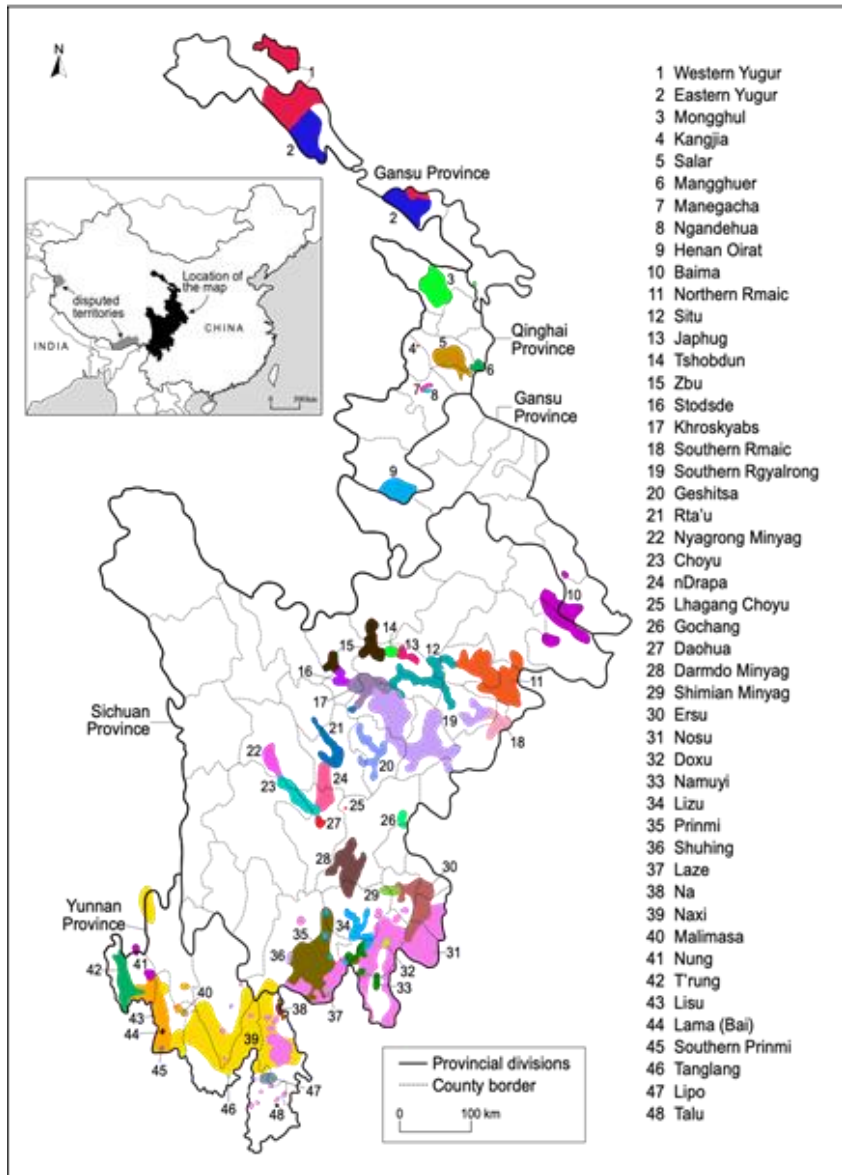
within China as Tibetan autonomous regions, and a few adjacent areas where there are significant Tibetan populations. The whole roughly equates to the geographic zone of the Tibetan Plateau, as shown in Figure 1 from Roche & Suzuki (2018).



*Figure 1: Map of the Tibetan Plateau (Roche & Suzuki 2018)*

Minority languages on the Tibetan Plateau are linguistically distinct, both in terms of language structures, and mutual intelligibility from Tibetic or Sinitic (Chinese) languages. They are often unrecognized both by the state and within the broader Tibetan community, under the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between language and ethnicity. In addition to the three commonly acknowledged tongues of Tibetans, namely Amdo, Kham, and U Tsang, approximately 230,000 of the 6.2 million Tibetans in China speak a minority language. According to Roche & Suzuki (2018) there are 30 such languages. In 2019, Suzuki and Tashi Nyima identified four additional languages, so the latest estimate is 34 minority languages spoken in Tibetan regions, by Tibetans. Figure 2 shows the distribution of minority (non-Tibetic) languages of the eastern Tibetan Plateau (Roche & Suzuki 2018), including languages spoken by Tibetans and members of other ethnic groups.

### Minority Languages of the Eastern Tibetsphere



Cartography: Chandra Jayasuriya. Language data: Gerald Roche and Hiroyuki Suzuki.

Figure 2: Minority languages of the Eastern Tibet region (Roche & Suzuki 2018)

Language diversity is part of linguistic ideology across Tibet, as evidenced by common sayings such as ལུང་བ་རེ་ལ་རྩ་རྒྱུ་བ་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རྒྱུ། [lɔŋba re=la tɕʰə re, rdewa re=la ʂkad re] ‘Every valley has a river and every village has a dialect’, and ལུང་བ་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རྒྱུ་མ་རེ་ལ་ཚོམ་རྒྱུ། [lɔŋba re=la ʂkad re, vlama re=la tɕʰu re] ‘Every valley has its dialect and every lama has his religion’.

Due to pressures coming from increasing integration into the modern Chinese state, as well as the standardization of Tibetan language and culture, these minority languages are highly threatened. Many are endangered, according to the UNESCO 9-factor framework for language vitality (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2003). Further, Roche (2018) reports that intergenerational transmission is highly likely to be interrupted in the near future for all the languages. Migration and mobility are significant factors in language shift in these communities, as more and more people are currently relocating to towns and cities. Youth face considerable pressure to shift to Mandarin in order to succeed academically and get good jobs. Mandarin is mandatory, since it is the language of instruction in the majority of schools.

In addition to pressure from Mandarin, social attitudes regarding Tibet’s minority languages also typically undermine their vitality. Tibetans are known to use pejorative terms to refer to the minority languages of Tibet. These include *dre skad* ‘ghost language’ and *log skad* ‘backwards language’, and the Chinese term 鸟语 *niǎo yǔ* ‘bird language’. Due to their Tibetan ethnic identity, standard Tibetan is the prestige language among their speakers. In recent years, there has been a wave of interest in learning written Tibetan among many minority language speaking communities. Overall, speakers of minority languages tend to have negative attitudes towards their languages relative to both the dominant language (Mandarin) and the prestigious language (Tibetan).

Historically, linguistic naming practices have very often taken a top-down approach, adopting official and colonial designations, and then consolidating their use through the principle of ‘convention’: linguists prefer to use the name that already exists in the literature. This *Language Snapshot* collection tries to depart from this tradition and give greater recognition and autonomy to the people who speak or sign the languages being discussed, by adapting locally preferred and understood names for the languages (Tunzhi 2017). As noted by Léglise & Migge (2006: 37) “acts of naming linguistic varieties are never neutral but are always dependent on and contribute to their representation and to the representation of the speakers involved”. As a speaker of one of the languages being discussed in these *Language Snapshots* (Khroskyabs), I understand intimately the significance of naming conventions. I still remember being approached by a linguist who said: “So you are a native speaker of Lavrung, how wonderful!”. I had no idea what the term “Lavrung” meant. It was only much later that I realized that my language was known to the world by a term I had never heard; this was a profoundly alienating and

disorientating experience for me. The language names used here therefore correspond as closely as possible to the names employed by the communities that speak and sign them, including spellings that typically aim to avoid transcription through mediating languages (e.g., Gochang rather than Guiqiong). Reference to previous literature ensures that continuity with names previously used in the literature is maintained.

In this paper, except for Section 3, languages are organised into language family groups to showcase the genetic closeness among them, so that it is easier for linguists and language workers to study and compare them. That said, the categorisation of speech forms into language versus dialect, and their classification into families, is extremely challenging in this context due to a lack of linguistic description, and sociopolitical factors such as the widespread desire of Tibetan people to standardize Tibetan language and culture. The selection of the languages, material and organization included in this *Language Snapshot* collection predominately reflects my own understandings of the situation, as both a linguist and a speaker of one of the languages being discussed. However, I acknowledge that this work is ongoing, and therefore, that the groupings discussed here may be revised as further progress in comparative research is made. The number of identified minority languages may expand as more research is done in geographically less-investigated areas. Regardless of how many languages are spoken in the Tibetan regions, it is certain that there will be fewer in 50 years' time if we do not actively preserve and support them now. Tables 1 to 4 set out summary information on the individual languages and groups that are discussed in more detail in the sections listed.

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### Tibetan minority languages overview

Table 1. rGyalrongic languages (嘉绒语组) <http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/pumi1242>

English name	Alternative	Tibetan name	Chinese name	ISO 639-3	Glottolog	Approx speakers	Section
Situ		ལྷུ་ལོང་ཚ་བ་ལག་བཞི།	四土	gya	situ1238	100,000	2.1
Japhug	Chaopu	ཇ་ཕུག	茶堡	gya	japh1234	10,000	2.2
Tshobdun	Caodeng	ཚོ་བདུག།	草登	gya	tsho1240	unknown	2.3
Zbu	Showu	ཚོང་འབུས།	日部	zbu	zara1252	5,000	2.4
Khroskyabs	Lavrung/ Guanyinqiao	ཁོ་རྒྱལ་པ།	绰斯甲	jiq	guan1266	10,000	2.5
rTa'u	Stau/Ergong/ Horpa	རྟཱུ།	道孚	ero	horp1240	45,000+	2.6
Nyagrong Minyag		ཉག་རོང་མི་ཉག།	新龙木雅			1,000	2.7
Tangut		མི་ཉག།	西夏	txg	tang1334	extinct	

Table 2. Qiangic languages (羌语支)

English name	Alternative	Tibetan name	Chinese name	ISO 639-3	Glottolog	Approx speakers	Section
Rma	Qiang	ཆའང་།	羌		qian1264	139,000	3.1
Choyo	Queyu	ཚྭ་ཡུལ།	却域	qvy	quey1238	3,000	3.2
Gochang	Guiqong	འགོ་ཐང་།	贵琼	gqi	guiq1238	2,000-6,000	3.3
nDrapa	Zhaba	འབྲ་པ།	扎坝	zhb	zhab1238	8,000-9,000	3.4
Pumi	Prinmi	ཕུམ་མི།	普米		pumi1242	35,000	3.5
Minyag	Muya	མི་ཉག།	木雅		muya1239	10,000	3.6
Ersu	Eastern Ersu	ཨེར་སོ།	尔苏	ers	ersu1241	13,000	3.7
Lizu	Western Ersu	ལའེ་སོག།	里汝/吕苏		lisu1245	4000	
Duoxu	Central Ersu	རྫོག་ལུག།	多续		duox1238	3000	
Namuyi	Namuzi	གནམ་བྱིས།	纳木依	nmy	namu1246	5,000-10,000	3.8.1
Shixing		ཚྭ་ཉིང་།	史兴	sxg	shix1238	1,800	3.8.2
Naxi		འཇང་།	纳西	nxq	naxi1245	310,000	3.8.3
Na	Mosuo	མཱ།	摩梭	nru	yong1270	40,000	3.8.4
Laze	Lare	ལཱ་བྱི།	水田		laze1238	300	3.8.5

Table 3. Other languages

English name	Alternative	Tibetan name	Chinese name	ISO 639-3	Glottolog	Approx speakers	Section
Daohua		ཉག་མུ་ཁ་བསྐྱེ་རྒྱུད།	倒话		daoh1239	3,000	4.1
Ngandehua	Wutunhua	སེང་གེ་གཞུང་བསྐྱེ་རྒྱུད།	五电话	wuh	wutu1241	4,000	4.2
Manegacha	Bonan	བའོ་ཨན།	青海保安话	peh	bona1250	8,000	4.3
Henan Oirat		ཉི་མན་ཨའི་རང་རྒྱུད།	河南瓦刺话			50	4.4
Baima		དཀག་ལ་པའི་རྒྱུད།	白马话	bqh	baim1244	10,000	4.5
Tibetan Sign Language	TibSL	བོད་གྲི་ལག་བརྒྱུད།	藏族手语	lsn	tibe1277	2,000	4.6

Table 4. Recently recognised languages

Lamo		ལམོ།	拉莱		lamo1245	6,500-7,000	5.1
Larong sMar		ལཱ་རོང་མམ།	拉绒玛			15,000	5.2
Drag-yab sMar		བྲག་གཡལ་མམ།	察雅玛		drag1234	20,000	5.3
gSerkhu		གསེར་ཁུ།	色库		gser1234	400	5.4
Basum	Ba-ke	བྲག་གསུམ།	巴松		basu1234	3,000	5.5

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## 2. Qiangic languages (藏羌彝语支)

The Qiangic group is a complex and still not fully understood subgroup of the Sino-Tibetan languages that are spoken mostly in Southwest China, including Sichuan and Yunnan provinces and the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Qiangic-speaking area is a contiguous geographical region in the borderlands of Tibet. The majority of the languages are found in the prefectures of Ngawa, Garze, Ya'an, and Liangshan in Sichuan, with some in northern Yunnan. Qiangic speakers are variously classified as Qiang, Tibetan, Yi, Pumi, and Naxi ethnic groups.

The Qiangic sub-group hypothesis assumes that Qiangic languages share a number of common linguistic features because they descend from a common ancestor. Jacques & Michaud (2011), Bradley (2008), and Sagart (2019) argue for a Burmo-Qiangic branch that includes two subbranches: Burmish (also known as Lolo-Burmese) and Na-Qiangic, which includes the Qiangic, rGyalrongic, Ersuish, and Naic languages (Figure 3). In this *Language Snapshots* collection, Qiangic and rGyalrongic are treated in separate sections, primarily as an organizational device, due to the diversity among rGyalrongic languages, rather than as any attempt to advance an argument about the relationship between Qiangic and rGyalrongic. ‘Qiangic’ in this section therefore refers to all the varieties under Na-Qiangic except rGyalrongic ones.

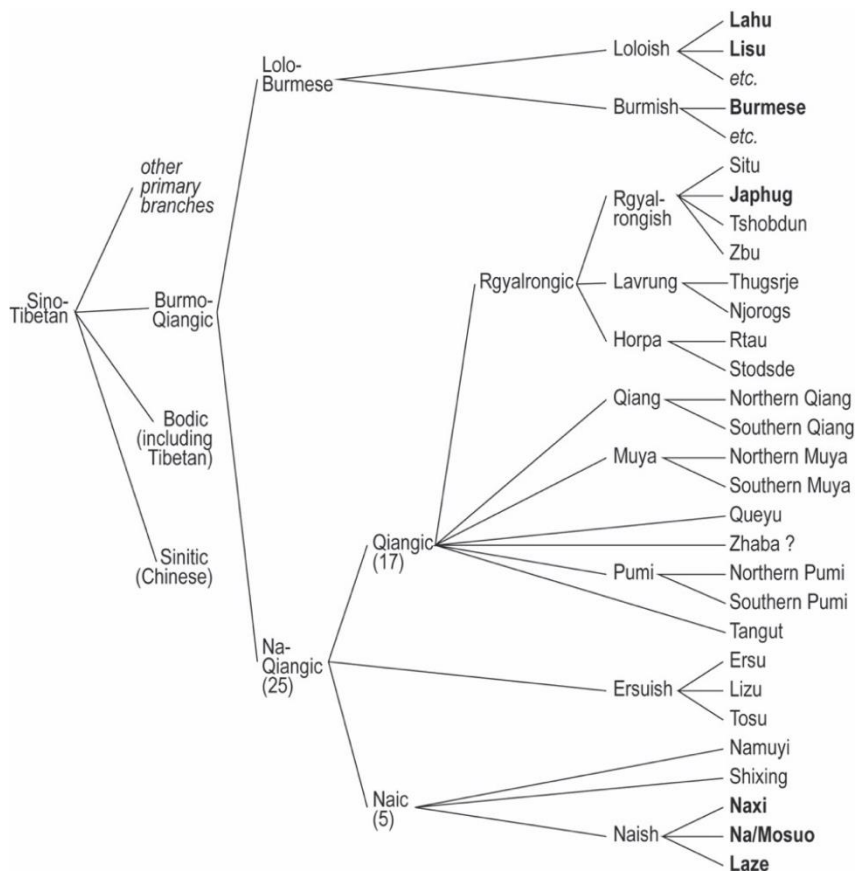


Figure 3: Classification of Qiangic within Sino-Tibetan.

Chirkova (2012) casts doubt on the validity of Qiangic as a genetic unit, instead considering Qiangic to be a Sprachbund linguistic area where the languages may be genetically unrelated. That said, there are some languages that are well-established coherent Qiangic languages, while others have been lumped into this family due to a lack of linguistic data. In addition, this is a complex area which is the crossroads of many cultures and languages. This Qiangic region is historically, ethnically, and linguistically complex, and many of the individual languages are not well documented. Here we focus on language descriptions rather than discussing claims about genetic classifications. Qiangic communities are characterized by long-standing multilingualism, suggesting the potential for diffusion as a key factor in language formation in the area. This further poses challenges to subgrouping.

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### 2.1 Rma (Qiang ཆལང་ཡུལ་ཤེས་སྐད་)

The name ‘Qiang’ has been applied by the Chinese to various groups of people at different historical time periods. The modern Qiang are an ethnic group that mainly live in Mao County, Wenchuan County, Li County, and Songpan County in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, as well as Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County in Mianyang City. A small number of Qiang people live in Danba County of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, to the west of Aba Prefecture, and in Shiqian and Jiangkou of the Tongren area in Guizhou province, far to the southeast of Aba Prefecture (LaPolla & Huang 2003). Qiang people refer to themselves as *Rma* (written *RRmea* in the Qiang orthography), and their languages as *Rma* languages. The meaning of the word is something like ‘the locals’. The name Qiang or Qiang Zu (*qiang* ethnicity) was officially ascribed to the *Rma* people in 1950 as non-Han people living in the upper Min River region.

Sun (1981a: 177–178) divides Qiang into two major varieties: Northern Qiang, and Southern Qiang. Qiang speakers living in Heishui County and the Chibusu district of Mao County, including those designated by the Chinese government as Tibetans, are said to be speakers of the Northern dialect. Southern Qiang is spoken in Wenchun County and Li County. The major difference between these two dialects is that Southern Qiang is tonal and Northern Qiang is not. There are 58,000 Northern Qiang speakers and 81,000 Southern Qiang speakers, according to *Wikipedia*. This ascribed population varies between the available sources; most, but not all, members of the Qiang ethnicity speak Qiang, and not all of those who speak Qiang are considered members of the Qiang ethnicity.

Some linguistic characteristics of the Qiangic languages include having full sets of directional prefixes, person-marking paradigms, and loss of syllable-final consonants, while preserving proto-Sino-Tibetan word-initial consonant clusters. There is an officially acknowledged writing system based on the Qugu variety of the Yadu Northern dialect, developed by a team of Qiang specialists in the late 1980s. This uses Roman letters to represent the 42 consonants and 8 vowels in the Yadu Northern dialect. However, this writing system is not currently taught or used.

The area of distribution of the Qiangic languages historically lies in the zone of intersection of Tibetan and Chinese influences, with high degrees language contact. Qiang is becoming more threatened due to two more major forces: (1) standardization of education, where the medium of instruction is Mandarin; and (2) the increasing number of Qiang speakers using local Sichuanese Mandarin in their daily interactions.

Some linguistic documentation has been carried out by Jackson Sun, Randy LaPolla, Huang Chenlong, Jonathan Evans, and Nathaniel Sims, as shown in the following resource list. A film named *Nowhere to Call Home* features a Rma-speaking Tibetan woman, and contains many conversations and monologues in Rma.

## Resources

- Chirkova, Ekaterina. 2010. What defines Qiang-ness: A look from Southern Qiangic languages. Unpublished manuscript. [https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/553056/filename/2010\\_Chirkova\\_Qiangness\\_Submission.pdf](https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/553056/filename/2010_Chirkova_Qiangness_Submission.pdf) (accessed 2021-11-25)
- LaPolla, Randy J. & Chenglong Huang. 2003. *A Grammar of Qiang: with annotated texts and glossary*. Mouton Grammar Library 31. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.
- Sims, Nathaniel. 2016. Towards a More Comprehensive Understanding of Qiang Dialectology. *Language and Linguistics* 17(3), 351–381.

## Others

ELAR archive of Yonghe Northern Qiang:

<https://www.elararchive.org/dk0551/>

Film *Nowhere to Call Home*:

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/nowheretocallhome>

Video – The Rma Script: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34Pj95zFHd4>

Video – Support the Rma Script: [https://youtu.be/B\\_xhxpYPF8s](https://youtu.be/B_xhxpYPF8s)

Video – Rapunzel, told in Rma: [https://youtu.be/S2\\_\\_IIUSgIM](https://youtu.be/S2__IIUSgIM)

Video – Parts of the Face in Mawo Rma: <https://youtu.be/15LCScQ10Es>

Endangered Languages Project (Northern Qiang):

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/2405>

New York Times review of *Nowhere to Call Home*:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/movies/nowhere-to-call-home-examines-prejudices.html>

## 2.2 Choyo (Queyu ཚུལལ་ཕུ་ལྷུ་གཤམ་ལྷུ་གཤམ་)

Choyo (Choyu, Queyu) is a Qiangic language spoken in Yajiang, Litang, and Xinlong counties in western Sichuan. Although speakers are classified as ethnic Tibetans (Chinese 藏族), Choyo belongs to the Qiangic branch rather than Tibetan. Choyo is spoken in the Kham region in Ganzi Prefecture in Sichuan, along the same river valley as Nyarong Minyag;<sup>1</sup> it is closely related to Zhaba, which is spoken in Daofu and Yajiang counties. Most sources, such as Eberhard et al. (2021) and the *Endangered Language Project*, report 7,000 speakers, however, Roche (2018) identifies only 3,000 speakers.

There are four major dialects of Choyo according to Wikipedia:

1. Tuanjie Township 团结乡, Yajiang County – see Lu (1985); Sun (1991)
2. Rongba Township 绒坝乡, Litang County – see Nishida (2008)
3. Xiala Township 呷拉乡, Yajiang County, which also has Dao speakers – see Prins & Nagano (2013)
4. Youlaxi Township 尤拉西乡, Xinlong County, which also has Western Horpa speakers – see Wang (1991), Huang (1992)

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<sup>1</sup> See #22 and #23 on the map at <https://zenodo.org/record/1199216> (accessed 2021-05-27)



There is not much descriptive material on Choyo. Huang & Dai (1992) document the Youlaxi Township dialect. Fuminobu Nishida (Tohoku University) has conducted research on Choyo.<sup>2</sup> Xuan Guan has an ELDP-funded project to document the language and cultural traditions, and plans to archive his corpus with ELAR (Guan 2018).

Lhagang Choyo is considered by Suzuki & Wangmo (2016) to be a related but different language from Choyo proper, based on their linguistic analysis. It is only spoken in one small hamlet called Täge of Tagong Town, Kangding City, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Lhagang Choyo is a half-dormant language, as there are fewer than 100 speakers currently, and no children are acquiring it as a mother tongue. Most Lhagang Choyo now speak Khams Tibetan, due to the relative prestige of that language. According to a local oral story, the ancestors of the Lhagang Choyo migrated from the present Choyo-speaking area of Xinlong County, however there have been no systematic studies of intelligibility between the languages so far.

## Resources

- Guan, Xuan. 2018. Documentation of Choyo (Queyu) and its cultural traditions. Endangered Languages Archive.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2196/00-0000-0000-0012-6DB8-F> (accessed 2021-05-27)
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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.ccle.ihe.tohoku.ac.jp/en/staff/stf028/> and [http://www.himalayanlanguages.org/team/fuminobu\\_nishida](http://www.himalayanlanguages.org/team/fuminobu_nishida) (accessed 2021-05-27)

## Others

Map of Choyu communities:

<https://www.sichuanzoulang.com/en/ethnolinguistic-groups-en/queyu-menuheading-en/queyu-maps-en/queyu-maps-queyu-zhaba-en.html>

Endangered Languages Project:

<https://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5318>

ELDP project by Guan Xuan on Documentation of Queyu (Choyo) and its cultural traditions: <https://elararchive.org/blog/2020/09/25/eldp-project-highlight-documentation-of-queyu-choyo-and-its-cultural-traditions/>

### 2.3 Gochang (Guiqiong འགོ་ཐང་། 贵琼语)

Gochang (Guiqiong) (gu<sup>33</sup>teh<sup>53</sup>) is a poorly documented and understood Qiangic language spoken in Kangding County (Tibetan: *Dar.rtse.mdo*) in Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan Province. There are approximately 2,000-6,000 speakers in Shiji Village, Shelian Village, Qianxi Village, Maibeng Village, and Guza Township, according to Rao et al. (2019: 261). There are also some speakers in Luding County and Tianquan County in Ya'an. The tablelands along both banks of the Dadu River inhabited by the Guiqiong people were part of Xikang Province until the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949.

Hammarstrom et al. (2021) lists the language as Endangered (100% certain based on available evidence). Gerald Roche and Yudru Tsomu, the latter a Tibetan historian and Gochang speaker, classify the language as 'definitely endangered' according to the UNESCO language vitality framework. They claim that the intergenerational transmission has been declining for some time, and appears to have largely ceased within the last five years. Gochang is not written, or taught in schools, and very limited documentation exists. Many of the speakers are also indifferent to the fate of the language.

## Resources

- Jiang, Li. 2015. *A grammar of Guìqióng: a language of Sichuan*. Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region, Volume: 15. Leiden: Brill.
- Rao, Min. 2015. Description du Guiqiong : langue tibéto-birmanne (famille sino-tibétaine). PhD thesis. Ecole Des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.
- Rao, Min, Gao Yang & Jesse Gates. 2019. Relativization in Guiqiong. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 42, 263–282.
- Roche, Gerald & Yudru Tsomu. 2018. Tibet's invisible languages and China's language endangerment crisis: lessons from the Gochang language of western Sichuan. *China Quarterly* 233, 186–210.

Song, Lingli [宋伶俐]. 2011. *A study of Guiqiong* [贵琼语研究]. Beijing: Ethnic Publishing House [民族出版社].

Hammarström, Harald & Forkel, Robert & Haspelmath, Martin & Bank, Sebastian. 2021. Glottolog 4.4. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <http://glottolog.org> (accessed 2021-07-09)

## Others

Map of the Gochang-speaking area:

<https://www.sichuanzoulang.com/en/ethnolinguistic-groups-en/guiqiong-menuheading-en/guiqiong-maps-en/guiqiong-maps-guiqiong-en.html>

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5611>

## 2.4 nDrapa (Zhaba འདྲཱཔ་ཤམ་པ་ 扎坝语)

The nDrapa language (also known as: Bazi, Bozi, Draba, Zhaba, Zaba, Zha, and in Chinese as 扎坝语 or 扎巴语) is spoken by 8,000–9,000 people living primarily in the valley of the Xianshui River 鲜水河 between Daofu and Yajiang counties in western Sichuan. Speakers of nDrapa are classified as Tibetans and refer to themselves as [ndza<sup>55</sup> pi<sup>31</sup>] and to their language as [ndza<sup>35</sup> ska<sup>55</sup>]. The neighboring Kham Tibetans refer to the nDrapa people as [ndza<sup>55</sup> pa<sup>55</sup>]. There are two major dialects of nDrapa: Northern and Southern, located in the Upper Zha and lower Zha areas respectively, according to Gong (2007). The following subgroups are recognized:

- Upper Zha area (nDra-stod): Zhaba District in Daofu County
  - Yazhuo 亚卓乡
  - Hongding 红顶乡
  - Zhongni 仲尼乡
  - Zhatuo 扎拖乡
  - Xiatuso 下拖乡
- Lower Zha area (nDra-smad): Zhamai District in Yangjiang County
  - Waduo 瓦多乡
  - Murong 木绒乡

The varieties spoken in these two districts are mutually intelligible. The language exhibits several areal features, including a set of directional prefixes (Sun 1983; Nishida 1993; Shirai 2009). It has a large number of phonemes, according to Shirai (2018), namely:

- (i) consonants: ph [p<sup>h</sup>], th [t<sup>h</sup>], tʰ [t<sup>h</sup>], ch [c<sup>h</sup>], kh [k<sup>h</sup>]; p, t, ṭ, c, k; b, d, ḍ, ʃ, g; tsh [ts<sup>h</sup>], tɕh [tɕ<sup>h</sup>]; ts, tɕ; dz, dz; m, n, ŋ, ŋ; m̥, n̥, ŋ̥; fh [f<sup>h</sup>], sh [s<sup>h</sup>], ɕh [ɕ<sup>h</sup>]; f, s, ɕ, x, h; v, z, ẓ, ʃ, fi; w, j; l, r [ɽ]; ʎ [ʎ], r̥ [ɽ̥]
- (ii) vowels: i, i, u, u, e [i], ø, o, ε, ʌ, ə, a; ei
- (iii) word tones: 1 (high-level), 2 (high-falling), 3 (low-rising) and 4 (low-rising-falling).

The language is endangered, with the Endangered Languages Project (ELP) listing it as ‘threatened (40% certain based on available evidence)’, while Hammarstrom et al. (2021) lists it as ‘shifting’. Roche (2018) describes it as both ‘Endangered: All people of the grandparent and parent generation speak X. No children (<18) speak the language’, and ‘Threatened. All or almost all children speak X, but if current conditions continue, intergenerational transmission is likely to be interrupted in the near future’. All sources agree that where language shift is taking place in the nDrapa community it is towards some form of Chinese.

Linguistic descriptions include Huang (1991), Huang & Dai (1992), and Gong (2007). Extensive research has been carried out by Satoko Shirai and Elvis Huang (see below).

## Resources

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- Gong, Qunhu. 2007. *Zhabayu Yanjiu* (Study of the Zhaba language). Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe.

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## Others

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5610>

nDrapa architecture has also been tentatively inscribed on the UNESCO world heritage register:

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5815/>

Stéphane Gros blog post about nDrapa concepts of the house as a kinship unit:

<https://himalayas.hypotheses.org/2629>

## 2.5 Prinmi (Pumi ཕྱི་མི། 普米语)

The Pumi (普米) nationality is one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic groups of China. The Pumi language (also known as Prinmi) is closely related to the extinct Tangut, according to Ding (2014). This region straddles the border of two provinces, and the people are divided into two groups: an independent Pumi ethnicity in Yunan, and a Tibetan ethnicity for speakers in Sichuan. The language is also recognized as including two mutually unintelligible varieties which do not coincide with the provincial division: Northern Pumi, and Southern Pumi. In Yunnan, the two areas with large Pumi populations are Lanping and Bai autonomous counties in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, and Ninglang Yi Autonomous County in Lijiang.

According to the nationwide census in 2000, the total population of Pumi people was 33,600. This number does not indicate the number of speakers since the census does not collect information on spoken languages, only ethnicity. It is thus difficult to give a precise number of Pumi speakers: Eberhard et al. (2021) gives 5,000 in Yunnan and 30,000 in Sichuan. Even though Pumi is the official language of a recognized minority that is entitled to language development according to the Chinese constitution, there is no orthography established yet. There have been a few attempts by Pumi speakers and scholars to create an orthography, but none has been accepted for general use by the community.

Picus Ding, Henriëtte Daudey, and Gerong Pincuo are the main people who have worked on these varieties. There are both audio and video materials available in the ELAR archive and elsewhere online. Ding (2014) is a descriptive grammar that covers phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, with two sample texts, and an English-Prinmi glossary. Some prominent linguistic features of Pumi are a large number of clitics (appearing as proclitics, enclitics, mesoclitics, or endoclitics), a lexical pitch-accent system akin to Japanese, and existential verbs that distinguish concreteness, animacy, and location.

Hammarstrom et al. (2021) list the language as threatened. ELP lists it as ‘vulnerable (20% certain)’. Roche (2018) describes Prinmi as ‘Shifting (moderate). Some children do not speak X’. Younger Pumi speakers are increasingly becoming monolingual in the Yunnan dialect of Mandarin, or in standard Mandarin through education.

## Resources

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## Others

Prinmi songs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7t57fVV1as>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2rvUINAn08>

Endangered Languages Project:  
<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5607>

## 2.6 Minyag (Muya མི་ཉག ལྷ་མཚོ་ལྷ་མཚོ་ལྷ་མཚོ་ 木雅语)

Minyag is an endangered Qiangic language spoken by more than 13,000 people living in the vicinity of Mount Gongga, Sichuan, China. The name has been spelled various ways, including *Manyak*, *Menya*, *Minyag*, *Minyak*, and

*Muya*. Other names include Boba and Miyao. Most speakers of *Muya* are officially included within the Tibetan nationality in China, with most speakers being at least bilingual (Mandarin and Minyag); and a high percentage in the northern areas are trilingual (Mandarin, Minyag, Khams Tibetan).

Eberhard et al. (2021) list two mutually unintelligible Minyak dialects: Eastern (Nyagrong), and Western (Shimian and Darmdo), and there is no contact between speakers of them so they are often considered separate languages (Suzuki & Drolma 2016). Darmdo Minyag is spoken to the west of Mount Gongga, and Shimian Minyag to the east. Darmdo Minyag speakers live between Jiagenba Village of Kangding Municipality and Tangu Village of Jiulong County along one valley, both in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. The area is distributed in Kangding (Jiju, Gonggashan, Pubarong, Shade, Pengbuxi), Jiulong (Tangu), and Yajiang (Zhusang, Gala). The language is unintelligible with Khams Tibetan, Amdo Tibetan, and Ersu; among speakers of Khams Tibetan it is called *rong skad* ‘farmer’s tongue’. A number of scholars have described this variety, such as Huang (1985, 1992, 2007), Sun (1983), and Ikeda (2002, 2006). However, there is no grammar or dialectological study of Darmdo Minyag to help us determine dialectal differences within this language. Darmdo Minyag is estimated to have 10,000 speakers (Drolma & Suzuki, 2015). The number of speakers of Darmdo Minyag is decreasing due to shift to Khams Tibetan.

Shimian Minyag speakers live in eastern Jiulong County and part of Shimian County in Ya’an city. Here people follow the Bon religion, with Tibetan Buddhist rituals mixed in, which is most evident at the annual *Shine Upon the Buddha Festival*, held on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month of the lunar calendar. Shimian Minyag is estimated to have 3,000 speakers (Yin Weibin 2015); there is not much documentation on this variety of *Muya*. Very few speakers of Shimian know Tibetan.

Glottolog lists *Muya* as threatened, whilst the Endangered Language Project lists it as ‘vulnerable (40% certain)’. Roche (2018) describes the language as ‘Threatened. All are almost all children speak X, but if current conditions continue, intergenerational transmission is likely to be interrupted in the near future’. None of these sources distinguishes between Darmdo and Shimian Minyag.

A writing system was developed for Darmdo Minyag, using the Tibetan script, and a textbook (available online) was created to teach the writing system, but these are not currently in use.



## Resources

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## Others

Darmdo Minyag textbook:

[http://www.khamaid.org/programs/culture/minyaklanguage/minyak\\_language.pdf](http://www.khamaid.org/programs/culture/minyaklanguage/minyak_language.pdf)

Darmdo Minyag textbook (read online):

<https://en.calameo.com/read/00043297764534ed34467>

Video about Darmdo Minyag endangerment:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WfXUbNMgHU&t=2s>

Parts of the face in Darmdo Minyag with Pasang Drolkar:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NvEFqDaZDA>

Endangered Language Project (Muya):

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5609>

## 2.7 The Ersuic branch (ཨར་སུ་ཁོ་ལོ་ཨར་སུ་ཁོ་ལོ་ཨར་སུ་ཁོ་ལོ་ 尔苏语组)

The Ersuic languages (also known as Duoxu or Erhsu) are a Qiangic language cluster in the Sino-Tibetan family. There are around 20,000 Ersuic speakers living in the western part of Sichuan Province, according to Eberhard et al. (2021), spread through several counties within Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, and the city Ya'an. This is a multi-ethnic and multilingual region; most Ersuic speakers are classified as Tibetans, though some belong to the Yi ethnicity, while some are registered as Han Chinese.

There are major mutually unintelligible varieties of Ersuic languages:

- *Eastern* (Ersu) 尔苏 – 13,000 speakers (Sun 1982), spoken in Ganluo (甘洛), Yuexi (越西), Hanyuan (汉源), and Shimian(石棉);
- *Central* (Duoxu or Tosu) 多续 – 3,000 speakers (Sun 1982), spoken in Mianning冕宁, though Chirkova (2008) reports almost none remaining;
- *Western* (Lizu) 傈苏/里汝/吕苏 – 4,000 speakers (Sun 1982); 7,000 speakers (Chirkova 2008), spoken in Mianning冕宁、Muli (木里), Jiulong (九龙)

Unlike rGyalrongic languages, the Ersu varieties do not have syllable codas. There are extensive directional markings.

The varieties are little-known and highly under-documented, and all are endangered: only a handful of people know Tosu (ELP lists it as ‘critically endangered, 80% certain’); Lizu is classified as ‘endangered (100% certain)’; and Ersu is ‘threatened (100% certain)’. Duoxu is documented only through a 740-word vocabulary list in the Sino-Tibetan vocabularies *Xīfān Yiyù* [Tibetan-Chinese bilingual glossary], and a grammatical sketch (Huáng & Yin 2012).

The Ersu script, known as *Ersu Shaba Picture Writing*, and called in Ersu [ndzārāmá], is an indigenous writing system used in the Bon religion in which the color of the characters affects the meaning. The colored pictographic writing system was first described in Sun (1982a), and only Shaba, the religious specialists, can understand and use it. Chirkova & Wang (2021) developed a Romanization system which they use in Ersu traditional story annotations, and for an Ersu-Mandarin dictionary they are preparing. The main people working on Ersuic documentation and revitalisation are Ekaterina Chirkova, and Dehe Wang, who is a member of the Ersu community, along with Da Wu and E. Schmitt.

## Resources

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## Others

Ersu people in Southwest Sichuan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJuR6TkVWyg>, and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM-IWGG7W0s>

Lizu stories: <http://www.katia-chirkova.info/sounds/lizu-stories/>

Revitalizing Tosu: <https://tinyurl.com/truzt54>

Ersu: <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/4133>

Lizu: <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/10624>

Tosu: <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/10625>

## 2.8 The Naic Branch (རྒྱ་སྐད་ཚན། 纳语族)

The name ‘Naic’ is derived from the endonym Na used by speakers of several languages; the group is classified as Qiangic by Jacques & Michaud (2011). Lama (2012) places them in the Loloish branch. Because of the high degree of phonological erosion of the Naic languages, classification has been slow.

The sub-classification of Naic is:

- Namuyi (纳木依)
- Shixing(史兴)
- The Naish Languages (纳西语种)
  - Naxi (纳西)
  - Na (纳)
  - Laze (水田)

### 2.8.1 Namuyi (གནམ་བྱིས། 纳木依)

Namuyi (or Namuzi; autonym: *na54 mzi54*) is a Tibeto-Burman language of the Qiangic group, spoken by approximately 5,000-10,000 people on the eastern border of the Tibetan plateau. They are mostly distributed in Mianning 冕宁 county, Muli 木里 Tibetan autonomous county, Jiulong 九龙 county and Xichang 西昌 city in Sichuan Province. Jianfu subdivides Namuyi into three dialectal regions: Xichang, Mianning, and Muli.

Based on a local perspective, the name ‘Namuyi’ is interpreted by Li Jianfu (2017) as, /nam54/ ‘sky’ and /zi54/ ‘descendant’, resulting in a compound meaning of ‘descendants of the sky’. Namuyi people traditionally followed a pre-Buddhist, animist religion, involving a religious practitioner serving as a bridge between humans and supernatural beings.

Namuyi communities are surrounded by Nuosu-speaking Yi communities, and so they are mostly shifting towards Nuosu or some form of Chinese. ELP lists Namuyi as ‘endangered (100% certain based on the available evidence)’;

Glottolog lists the language as ‘shifting’ and Roche (2018) has it as ‘threatened’. The following quote, from a linguist and member of the Namuyi community, gives some indication of the attitudes and social structures that underlie the language shift (Li et al. 2007: 241).

It is stupid to speak such a useless language as Namuyi these days. We have to communicate with our Nuosu friends in Nuosu. There are only a very few people who speak Namuyi. It’s just like walking off a cliff with your eyes closed if you only speak Namuyi and refuse to speak Nuosu. When the author asked why their two seven year-old children only spoke and understood Chinese, they replied: ‘Who doesn’t want their kids to find a good job, settle down, and have a comfortable family life? We should have our kids learn Chinese to help them find a job, shouldn’t we?’

In addition to several books and articles in English, Pavlik (2017) and Lakhi (2017) are PhD dissertations on Namuyi. Fuminoda Nishida, who has conducted research on Choyu, has also worked on Namuyi. There is also an archive of audio and video from Namuyi communities in the ELAR archive Archive compiled by Huang Chenglong.

## Resources

- Lakhi, Libu (with Qi Huimin, Kevin Stuart & Gerald Roche). 2009. *na<sup>53</sup> mzi<sup>53</sup> Tibetan Songs, Engagement Chants, and Flute Music*. Cambridge: Asian Highlands Perspectives.
- Lakhi, Libu (with Tsering Bum & Charles K Stuart). 2009. *China’s na<sup>53</sup> mzi<sup>53</sup> Tibetan Life, Language, and Folklore*. Two volumes. Cambridge: Asian Highlands Perspectives.
- Lakhi, Libu, Brook Hefright & Charles K Stuart. 2007. The Namuyi: Linguistic and Cultural Features. *Asian Folklore Studies* 66(1/2), 233–253.
- Lakhi, Libu. 2017. A Descriptive Grammar of Namuyi Khatho spoken by Namuyi Tibetans. Ph.D. thesis. La Trobe University.
- Li, Xiaoqing. 2014. *A Namuyi Tibetan Woman’s Journey from Chinese Village, to Indian City, to Beijing*. Cambridge: Asian Highlands Perspectives.
- Pavlik, Štěpán. 2017. The Description of Namuzi Language. Ph.D. thesis. Charles University.

## Others

Video (Namuyi soul-calling ritual):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGZ43LoUB84>

Video (Parts of the face in Namuyi):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWQNjLXf0fg>

ELAR Namuyi materials: <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1029709>

Fuminoda Nishida research profile:

[http://www.himalayanlanguages.org/team/fuminobu\\_nishida](http://www.himalayanlanguages.org/team/fuminobu_nishida)

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/21>

### 2.8.2 Shixing (ཚྭ་ཉིང་|史兴)

Shixing-speaking people are known as Xumi (旭米) or Sumu (粟母) and live in Muli Tibetan Autonomous County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan. Both names are Chinese renderings of the group's name in Prinmi (Pumi), that being the language of Muli's Tibetan ethnic majority (Chirkova 2009) – see Section 2.5. Shixing is spoken by about 1,800 people living by the Shuiluo River in Shuiluo Township 水洛乡 in Muli. It was first described by Sun (1983), who called it 'Shixing', a name used by a few scholars despite the fact that it is generally unknown to the people who live in Muli. Chirkova (2009) uses 'Xumi' to refer to the people, following the preferences of her language consultants, and 'Shixing' to refer to their language.

The Xumi people live in eleven villages in the Shuiluo Valley, alongside the Shuiluo River. Based on lexical and phonological differences, Chirkova (2009) distinguishes two mutually intelligible varieties:

- Upper Xumi
- Lower Xumi

The Shuiluo region is a multi-ethnic township, inhabited by five different ethnic groups: Tibetans, Prinmi, Xumi, Muli Mongolians, and Naxi. The first three groups are officially classified as Tibetans and the latter two as Naxi. Therefore, Shixing is spoken at the border areas with Tibetans and groups speaking Ngwi-Burmese, Na, and Naxi.

ELP describes Shixing as 'threatened (100% certain, based on available evidence)'. Glottolog describes the language as 'shifting'; Roche (2018) lists it as 'threatened'. The language is being replaced by forms of both Tibetan and Chinese. Along the Shuiluo River, communities in the north are shifting to Tibetan, and in the south, to Chinese.

Language shift is discussed in Chirkova (2007). Huber, Weckerle & Hsu (2017: 365), who describe a situation of communal language shift:

The village Xiwa in the north is geographically close to the Gami Tibetans of Dulu and Galuo, and over the short period between 2005 and 2010 a significant reclassification in ethnic identity took place in Xiwa. While in 2005, 22 out of 25 houses in Xiwa referred to themselves as Shuhi, in 2010 the situation changed completely, and the majority referred to themselves as Gami [Tibetan]. Exceptions were the elder people. This shift was accompanied by a transition in language preferences from Shixing to Gami Tibetan, with only older people still using Shixing during daily conversation.

## Resources

- Chirkova, Ekaterina. 2007. Between Tibetan and Chinese: Identity and language in Chinese South-West. *Journal of South Asian Studies* 30(3), 405–417.
- Chirkova, Ekaterina. 2009. Shixing, A Sino-Tibetan Language of South-west China: A Grammatical Sketch with two Appended Texts. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 32, 1–89.
- Huber, Franz K., Caroline S. Weckerle & Elisabeth Hsu. 2017. The Shuhi House between Reformist China and Revivalist Tibet. *Asiatische Studien – Études Asiatiques* 71(1), 353–374.
- Sun, Hongkai [孙宏开]. 2014. A study of Shixing [Shixingyu yanjiu 史兴语研究]. Beijing: Minzu University Press.

## Others

Audio of Shuhi (recorded by Chirkova):

<http://www.katia-chirkova.info/sounds/xumi-stories/>

Shuhi textbook (by Chirkova):

<http://www.katia-chirkova.info/research/publications/xumi/>

Shuhi documentation project (by Chirkova):

<http://www.katia-chirkova.info/research/projects/ersu-xumi/>

ELAR deposit: <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI615588>

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5431>

Shuhi map: <https://www.sichuanzoulang.com/en/ethnolinguistic-groups-en/xumi-menuheading-en/xumi-maps-en/xumi-maps-xumi-en.html>



### 2.8.3 The Naish Languages (འཇང་གི་སྐད་ཚིག་纳西语种)

Naxi (Nàxī 纳西) in Chinese scholarship refers to the officially recognised ethnicity and covers a range of language varieties related to the Naxi language spoken in Lijiang, in Northwestern Yunnan. The linguistic terms Naish and Naic are derived from the endonym Na; currently, three major varieties are recognized, based on Jacques & Michaud (2011), who identified shared lexical innovations and reconstructed ancestral Proto-Naish. The level of their mutual intelligibility is yet to be studied:

- Naxi (纳西)
- Na (Mosuo纳)
- Laze (水田话)

Word lists for various Naish varieties are available online from the *Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus* (<http://stedt.berkeley.edu>, accessed 2021-11-25). Glossed Naxi, Na, and Laze texts and word lists synchronized with recordings are available in a *Pangloss Collection* ([http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/archivage/presentation\\_en.htm](http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/archivage/presentation_en.htm), accessed 2021-11-25).

#### 2.8.3.1 Naxi (འཇང་སྐད་纳西)

Naxi, also known as *Nakhi*, *Nasi*, *Lomi*, *Moso*, and *Mo-su*, is spoken by some 310,000 people, most of whom live in and around Lijiang City Yulong Naxi Autonomous County (玉龙纳西族自治县) in Yunnan Province. There are two major clusters, Western Naxi and Eastern Naxi, recognized by He & Jiang (1985). There are speakers of Naxi who are not registered as members of the ethnic group, and people who are officially registered but do not speak the language, so the exact number of Naxi speakers is extremely difficult to calculate.

Lidz (2010) notes that the western groups call themselves ‘Naxi’, whereas the eastern groups call themselves ‘Na’.

- Baoshanzhou 保山州
- Dayanzhen 大研镇
- Lijiang 丽江

Western Naxi is fairly homogeneous and people can communicate with each other regardless of the villages they are from. The language is commonly

spoken among Naxi people and is in little danger of dying out soon, especially with recent emphasis on literacy skills. The language can be written in the Geba syllabary, Latin script, or the Fraser (missionary) alphabet, but these are rarely used in everyday life and few people are able to read any form of Naxi. In 1932 the Naxi Gospel of Mark was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in the Fraser alphabet.

In-depth lexicographic work on Lijiang Naxi by Pinson will soon result in the publication of a dictionary, considerably expanding the existing glossary (Pinson 1998).

Due to the boost of tourism around Naxi speaking areas in Lijiang, the promotion of Naxi culture and language has helped with maintenance of the language. There are many multimedia resources on Naxi available on the internet.

## Resources

Bradley, David. 1975. Naxi and Proto-Burmese-Lolo. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 2(1), 93–150.

Fang, Guoyu 方国瑜 & Zhiwu He 和志武. 1995. *Nàxī Xiàngxíng Wénzì Pǔ* (A dictionary of Naxi pictographic characters) (纳西象形文字谱). Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe.

He, Jiren 和即仁 & Zhuyi Jiang 姜竹仪. 1985. *Nàxīyǔ Jiǎnzǐ* (A Presentation of the Naxi Language). Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe. 民族出版社

He, Zhiwu 和志武. 1987. *Nàxīyǔ Jīchǔ Yǔfǎ* (A Basic Grammar of Naxi). Kunming: Yunnan Minzu Chubanshe.

## Others

Naxi language classes oriented to tourists

<https://haokan.baidu.com/v?vid=3700365498659087053&pd=bjh&fr=bjhauth or&type=video>

<https://haokan.baidu.com/v?vid=17953045595865002383&pd=bjh&fr=bjhauth or&type=video>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy1b5Q-Zzh4>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8sk3YLwsIbQkucHgOdDHEA>

A public talk in Naxi with many Chinese loanwords:

<https://v.qq.com/x/page/p0772xmvz3i.html>

### 2.8.3.2 Na (Mosuo 摩梭)

Moso or Musuo, often known as Na among themselves, are a group of approximately 40,000 with a unique culture living around Lugu Lake in Yunnan. Na is also referenced as Narua in Glottolog; they are officially grouped under Naxi ethnicity despite their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness.

There are three dialects of Na, according to Lidz (2010):

- Ninglang 宁蒍 / Beiqu 北渠
- Yongning 永宁
- Guabie 瓜别

Some Na speakers use ‘Naxi’ to refer to their language because of the double-layered connection of ethnicity and language closeness. A comprehensive grammar is available (Lidz 2010). Alexis Michaud has also worked extensively on the language.

### Resources

Dobbs, Roselle & Mingqing La. 2016. The two-level tonal system of Lataddi Narua. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 39(1), 67–104.

Michaud, Alexis. 2017. *Tone in Yongning Na: lexical tones and morphotonology*. Berlin: Language Science Press.

He, Jiren 和即委 & Zhuyi Jiang 姜竹仪. 1985. *Naxiyu Jianzhi 纳西语简弥* (A Presentation of the Naxi Language). Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe 民族出版社.

Lidz, Liberty. 2010. *A descriptive grammar of Yongning Na (Mosuo)*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Texas at Austin.

### Others

Mosuo movie trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iSQcfESTls>

Na (Mosuo)-English-Chinese Dictionary:

[https://www.academia.edu/16148636/Na\\_Mosuo\\_English\\_Chinese\\_Dictionary](https://www.academia.edu/16148636/Na_Mosuo_English_Chinese_Dictionary)

### 2.8.3.3 Laze (Lare ལཱེ་མི་ལཱེ་མི་ལཱེ་མི་ 水田话)

Laze, rendered in Chinese as Lare (拉热) and Shuitianhua (水田话), is spoken in Xiangjiao Township (项脚乡) in Muli Prefecture, western Sichuan Province. The total population is less than 1,000 and Laze has fewer than 300 proficient speakers, with very little documentation (Michaud & Jacques 2012). Huang (2009) is an introduction to a neighbouring dialect in the township of Bowa (锡博瓦乡达瓦村). Note that there is another, different language with the same name Shuitianhua (水田话) in Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan.

Michaud & Jacques (2012) provide a synchronic analysis of Laze, stating that it is similar to Na and Naxi in many respects, including its present-day syllable structure. Laze, like Naxi and Yongning Na, has a simple syllabic structure: (C)(G)V+T, where C is a consonant and G is a glide; there are neither initial consonant clusters nor final consonants.

### Resources

Huang, Bufan. 2009. A Survey of Muli Shuitian (Muli Shuitianhua Gaikuang). *Journal of Sino-Tibetan Linguistics* (Hanzangyu Xuebao) 3, 30–55.

Michaud, Alexis, Limin He & Yaoping Zhong. 2017. Nàxī language/Naish languages. *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics* 3, 144–157. Leiden: Brill.

Michaud, Alexis & Guillaume Jacques. 2012. The Phonology of Laze: Phonemic Analysis, Syllabic Inventory, and a Short Word List. *Yuyanxue Luncong* 语言学论丛 45, 196–230.

### Others

Audio stories, glosses, and a set of untranscribed rituals:  
<https://pangloss.cnrs.fr/corpus/Laz%C3%A9?lang=en>

### 3. rGyalrongic languages (རྒྱལ་རྩོད་སྐད་ལས་གཞི་ 嘉绒语组)

Gyalrong or rGyalrong (Tibetan: རྒྱལ་རྩོད་, Wylie: *rgyal rong*, Chinese: 嘉绒) refers to the language(s) and the people and culture of some Tibetans who live in Sichuan. The language group belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, and the languages in it are closely related to Tibetic and Qiangic languages (see Section 2).

Although there is a large amount of diversity among rGyalrongic languages, they are often regarded as a single language. This typically reflects understandings about the historical and social identity of the region, rather than

consideration of linguistic factors. rGyalrongic can be classified into Eastern and Western branches, based on linguistic features such as shared retentions and innovations. The Eastern branch includes Situ (ལྷམ་རྩོལ་ཚ་བ་ཁག་བཞི། 四土), Japhug (རྫོང་ལྷུག་ཅུ་རུ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ 茶堡), rDzong-‘bur or Zbu (རྫོང་ལྷུག་ 日部), and Tshobdun (ཚོ་བདེ་ན། 草登). The Western branch includes Khroskyabs (ཁྲོ་སྐབས། 绰斯甲), rTa’u (རྟཱུ་ 道孚), and Nyagrong Minyag (གྲག་རྩོལ་མི་གྲག། 新龙木雅). These seven languages plus Tangut, now extinct, make up the rGyalrongic group, spoken by people self-identifying and identified as ethnic Tibetans (Lai 2017). Tangut was spoken until 1500 in Western Xia (the modern Chinese provinces of Ningxia, Gansu, eastern Qinghai, northern Shaanxi, north-eastern Xinjiang, southwest Inner Mongolia, and southernmost Outer Mongolia).

Eberhard, Simons & Fennig (2021) report 75% lexical similarity between Situ and Japhug, 60% between Japhug and Tshobdun, but only 13% between Situ and rTa’u. This supports a distinction between the Eastern and Western branches. The rGyalrongic languages are closely related to Pumi, Muya, Queyu, and Qiang within the Qiangic group (see Section 2). The rGyalrongic languages are distinguished by their conservative morphology and their phonological archaisms, which make them valuable sources for linguistic typology and historical linguistics. Old Tibetan had complex word-initial consonant clusters which are not preserved in any of the attested modern Tibetic languages, however some are still present in rGyalrong. All rGyalrongic languages, except Japhug, are tonal and use pitch to distinguish lexical items.

rGyalrongic languages also have person agreement marking and verb stem alternations that are absent from the modern Tibetic languages. Rare and extensive prefixing systems have been detected in rGyalrongic languages (Jacques 2013; Lai 2021). This language group has complex verbal morphology, unlike anything found elsewhere in Sino-Tibetan. Indeed, rGyalrongic languages are the only fully polysynthetic tongues in China, actually in all of Asia, except for isolated languages of the subpolar and polar regions such as Ket, Ainu, and Chukchi. This notion that rGyalrongic languages are polysynthetic was first proposed by Jaques (2012). The characteristics of polysynthetic languages (Evans & Sasse 2002) exhibited by them are:

- (1) high word-to-morpheme ratio (most verbal forms include at least three morphemes and can have up to eight);
- (2) head-marking typology (grammatical relationships are marked mainly on the verb, while within the noun phrase, possession is marked on the possessed rather than on the possessor);
- (3) verbal agreement with two arguments;
- (4) nominal incorporation (Jacques 2008).

All rGyalrong languages are highly endangered since most speakers are gradually shifting to standard Tibetan and Chinese. Although Eberhard, Simons & Fennig (2021) list them as ‘not endangered’, it is not clear how this categorisation was arrived at. Like many endangered languages around the world, interruption of intergenerational transmission typically results in language loss within one to two generations. Roche (2018) provides two assessments: ‘Shifting (advanced). Most children do not speak X’; and ‘Threatened. All are almost all children speak X, but if current conditions continue, intergenerational transmission is likely to be interrupted in the near future’. The endangerment classification of individual languages is presented in the descriptions below.

### 3.1 Situ (ལྷུ་རྩོམ་ཚ་བ་ལག་བཞི། 四土)

Situ (四土) is the most widely spoken rGyalrong group language, with about 100,000 speakers. The name (literally ‘four earths’) refers to the four main Tūsī 土司 (a Chinese administrative position) governing the rGyalrong area. Situ is spoken over a large area that includes Maerkang, Xiaojin, Miyaluo and Lixian Counties in the east to Danba County in the west. The language is often considered ‘rGyalrong proper’ due to the historical and cultural significance of its location. Often, rGyalrong and Situ are therefore used synonymously, both in terms of language and culture, both by insiders and outsiders. Situ is the only rGyalrongic language to have been put into writing before 1949, using Tibetan script (see Btsan lha 2010). The main references on this language are the grammar of Lin (1993), the dictionary of Huang & Sun (2002), and descriptions by Lin (2003) on the verbal system, and Lin (2009) on tone and intonation.

Professor Ngag dbang tshul khriims has published a lexicon of the Xiaojin (Wylie: *Btsan lha*) variety of rGyalrong Situ, among other contributions on the language. Yasuhiko Nagano has conducted extensive research on Situ, including overseeing the *rGyalrongic Languages Database*. Marielle Prins has written a grammar on the Jiaomuzu (Wylie: *Jyomjo*) variety. A primer on ‘rGyalrong language’ was published in 2017, edited by ‘Brug rgyal mkhar. It is designed as a transitional primer, aimed to accelerate acquisition of literary Tibetan. It is also based on the assumption that rGyalrong is a single language, despite the fact that the varieties are mutually unintelligible.

## Resources

- Btsan.lha, Ngag.dbang Tshul.khrims. 2010. Rgyal.rong dmangs.khrod gtam.tshogs [Popular Rgyalrong texts]. Beijing: Mi.rigsdpe.skrunkhang.
- Gates, Jesse. P. 2012. *Situ in Situ. Towards a Dialectology of Jiāróng (rGyalrong)*. PhD dissertation. Trinity Western University.
- Huang, Liangrong & Hongkai Sun. 2002. 汉嘉戎语词典 [A Chinese–rGyalrong dictionary] Beijing: Minzu chubanshe.
- Lin, Xiangrong. 1993. 《嘉戎语研究》 [A study on the rGyalrong language] Chengdu: Sichuan Minzu chubanshe.
- Lin, You-Jing. 2003. Tense and aspect morphology in the Zhuokeji rGyalrong verb. *Cahiers de linguistique - Asie orientale* 32(2), 245–286.
- Lin, You-Jing. 2009. *Units in Zhuòkējì rGyalrong discourse: prosody and grammar*. Doctoral dissertation. University of California at Santa Barbara.
- Lin, You-Jing. 2016. 嘉戎语卓克基话语法标注文本 [Cogtse Rgyalrong texts: Fully analyzed spontaneous narratives with an updated sketch grammar of the language]. Beijing: Social Sciences Press.
- Lin, You-Jing. 2017. How Grammar Encodes Space in Coptse Rgyalrong. In Carol Genetti & Kristine Hildebrandt (eds.) *Himalayan Linguistics: Special Issue on the Grammatical Encoding of Space* 59–83.
- Lin, You-Jing. 2020. *Units in cogtse rgyalrong discourse: prosody and grammar*. Beijing: Wan Juan Lou Books Co., Ltd.
- Ngag-dbang-tshuk-khrims Btsan-lha, Marielle Prins & Yasuhiko Nagano. 2009. *A Lexicon of the rGaylrong bTsanlha Dialect: rGyalrong-Tibetan-Chinese-English*. Osaka: National Museum of Osaka.
- Prins, Marielle. 2016. *A Grammar of rGyalrong, Jiāomùzú (Kyom-kyo) Dialects: A Web of Relations*. Tibetan Studies Library 16. Leiden: Brill.
- Zhang, Shuya. 2018. Stem alternations in the Brag-bar dialect of Situ Rgyalrong. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 41(2), 294–330.
- Zhang, Shuya. 2019. From proximate/obviative to number marking: Reanalysis of hierarchical indexation in Rgyalrong languages. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 47(1), 125–150.
- Zhang, Shuya. 2020. *Le rgyalrong situ de Brag-bar et sa contribution à la typologie de l'expression des relations spatiales: L'orientation et le mouvement associé*. Doctoral dissertation. Paris: Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales.
- Zhang, Shuya & Jingming Fan. 2020. Brag-bar kinship system in synchronic and diachronic perspectives. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 83(3), 479–503.

## Others

The 2018 film *Ala Changso* by Sontar Gyal includes some dialogue in Situ.  
[http://v.pptv.com/show/07q5Np4EdLIVk18.html?rcc\\_id=baiduchisou](http://v.pptv.com/show/07q5Np4EdLIVk18.html?rcc_id=baiduchisou)

Bibliography of Gyalrong Studies:

[https://www.academia.edu/12173850/Bibliography\\_of\\_Rgyalrong\\_studies](https://www.academia.edu/12173850/Bibliography_of_Rgyalrong_studies)

Gyalrong Languages Database (searchable by map; audio available under 200 sentences listing; in Chinese and English):

<https://htq.minpaku.ac.jp/databases/rGyalrong/>

A song in Southern rGyalrong by Danpa Wangmo:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7H26CB1rrt4&fbclid=IwAR2bMhTT18j1N15Bn8POE-AZ5A66obPO\\_rT8uvEVoAt\\_CNfLndeedyz3lw&app=desktop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7H26CB1rrt4&fbclid=IwAR2bMhTT18j1N15Bn8POE-AZ5A66obPO_rT8uvEVoAt_CNfLndeedyz3lw&app=desktop)

Rgyalronghua website: <https://rgyalronghua.com/>

### 3.2 Japhug (ཇཤུག 茶堡)

Japhug is spoken in the north-east of Mbarkhams/Maerkang 马尔康 county in three townships of Gdong-brgyad (龙尔甲), Gsar-rdzong (沙尔宗) and Da-tshang (大藏) in Aba Prefecture in Sichuan. The name Japhug (IPA: [tɛɾpʰu]) in Japhug refers to the area comprising Gsar-rdzong and Da-tshang, while that of Gdong-brgyad is known as IPA [sɿŋu] (Jacques 2004). However, speakers of Situ rGyalrong use this name to refer to the whole Japhug-speaking area.

There are around 10,000 speakers of Japhug, presenting some dialectal diversity, especially in the Gdong-brgyad area. Like all the other rGyalrongic languages, Japhug has undergone extensive lexical influence from Tibetan (Jacques 2004), yet its unique morphosyntax is much more diverse than Kham, Amdo, and Utsang Tibetan. It has person agreement and inverse marking.

As mentioned above, rGyalrongic languages typically have large consonant inventories; for instance, Japhug has a consonantal system with 49 phonemes shown in Figure 4.



p	t			c	k	q
p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>			c <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	q <sup>h</sup>
b	d			ʃ	g	
mb	nd			ɲʃ	ŋg	ŋg
	ts	tʂ	tɕ			
	ts <sup>h</sup>	tʂ <sup>h</sup>	tɕ <sup>h</sup>			
	dz	dʒ	dʒ			
	ndz	ndʒ	ndʒ			
m	n			ɲ	ŋ	
	s	ʂ	ɕ		x	χ
	z		ʒ		ɣ	ʁ
w	l	r		j		
	ɬ					

Figure 4. Japhug consonants

Japhug has at least 404 types of consonant clusters, including groups with up to three or even four consonants (Jacques 2016). Further, Japhug, unlike the other rGyalrongic languages, has lost tonal contrasts. Word stress is the only suprasegmental feature; it is almost always word-final.

Jacques (2021) is a comprehensive grammar of Japhug. Jacques (2008) is a grammar with glossary, Jacques & Chen (2010) is a text collection, and Jacques (2015a) is a dictionary. Jacques has also developed a Japhug dictionary app for mobile devices.

## Resources

Jacques, Guillaume. 2004. *Phonologie et morphologie du japhug (rGyalrong)*. Doctoral dissertation. Paris-Diderot/Paris VII.

向柏霖 (Jacques, Guillaume) 2008. 嘉绒语研究 (Volume 38). 北京: 民族出版社.

Jacques, Guillaume. 2010. The inverse in Japhug Rgyalrong. *Language and Linguistics* 11(1), 127–157.

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### 3.3 Tshobdun (ཚོ་བདུན། 草登)

Tshobdun (or Cǎodēng) is spoken mainly in Rngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in northwestern Sichuan, in several villages in Tshobdun Township, next to the Japhug-speaking area in Mbarkhams County (马尔康). The Tshobdun language is internally uniform with very little divergence.

Directional-marking is a prominent part of rGyalrongic languages and Tshobdun exhibits three distinct subsystems, each with two opposing terms: vertical (up-down), riverine (upriver-downriver), and solar (east-west) according to Sun & Bstan'dzin Blogros (2019). They explain that the riverine terms ‘upriver’ and ‘downriver’ in Tshobdun have extended their meanings by metaphorical use: ‘into’ (< upriver into a valley) versus ‘out of’ (< downriver out of a valley), as well as ‘obliquely upward (as if going upriver)’ versus ‘obliquely downward (as if going downriver)’. The solar terms ‘eastward’ and ‘westward’ have also taken extended meanings ‘toward center’ versus ‘away from center’.

Sun & Bstan'dzin Blogros (2019) also present the three categories of parts of speech used to describe an orientation: orientation nominals (e.g. *li?* ‘upriver’), adverbials (e.g. *lecho* ‘towards upriver’), and a full paradigm of verbal orientation prefixes, whose basic set is:

UP	DOWN	UPRIVER	DOWNRIVER	EASTWARD	WESTWARD
<i>tə-</i>	<i>nɛ-</i>	<i>lɛ-</i>	<i>tʰɛ-</i>	<i>kə-</i>	<i>nə-</i>

Most interestingly, the verb orientational prefixes are obligatory (as we will also see with Khroskyabs) when describing a motion event, e.g. when saying ‘I went to my uncle’s house’, speakers must use an orientation prefix to indicate the path of their movement. In contrast, English orientation prepositions such as ‘up’, ‘down’, or ‘across’ are optional.

Sources on this language include the text collection of Sun & Blogros (2019) and Sun (2000, 2003, 2006, 2007) on various aspects of its phonology and morphosyntax.

## Resources

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- Sun, Jackson. T.-S. & Bstan’dzin Blogros. 2019. *Tshobdun Rgyalrong Spoken Texts With a Grammatical Introduction*. Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica.

## Others

Narratives in Tshobdun:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvmNYmYHJow-r2sRpjuifeA>

Tshobdun word list:

[https://htq.minpaku.ac.jp/databases/rGyalrong/pdf/words/54caoa\\_e.pdf](https://htq.minpaku.ac.jp/databases/rGyalrong/pdf/words/54caoa_e.pdf)

### 3.4 Zbu (藏文: རུ་ཡུལ་ 日部)

Zbu is spoken in the northeast of Mbarkhams County, and in pockets in neighboring Ndzamthang County and Ngawa County. There is ongoing debate about whether Zbu is a variety of rGyalrong or a distinct language.

Zbu is also known as Showu and Sidaba. Sun (2004) groups the three townships of Caodeng (WT Tsho-bdun), Kangshan (WT Khang.sar), and Ribu (WT rDzong-'bur) as sites for the Sidaba language. The term Showu, a Caodeng exonym referring to this particular Sidaba rGyalrong variety, is also used by some scholars such as Jackson T.-S. Sun to avoid possible confusion with the speech forms confined within that township. There is no uniform self-denomination among speakers from the various places; it is often referred to as Zbu, after the name of the major township where a large percentage of its speakers currently reside. There are small outlier communities in some villages like Kehe and Rong'an townships in the southwestern corner of Aba County and, to the west, along the middle Duke river between Wuyi and Shili townships in Rangtang County. Therefore, the total population of Zbu speakers is not accurately known, however, research by Gong (2019) suggests that there are about 5,000 speakers. There are three distinct varieties of Zbu:

1. *Northern*: Kangshan, Ribu
2. *Central*: Rong'an, Kehe
3. *Southern*: Wuyi, Geletuo, Shili

The main sources are Sun (2004) and Gong (2014). Sporadic Zbu (Showu) forms appear in Lin (1983), and a phonemic summary and short wordlist can be found in Lin (1993). Sun (2000) contain some morphological data on several varieties of Zbu.

### Resources

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- Sun, Jackson T.-S. 孫天心. 2004. 草登嘉戎語的狀貌詞 [The ideophones in Caodeng rGyalrong] *民族語文* 5, 1–11.

### 3.5 Khroskyabs (ཁྲོས་སྐད་ལྷ་མོ། 绰斯甲)

Khroskyabs (IPA is [tʃhoscæv]) is spoken in Rnagba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, in Western Sichuan, China. There are approximately 10,000 speakers in Jinchuan, Rangtang, and Maerkang Counties. Based on shared phonological and morphological innovations, Lai (2017) claims there are two main branches: core Khroskyabs varieties, and Njorogs (业隆话). Core Khroskyabs consists of Phosul (Puxi 蒲西), Siyewu (斯跃武), Wobzi (Ere 俄热), 'Brongrdzong (Muerzong 木尔宗), and Guanyinqiao (观音桥). Njorogs is spoken in 'Jorogs (Yelong 业隆).

Khroskyabs is a geographic term for the territory of an old tribe of this region, and is comprehensible for both linguists and speakers. Eberhard et al. (2021) refer to the language as *Guanyinqiao* after a town in western Sichuan where one variety of the language is spoken. Huang (2003) calls it *Lavrung*, a term which is not familiar to Khroskyabs speakers

In this part of modern Sichuan Province, people who live in the valleys are farmers, and speak Khroskyabs or other languages, while people who live higher up in the mountains are nomadic yak herders, and mostly speak Amdo Tibetan. The language in the valley is called *rongskad* which signifies 'farmer's language', or 'valley language', as opposed to the 'nomadic language', Amdo Tibetan, spoken in the mountains.

There are three rather comprehensive linguistic descriptions of this language. Lai (2017) is a doctoral dissertation in French on the Wobzi variety of Khroskyabs. Huang (2003) is a grammar in Chinese of the Guanyin Qiao, while Yin (2007) is a grammar of the Yelong variety. Khroskyabs is known for its complex phonology and morphology, e.g. it has word-initial complex consonant clusters such as [ɣjnlzdɛ] 'to make someone buy something for the benefit of oneself'.

Lhawa & Lai (2017) reports on a sociolinguistic survey of language attitudes among Khroskyabs speakers, based on 88 responses to a Chinese-language online survey. These suggested a positive attitude overall.

However, the survey was followed up with face-to-face interviews with eight participants, conducted in Khroskyabs, and here the responses contradicted the on-line survey. All interviewees expressed negative attitudes towards Khroskyabs, especially in comparison to the dominant national language, Mandarin, and the local prestige language, Tibetan. They preferred Khroskyabs to be replaced by Amdo Tibetan, even though they agreed that Khroskyabs is a separate language. Further, most interviewees agreed that both Tibetan and Chinese speakers are more knowledgeable in general than Khroskyabs speakers, because the latter are literate. Speakers of Khroskyabs, therefore, are unenthusiastic about its maintenance.

## Resources

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- Lhawa, Yulha. & Yunfan Lai. 2017. Surveying language attitudes among Khroskyabs speakers in rural western Sichuan. Paper presented at 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation (ICLDC), University of Hawaii.  
<https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/41960> (accessed 2021-05-22)
- Yin, Weibin. 2007. 业隆拉坞戎语研究 [Yelong Lawurong Language]. Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe.

## Others

- A song in Khroskyabs:<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFzXC9M8R9U>
- Video of Yulha Lhawa:<sup>4</sup> [https://vimeo.com/231602170#\\_=\\_](https://vimeo.com/231602170#_=_)
- Smithsonian Folklife Magazine feature on Yulha Lhawa in a series on Tibetan women:  
<https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/rigzin-tibetan-khroskyabs-language>
- Audio archive by Yulha Lhawa:  
<http://www.oralliterature.org/collections/gyulha001.html>
- Videos on agricultural and nomadic tools:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5rogmLCON0> and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iu35DKUnlqg>

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<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, most songs in the Khroskyabs community were only sung in Tibetan.

<sup>4</sup> Created as part of a project to develop a script for Khroskyabs.

### 3.6 rTa'u (རྟཱུ 道孚)

The cluster of language communities variously referred to as Stau, Ergong, or Horpa in the literature are spoken over a large area from Ndzamthang County (Rangtang 壤塘县) in Rngaba Prefecture (Aba 阿坝州) to Rtau County (Dawu 道孚) and Brag mgo County (Luhuo 炉霍) in Dkarmdzes Prefecture (Ganzi 甘孜州), in Sichuan Province. The Tibetan linguist and rTa'u speaker, Sonam Lhundrop (2019), claims that the 'Horpa' name originally used in the linguistics literature is offensive and linked to negative attitudes in the community. It is unclear how many varieties belong to this group, but at least three must be distinguished if mutual intangibility is taken into consideration: (1) the language of Rtau County (道孚); (2) the Dgebshes language (Geshizha 格什扎) spoken in Rongbrag County (Danba 丹巴); and (3) the Stodsde language (Shangzhai 上寨) in Ndzamthang County.

Lhundrop (2019) claims that there are about 45,000 rTa'u speakers in both rTa'u and Brag mgo Counties. To this should be added speakers in Ndzamthang and Danba Counties. However, there is a considerable proportion of speakers within the total population who have now moved away from their original communities where rTa'u is used on daily basis; they may have shifted languages, so the exact number of speakers are very difficult to calculate.

Lhundrop (2019) provides a grammar of rTa'u, of which he is a native speaker. Gates (2021) is a grammar of different variety. Honkasalo (2019) is a grammatical description of Geshiza, a tongue closely related to rTa'u. Other sources are listed below.

### Resources

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- Genga, Wengmu & Hiroyuki Suzuki. 2008. 从共时差异看道孚语使用变化过程和语言活力 *Cóng gòngshíchāyì kàn Dào fú yǔ shíyòng biànhuà guòchéng hé yǔyán huólì* [A synchronic perspective on the language usage and vitality of Dào fú language]. 康定民族师范高等专科学校学报 *Kāngdìng Mínzú Shīfàn Gāoděngzhuānkē Xuéxiào Xuébào* [Journal of Kangding Nationalities Teachers' College] 1, 1–5.



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- Kong, Jiangping. 1991. Dàofú Zàngyǔ shuāngsèyīn shēngmùde shēngxué xīngzhì, [Acoustic features of initial fricatives clusters in the Tibetan dialect of Daofu language]. *Yǔyán Yánjiū* [Language Studies] 2, 122–133.
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- Wang, Stephen S. 1970-1971. Consonantal clusters of Tibetan loanwords in Stau. *Monumenta Serica* 29, 631–658.

## Others

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/640>

Videos by Sonam Lhundrop:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaP\\_meXc66hcv09-ucCRI3g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaP_meXc66hcv09-ucCRI3g)

Video (conversation between three young people):

<https://youtu.be/pzjJj6acLas>

Video (parts of the face): [https://youtu.be/VoSUN\\_zcN7A](https://youtu.be/VoSUN_zcN7A)

### 3.7 Nyagrong Minyag (ཉག་རོང་མི་ཉག།新龙木雅)

Nyagrong Minyag is an under-documented language spoken by approximately 1,000 ethnically Tibetan people in Xinlong (Nyagrong) County, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China. The name should not be confused with ‘Minyag (Muya)’, used to refer to a Qiangic language spoken in and around Kangding, Sichuan. Therefore, Nyagrong, the name of the county, is used to avoid this confusion. Culturally, this region is classified as part of the Kham section of the three greater Tibetan regions (Amdo, Kham, and Utsang).

Other names for this language include the Chinese translation Xinlong Muya, or Western Horpa, Ergong, as well as variations of ‘Horpa’ or ‘Rgyalrong’. By choosing the name ‘Nyagrong Minyag’, Van Way (2018) claims that priority was given to the community and their autonym, while avoiding other alternatives such as ‘Ergong’ because they are either meaningless to the speakers or rather pejorative. Community members’ involvement for naming their languages should be a fundamental principle in the context of language documentation and revitalization.

Many scholars have attested that Nyagrong Minyak is a rGyalrongic language due to its shared linguistic traits with others in that group (e.g., Sun 2000a,b; Jacques et al. 2017; Suzuki 2012). Van Way (2018) identifies at least two distinct dialect areas within the Nyagrong Minyag speech community, based on the townships of Nyagrong County. The Manqing (Manchen) dialect is spoken in the Nyagrong County administrative seat by the highway with constant contact with Tibetan speakers from other places, resulting in a large influence on the local tongue. The Bomei (Bangsmad) dialect is spoken further downriver around the Bomei township, and appears to be the slightly more conservative. A third dialect was proposed in Youlaxi (Yangslagshis) which Van Way thinks may be related to Queyu (Choyo, Zhaba; ISO 639-3: qvy), another language of the Qiangic group of Tibeto-Burman.

The first direct reports on the language spoken in Nyagrong (Xinlong) County come from Suzuki (2009, 2010, 2012). Bkrashis Bzangpo, a speaker

of Nyarong Minyag, has written about and documented aspects of the community's oral traditions, as well as providing ethnographic background for these traditions<sup>5</sup>. Van Way (2018) deals with the phonetics and phonology of Nyarong Minyag. Van Way & Bkrashis Bzangpo (2018) is an archived annotated collection of audio and video materials.

ELP lists the language as threatened. It is at the bottom of a prestige hierarchy which also includes varieties of Tibetan and Chinese. Van Way & Bkrashis Bzangpo (2018) report that speakers are generally shifting to Nyajskad, the local variety of Tibetan.

## Resources

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- Van Way, John. 2018. The Phonetics and Phonology of Nyarong Minyag, an Endangered Language of Western China. PhD dissertation. University of Hawaii at Manoa.

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<sup>5</sup> See Bkrashis Bzangpo's work in the links below.

## Others

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/8369>

John Van Way podcast on documentation experiences:

<https://www.chengduliving.com/endangered-languages-podcast/>

Bkra shis bzang po's writing and archived oral traditions:

<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/241080>

<http://www.oralliterature.org/collections/bkrashis001.html>

<http://www.oralliterature.org/collections/bkrashis002.html>

<http://www.oralliterature.org/collections/bkrashis003.html>

## 4. Other languages

This section discusses other languages spoken on the Tibetan plateau, including some mixed languages and others whose classification remains unclear.

### 4.1 Daohua (ཉག་ཁྱེ་ཁ་བསྟེ་སྐད་ཀྱི་ལྟུང་ལྟུང་ལྟུང་ 倒话)

Daohua (倒话), literally meaning 'reversed language', is a Chinese-Tibetan creole spoken in Yajiang County, Sichuan Province, China. It is also one of the newly documented languages spoken by Tibetans; the main source is Atsok (2004), with some description from Sun et al. (2007). Atsok has archived audio and video materials with the ELAR archive. The most recent estimate for the population of Daohua speakers, from the mid-1990s, is 2,685 people, belonging to 504 households in eight villages (Atsok 2001; Sun et al. 2007). All Daohua speakers also speak the local variety of Kham Tibetan.

The most recognizable feature of Daohua is that its lexicon is derived predominantly from the local variation of Mandarin, while its grammar is basically Tibetan. For example, Daohua exhibits SOV order, like Tibetan, while Mandarin is SVO. Based on Atsok (2001), among the 2,240 Daohua lexical items that he surveyed, more than 88% are Sinitic forms, while Tibetic forms constitute slightly more than 5%. Tibetan words are mostly found in specific domains, such as religion, ceremonies, customs, and local plants/animals. The remaining 6% of the lexicon is unique to Daohua.

Daohua is a distinct language and differs from the code-switching between Tibetan and Chinese that happens in many multilingual communities. Chen (2017) explores the socio-historical contexts of the development of Daohua over the past three centuries, and shows how such social contexts were not homogeneous through history. Chen (2017) proposes two development stages

for the emergence of the creole: (1) creole formation resembled natural second language acquisition; and (2) it later developed to monitored second language acquisition, separated by the early 1950s and the launch of nationwide mandatory Chinese language classes.

Glottolog lists the language as ‘not endangered’, though it is unclear on what basis. Given that it is not officially recognized in China, and therefore excluded from formal institutions like education, it is likely to be, at least, threatened.

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## 4.2. Ngandehua (མིང་གེ་གཞུང་བསྐྱོད་ལྷན་ཅེ་ལྷན་ 五屯话)

Ngandehua (五屯话), literally ‘our language,’ is a creole language, emerging from contact between Northwest Mandarin, Amdo Tibetan, and the Mongolic Bonan language. It is used in three villages in Rebgong (Tongren) County, in Qinghai Province, P.R. China. Sandman (2019) reports that Ngandehua is spoken by around 4,000 people in three villages: Upper Wutun, Lower Wutun, and Jiancangma villages (p.205). Although speakers refer to it as Ngandehua, it is more commonly known in the linguistics literature as Wutun or Wutunhua. Local Tibetan-speakers in Rebgong call it *Dor skad*, which is a hyponym including two distinct languages: Ngandehua and Manegacha (the Mongolic language known to linguists as Bonan, see below).

The region has been a borderland between China and Tibet since the Ming Dynasty, and the site of long-standing marriages among speakers of Sinitic, Tibetic, and Mongolic languages. This created the socio-historical conditions for the emergence of Ngandehua, as a mix of Sinitic, Tibetic, and Mongolic languages (Sandman 2019: 206). People are officially identified as ‘Monguor’ (*Turen* or *Tuzu*), but they identify themselves as Tibetans culturally, and they follow the Gelukpa (Yellow Hat School) of Tibetan

Buddhism. As Amdo Tibetan and the local variety of Mandarin are the lingua francas of this multiethnic region of Tibetans, Hui, Han Chinese, Monguor, and Mongols, most of villagers are bilingual in both. Tibetan and Chinese are also used for written communication.

Typologically, Sandman (2019) characterizes Ngandehua as a heavily Tibetanized variety of north-west Mandarin with some Mongolic features. This creole is similar to Daohua (see 4.1) in that the majority of the lexicon consists of the local Mandarin variety while the grammar is heavily Tibetan. Due to the influence of the non-tonal languages, Amdo Tibetan and Bonan, Ngandehua has no tones. In terms of word order, it can be characterized as verb-final, like Amdo Tibetan and Bonan. The influence from Bonan is somewhat marginal and mainly occurs in some aspects of morphosyntax (Sandman 2019). Further, the language has developed an agglutinative morphology, and lost most of its numeral classifiers. For more on Ngandehua phonology, see Janhunen et al. (2008), and Janhunen (2008).

Chen (1981, 1982, 1986) was the first linguist to work on this language. Since then, Ngandehua has received increasing attention in language contact studies (see e.g., Li 1983, 1984, 1986). Janhunen et al. (2008) first described the language systematically, and discussed phonological change; Janhunen (2009) investigated the possibility of using the Tibetan alphabet to write it.

Despite the small number of speakers, Ngandehua is still a vigorous language spoken by all generations in the community, and it is still learned as a first language by children. Yet, such a small language community is potentially vulnerable due to its size and lack of official recognition. Derogatory names such as Dordo or Dordoma are used to refer to Ngandehua speakers by other Tibetans in the region. ELP lists Ngandehua as ‘endangered (40% certain)’; Glottlog describes it as ‘shifting,’ which appears to be a better description. Sandman (2016: 13) observes that Ngandehua ‘some speakers are switching their language to Amdo Tibetan’. Tshe ring skyid (2015), a native speaker of Ngandehua, describes the language as ‘threatened’, highlighting the local support for Tibetan-medium education. Lack of official recognition and low social status is slowly forcing to Ngandehua speakers to shift to Tibetan and Mandarin.

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## Others

Parts of the face in Ngandehua (by Tseringji):  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_5Szbi8Hts](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_5Szbi8Hts)

Giulia Cabras talk about Ngandehua/Wutun:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDoluSHNO4E>

ELAR Ngandehua collection: <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI73784>

Endangered Language Project:  
<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/1311>

### 4.3 Manegacha (འདྲ་ཨན། 青海保安语)

Manegacha is known in the linguistics literature as Bonan (Bao'an, Bonang). It is a Mongolic language, comprised of two varieties: Western Bonan (Qinghai Bonan) and Eastern Bonan (Gansu Bonan). The two varieties are lexically, phonologically, and grammatically divergent yet there is great degree of mutually intelligibility (Wu 2003). Western Bonan is known by its speakers as Manegacha, which literally means 'our language/speech', and is the most well-studied. Speakers of Manegacha are predominantly Tibetan Buddhists, while speakers of Eastern Bonan are Muslims.

Manegacha is spoken by 8,000 people in four villages of Rebgong County in Qinghai Province (State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 2005). Members of these communities are officially classified as Tu (Monguor), along with speakers of Ngandehua, but they self-identify as Tibetans. The vast majority of Manegacha speakers also speak Amdo Tibetan, and their cultural traditions are very similar to those of local Tibetans.

The Four Stockaded Villages 四寨子 where Manegacha is spoken are: Lower Bonan town (*Bao'an Xiaozhuang* 保安下庄), Gaser (Tibetan *sKa gsar*), Gomar (*sGo dmar*), and Nyenthoq (*gNyan thog*). Local Tibetans use the same name to refer to Manegacha and Ngandehua, *Dor skad*, despite the fact that they are completely different languages. This reflects the fluidity and socially established conventions of local Tibetan conceptions on language naming.

Chen (1980) is one of the largest linguistic studies of Manegacha to date; this resulted in a glossary (Chen 1985), a volume of language materials (Chen 1986), and a diachronic comparative study (Chen & Chingeltei 1986). Wu (2003) is a summary based on those publications. Fried (2010) is a dissertation grammar, and Wu (2003) is a grammatical sketch; both cover all four locales where Manegacha is spoken.

The main language domain is limited to the home and in-group interactions between the four villages. All four Manegacha-speaking villages have their own primary schools where Tibetan is used as the medium of education. After primary school, children attend boarding schools where



either Tibetan or Chinese is used as the medium of education. Tibetan and Mandarin both have higher status than Manegacha, due primarily to the demographic dominance of Tibetans, and the cultural prestige of the language, plus the official status of Mandarin locally.

ELP lists Manegacha as ‘threatened (100% certain)’. Glottlog describes the language as ‘shifting’. Roche (2019) reports on a survey and interviews in the Manegacha-speaking communities, finding that reported competence in the language is declining across generations, and that intergenerational transmission is currently breaking down. Roche (2021) has also examined how this incipient language shift is driven by the confluence of state policies and local language ideologies regarding language purity.

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Endangered Languages Project (Qinghai Bonan):

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/8199>

Parts of the face in Manegacha: <https://youtu.be/W1TuSicE2RE>

Videos dubbed in Manegacha: [https://youtu.be/QjV6GxV\\_jM4](https://youtu.be/QjV6GxV_jM4),  
<https://youtu.be/6b6nTaYWZLM>

Luru ritual in Nyantok village (five videos): [https://youtu.be/o\\_AZ4rQXNmA](https://youtu.be/o_AZ4rQXNmA)

Wutu ritual in Nyantok village: <https://youtu.be/Ju4-KZpVII0>

Deity mediums in Tho skyA bod skor: <https://youtu.be/f2Jy9K6U98w>

### 4.4 Henan Oirat (ཉི་ནན་ཨོའི་རང་སྐད་ 河南瓦剌)

Henan Oirat is spoken in the grasslands of the northeast Tibetan Plateau, in Henan Mongol Autonomous County (MAC) of the Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP), in eastern Qinghai. This Mongol autonomous county is surrounded by Tibetan autonomous administrative units: Zeku County in the north, Tongde (in Xinghai TAP) and Maqin (in Guoluo TAP) counties in the west; Maqu County (Gannan TAP in Gansu Province) in the south; and Luqu and Xiahe (Gansu, Gannan) in the east. Henan County is also known as Rma lho, Sog rdzong or simply Sogpo, which means ‘Mongolian’ in Tibetan. The county and its population is frequently described as Tibetanized, culturally and linguistically.

Roche (2016) claims that the people of Henan were neither Tibetan nor Oirat Mongol, nor a hybrid of the two. Nor are they Tibetanized. Instead, they

belong to a completely unique cultural area. The identity of Henan Oirat speakers, therefore, has received a lot of academic attention. Despite the fact that they are formally identified by the state as Mongolian, in many important aspects, including self-identification, speakers of Henan Oirat affiliate themselves with Tibetans.

Henan Oirat is a severely endangered Mongolic language, spoken by only a few individuals in Henan Mongol Autonomous County. Linguistic description of Henan Oirat is exceptionally challenging. Jiayi (2006: 69-71) briefly mentions the variety in his book about the Deed Mongol dialect, and presents a few phonological features in which Henan Oirat differs from Deed Mongol. Balogh Mátyás is the only scholar to have undertaken linguistic fieldwork on Henan Oirat, and during his visit in 2012 he was told by a local Henan resident that there might only be around 50 people who speak the language on a daily basis. Most locals predominantly use Amdo Tibetan.

Henan Oirat shares a large number of linguistic features with the Deed Mongol dialect, despite its isolated location from the other groups of Deed Mongols. Related varieties of Oirat are spoken in Western Mongolia, in the Jungarian Basin, in the Kalmyk Republic of Russia, and in Qinghai. Some shared common characteristics listed by Balogh (2017) are: an asymmetrical set of eight vowels, and absence of central vowels and diphthongs. Henan Oirat is distinguished from other Oirat varieties by the heavy influence of Amdo Tibetan, such as changes in vowels and consonants triggered by this contact. Balogh (2017) also notes that Henan Oirat does not attach personal predicative markers to its verbs.

This language can be classified as either ‘critically endangered’ (Balogh 2017) or ‘moribund’ (Roche 2018). Endangerment is related to complexities as an area caught between Tibetan and Chinese borderlands. Roche (2016) examines the process (and discourse) of Tibetanization in Henan, including the banning of the language and promotion of Tibetan after 1958. Currently, another factor contributing to the endangerment of Henan Oirat is the promotion of Mongolian language and identity, usually based on models from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, or from Mongolia (see Balogh 2017). There is also rapid disappearance of oral culture, and shrinking domains of Henan Oirat. Thus, the documentation and revitalization of Henan Oirat is critically urgent.

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## Others

Video by Balogh Mátyás on Henan Oirat: <https://youtu.be/8NT5UkktNqw>

Endangered Languages Archive collection on Henan Oirat (by Attila Rákos): <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI194588>

## 4.5 Baima (བླ་མ་པོ་ལོ་མ་ལོ་ 白马话)

Baima is spoken by approximately 10,000 people in three counties in Sichuan Province (Pingwu 平武, Songpan 松潘, and Jiuzhaigou 九寨沟) and one county in Gansu Province (Wenxian 文县). Baima people call themselves [pe] (*bod*) and are referred to as Dwags-po in Tibetan. In the three Sichuan counties, Baima live close by other Tibetan communities, as well as Han Chinese groups, whereas in Gansu, Han Chinese are the Baima’s only neighbouring ethnic group. In much Chinese literature, the Baima people are said to be the descendants of the Di 氐 people that the area was historically populated by. Later, with the expansion of the Tibetan empire, the region experienced a great degree of language and culture assimilation.

There is controversy amongst linguists as to whether Baima is a variety of Tibetan or a distinct language, and there is also controversy regarding whether Baima speakers are Tibetan or not, or whether they want to be (Chirkova 2007, 2008b,c; Gesang & Gesang 2002; Sun 1980a,b, 2003; Zhang 1994a,b).

Upton (2000) provides an extensive annotated translation of important Tibetan literature on Baima, and an overview of the debate surrounding their identity.

Sun (2003a: 788n.29) argues that Baima is ‘merely an aberrant Tibetan dialect’. Other scholars propose that Baima is a Tibetic language distinct from Tibetan (H. Sun 1980a,b, 2003; H. Sun et al. 2007). Baima is considered a distinct language by its speakers, who for the most part identify themselves as Tibetans, and it is not mutually intelligible with the Tibetic varieties in its neighborhood.

Baima is spoken in a multi-ethnic area, at the border of the historical regions of Amdo and Khams. There are several other Tibetic varieties in the region, such as Zhongu (Sun 2003a), Chos-rje (or Dpal-skyid) (H. Sun 2003b), Thebo (or Thewo) (Lin 2014), Cone/Chone (Jacques 2014; Bendi Tso & Turin, 2019), and Gser-Rdo (J. Sun, 2021) two newly-described languages. Baima exhibits a number of linguistic features in its lexicon, morphology, and syntax that are uncommon for Tibetic varieties, despite the fact that its lexicon is predominantly of Tibetan etymology (Chirkova 2008). From the words of unclear etymology and its complex phonology, we can infer that the development of Baima has been conditioned by language contact, with continuous re-borrowing and reshaping of words from different languages. Further, Chirkova (2017) claims that the system of evidentiality, a prominent feature of Tibetic varieties, in Baima appears quite dissimilar in its lexical choices, etymological origins, and morphology.

The Endangered Language Project lists Baima as ‘threatened (100% certain)’. Roche (2018) describes it as ‘threatened: All or almost all children speak X, but if current conditions continue, intergenerational transmission is likely to be interrupted in the near future’. Glottolog describes the language as ‘shifting’.

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## Others

Baima sociolinguistic profile (Chirkova):

<http://www.katia-chirkova.info/research/projects/baima/>

Endangered Languages Project:

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5614>

## 4.6 Tibetan Sign Language (བོད་ཀྱི་ལག་བརྗེ་སྐད་ 藏族手语)

Tibetan Sign Language (TibSL), *bökyi lagda* (bod kyi lag brda), is a recently-established deaf sign language used in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). It is the first officially recognized sign language for a minority community in China. A formalization process of various indigenous signs, gestures, and other kinds of signed communication was begun in 2000 by a group of deaf and hard-of-hearing Tibetans from the Tibet Deaf Association (TDA). According to the 2000 government census, there were about 2,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing people living in Lhasa, which is approximately 1% of the city’s total population. Prior to the formalization project of TibSL, most Tibetan deaf people lived and worked around hearing communities, with rare opportunities for communication with other deaf people. Therefore, most deaf people rarely had a good level of sign language, or there was quite a degree of diversity of signing practices.

Xinhua (2004) reported that ‘Tibetan dactylogy’ had over 700 popular signs. TibSL was developed by four members of a local deaf club to create a standardized language, based primarily on the existing sign *lingua franca* of Lhasa (Hofer 2017). The project produced several visual dictionaries, DVD volumes, and a Tibetan finger-spelling alphabet based on the shape of Tibetan written letters. Materials were distributed by the TDA for free (TDA 2005,



2011), and three volumes of the *Tibetan Sign Language Book* were published. TibSL is also used in classrooms on Saturdays as an extracurricular activity, and Hofer (2016) says the goal is to expose deaf students to TibSL as well as to improve their literacy in written Tibetan.

The Tibet Deaf Association and China Deaf Association launched a collaborative effort that produced a document outlining a comprehensive TibSL/Chinese Sign Language curriculum aimed at improving the literacy of deaf Tibetan teenagers and adults in both written Tibetan and Chinese (TDA 2010). Drawing on short anthropological fieldwork in 2007, Hofer (2017) presents a linguistic vitality and endangerment assessment of TibSL using the nine component Unesco model; this gives a score of 1 to 3 of a possible total of nine, indicating that the language is either ‘definitely, severely, or critically endangered’. Some Tibetan signers have started mixing TibSL and Chinese Sign Language, which Hofer (2016) describes as ‘neither-goat-nor-sheep sign’ (in Tibetan *ra-ma-luk lak-da*), a common Tibetan term used to describe something that is ‘neither this nor that’. This phrase often has a derogatory meaning of ‘impurity’. To date there has been no in-depth linguistic or socio-linguistic study of TibSL.

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## Others

Tibetan Sign Language videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyZHeSBzqiU>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=394923708304450>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kulvza7dEqo&list=PLPXu\\_Kfd0fdEfoBYoCgEU\\_6xRSwYrWRX3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kulvza7dEqo&list=PLPXu_Kfd0fdEfoBYoCgEU_6xRSwYrWRX3)

## 4.7. Recently recognised languages

This section discusses other languages recently identified in the Chamdo region of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) by Hiroyuki Suzuki and colleagues. The languages were recorded as one of three ‘special lects of Tibetan’ in Xizang (2005). Tashi Nyima & Suzuki (2019) is the first comprehensive linguistic introduction to these non-Tibetic Tibeto-Burman languages in Chamdo, while Suzuki et al. (2018) provide word lists of the first three. Suzuki et al. (2018) think these languages are genetically closer to Qiangic or rGyalrongic than to Bodish Tibetan. This section builds on the recent reports.

## Resources

- Suzuki, Hiroyuki, Tsering Samdrup & Sonam Wangmo. 2018. Contrastive word list of three non-Tibetic languages of Chamdo: Lamo, Larong sMar, and Drag-yab sMar. *Kyoto University Linguistic Research* 37, 79–104.
- Tashi Nyima & Hiroyuki Suzuki. 2019. Newly recognised languages in Chamdo: Geography, culture, history, and language. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 42(1), 38–82.
- Xizang Changdu Diqu Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui. 2005. *Changdu Diquzhi*. Beijing: Fangzhi Chubanshe.

### 4.7.1 Lamo (ལམོ་拉莱)

Lamo is spoken by around 6,500–7,000 people in Dongba and Zhonglinka townships, along the Nujiang River, in mDzo sgang County, Chamdo Municipality, Tibetan Autonomous Region. Local Khams Tibetan speakers call Lamo 'Bo skad. There are two dialects: Dongba Lamo, and Zhonglinka Lamei; mutual intelligibility is relatively low between the two.

A wordlist of Lamo is provided by Suzuki et al. (2018); a sketch of grammatical features is provided in Suzuki & Tashi Nyima (2021); and a wordlist and basic sentence examples of Lamei is in Suzuki et al. (2021). Dongba Lamo was also selected as a target language of *China's Language Resource Protection Project*. The recorded data is expected to be available soon.

### Resources

Suzuki, Hiroyuki & Tashi Nyima. 2021. Evidential system of copulative and existential verbs in Lamo. In Yasuhiko Nagano & Takumi Ikeda (eds.) *Grammatical phenomena of Sino-Tibetan languages 4: Link languages and archetypes in Tibeto-Burman*, 259–287. Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University.

Suzuki, Hiroyuki, Sonam Wangmo & Tsering Samdrup. 2021. Lamei, another dialect of Lamo (mDzogong, TAR): Vocabulary and sentence structure. In Yasuhiko Nagano & Takumi Ikeda (eds.) *Grammatical phenomena of Sino-Tibetan languages 4: Link languages and archetypes in Tibeto-Burman*, 25–69. Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University.

### 4.7.2 Larong sMar (ལྷོ་རྩེ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་拉绒玛)

Larong sMar has 15,000 speakers living along the Lancangjiang River within mDzo sgang and sMar khams counties, Chamdo Municipality. The language name is derived from the toponym Larong and the autonym sMar, to distinguish it from another sMar language called Drag-yab sMar, spoken in an adjacent area (see 4.7.3). Larong denotes a farming area (*rong*) of Zla chu (Lancangjiang). A wordlist of Larong sMar is provided by Suzuki et al. (2018). Zhao (2018, 2019) is an overview of phonology, grammar, and lexicon. Two dialect areas have been identified, northern and southern, however, the language awaits rigorous study.

## Resources

Zhao, Haoliang. 2018. A brief introduction to Zlarong, a newly recognized language in Mdzo sgang, TAR. *Proceedings of the 51st International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics*, 1053–1060.

Zhao, Haoliang. 2019. Xinfaxian yuyan Larongyu chutan – a Yinxi, cihui, xingtai yu puxi diwei. MA thesis. Zhongshan Daxue.

### 4.7.3 Drag-yab sMar (བླ་གཡེ་བ་སྐད་ལྟོགས། 察雅玛)

Drag-yab sMar has around 20,000 speakers in the central and southern areas of Drag-yab County, Chamdo Municipality. The language name is derived from the toponym Drag-yab and the autonym sMar, to distinguish it from neighbouring Larong sMar (see 4.7.2). It can be divided into sub-dialects, such as Palri, Zisang, Lhagsam, Shoglhung, Khuda, Tsothar, Dempu, Lashi, and Lhasong (Tashi Nyima & Suzuki 2019: 49), however rigorous study is necessary. The only sources are wordlists in Suzuki et al. (2018, 2021).

## Resources

dKon-mchog rGyal-mtshan. 2018. Khams Brag-g.yab sMar-skad-la thog-mar dpyad-pa. MA thesis. Xizang Daxue.

Suzuki, Hiroyuki, Tsering Samdrup & Sonam Wangmo. 2021. Taya-Ma [Drag-yab sMar] go Bae [mBengo] hoogen no goi siryoo (Niti-ei taisyoo). *Journal of Kijutsuken* 13, 189–213.

### 4.7.4 gSerkhu (གསེར་ཁུ། 色库)

gSerkhu is spoken by around 400 people in the gSerkhu Valley of Shang Chayu Town, rDza yul County, Nying khri Municipality. The language name is derived from a Tibetan word *gser khur* ‘(those who carry) sacks of gold’. According to local narratives, gSerkhu speakers migrated from a mDzo sgang-rDza yul county border zone to their current home with sacks of gold.

A few lexical forms are reported by Tashi Nyima & Suzuki (2019), according to whom gSerkhu has a relationship with Lamo. gSerkhu was selected as a target language of *China’s Language Resource Protection Project*. The recorded data is expected to be available soon.

### 4.7.5 Basum (བླ་གཡེ་བ་སྐད་ལྟོགས། 巴松)

Basum, also known as Ba-ke, is spoken by around 3,000 people in two townships Zhokha (Xueka) and mTshomgo (Cuogao) of Kong po rGya mda’

County, Nying khri Municipality. The language name is derived from a toponym Brag gsum. Local people use Ba-ke to distinguish the language name from the toponym, however, *ke* means ‘language’ and the full name of the toponym can be used in an academic context. They also call their language *mKha’ ’gro brDa skad* ‘the ḍākini’s language’.

Chinese scholars such as Qu et al. (1989) and Qu & Jin (2016) consider Basum as a vernacular of the dBus-gTsang dialects of Tibetan; however, Basum’s lexical substratum shows its non-Tibetic nature, according to Tournadre & Suzuki (2021). Nevertheless, only the data provided by Qu & Jin (2016) are systematic and available for research use.

## Resources

- Qu, Aitang, dKon-mchog rGya-mtsho, bCo-linga & sKal-bzang Ye-shes. 1989. Weizang fanyan de xin tuyu: ji zuijin faxian de Basong hua [New dialect of dBus-gTsang: Basum, a recently recognised variety]. *Minzu yuwen* 3, 39–61.
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- Tournadre, Nicolas & Hiroyuki Suzuki. 2021. *The Tibetic languages: An introduction to the family of languages derived from Old Tibetan*. With the collaboration of Xavier Becker and Alain Brucelle for cartography. Paris: LACITO Publications.