

Cultural Evolution

1. Description

- 1.1 Horpa, from Jiapongic language group of Tibeto-Burman Qiangic languages, is spoken by Ergong people of western China. Ergong are also known as Daofuhua, Bopa, Hor, Horpa, Hor-ke, Taofu, Pawang, Gesitsa, Bawang, or Rong-Ke. There are many variations on spelling of this culture, as well. {1}
- 1.2 ISO code: ero, 639-3 {1}
- 1.3 Ergong live within the Banzi Prefecture; while in neighboring Aba Prefecture the Ergong are dispersed in Jinchuan and Zamtang counties. Located in western China, in Garze Autonomous Prefecture and in Nagawa Autonomous Prefecture, in the western and northern Sichuan province. Latitude 19° 12'18" N Longitude 109° 26' 31" E. {2}
- 1.4 Part of the Qiang race of peoples, the Ergong people are directly tied to Tibet, as their habitat is what was formerly the Tibetan province of Kham. Historically, as the Qiang moved west, they became the minority among Tibetans, and the Ergong are one of the many Qiang people that are slowly being absorbed by the Tibetan culture. Over 99% of Ergong adhere to Tibetan Buddhism, and the city of Daofu (Dauwa) has the largest population of Ergong people, followed by Danba, Lühou, and Xinlong. Daofu is a religious center for the Ergong and other Tibetan Buddhist peoples, and has large Buddhist temples for rituals. Because of the unsettled conditions of the Himalayan Mountains, Ergong people have sporadic populations along the Himalayas, and it makes each family clan a small society of its own. Each family has its own unique customs, with some Ergong families permanently settled, while others move with the weather. Ergong people are nomadic, however, in recent history, as pressure is placed upon them to settle, they have become semi-nomadic, living in white-roofed huts along the Himalayan fronts. The white roofs, legend says, helped the Ergong see where their homes from a distance when they were out hunting, gathering and herding. {3}, {4}, {5}
- 1.5 As stated in 1.4, Ergong are heavily influenced by Tibetan culture, and outside influence is very limited. In the early twentieth century, two French Catholics built a Christian school in Daofu. While they had success in Daofu converting 70% of Chinese in Daofu to Christianity, few Tibetans converted. After the Communist government took power, the Frenchmen were kicked out of the country, and no new believers existed in Daofu. The school was converted to a dormitory, and after more time, a Tibetan Buddhist temple. That temple still stands today. {3}, {5}
- 1.6 Ergong are nomadic or semi-nomadic. The winters are bitter in Sichuan, but in May, warm spring-like weather allows for wild grass and flowers to blanket the region. Many Ergong will follow temperate weather, living as pastoralists, herding mountain animals, like pigs, chickens, sheep, and yak, for food. Much of the region that Ergong live in is protected by Chinese government as a sensitive ecologic area, and guidelines have been put forward to prevent further deforestation and eroding of natural habitat. {7}, {8}
- 1.7 Ergong population is approximately 74,500 people, with Daofu holding a little less than a third of that population. Each family is limited to three children per family, as per China's birth control

policy for Garze. Because of strict crackdown on childbirth, most immediate families are between four and seven members, minus some extended family. The majority of population of Ergong lives within a 350 mile radius. It used to take days to travel between each Ergong-populated settlement, but with the paving of roads, access is much easier today. {3}, {9}

2. Economy

2.1 Several subgroups of Tibetans, who live in the high mountains of Sichuan, rely heavily on buckwheat or barley, eating thick barley or maize cakes as a carbohydrate source. They also eat chambra, stir-fried barley. While some Tibetan subcultures avoid dairy, Ergong rely heavily on goat and yak milk as a source of nutrition. {3}, {4},{10}

2.2 Ergong rely on their yak to provide their protein intake. Yaks are a very important part of Horpa society. {4}, {10}

2.3 Traditionally, swords were used by Tibetan Buddhists, along with leather armor, gold and silver helmets and shields. Guns were intro western China in the mid sixteenth century, and until early twentieth century, muskets were found regularly within the region.{11}

2.4 Outside of nomadic Tibetan's tents, they have hanging racks full of dried yak meat. {4}

2.5

2.6 Because Ergong live in extended families, men are the heads of household, but they mostly follow a patrilineal land-inheritance, but follow a matrilineal line of care, because historically, walking marriages were common. Today, that practice is rare. {12}

2.7

2.8 Tibetans and Tibetan cultural minorities adhere to the Buddhist beliefs of sharing personal wealth.{13}

2.9 While it is a Buddhist belief that killing an animal for consumption is wrong, most of the peoples in western China, specifically in the Garze Autonomous Prefecture and the Ngawa Autonomous Prefecture, eat meat because of the harsh conditions of the Himalayans, and vegetation is not always available. There is a taboo on eating dog or horse meat, and some don't eat fish—although, this is more because of legend than it is as a religious practice.{14}, {15}

2.10 While no specific information was available for Ergong watercraft, coracles are found in Tibet and in western China. {16}, {17}

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height: 5'1" {18}

3.2 Mean adult weight: 126 pounds {18}

4. Life, History, Mating, Marriage

4.1 In some instances, girls celebrate their sixteenth birthday, and shortly afterwards, finds a husband. No specific information was found on Ergong culture, but in nomadic Tibetan Buddhist culture, this is common. In China, it is illegal for a man to marry before the age of 20, and a woman to marry before the age of 18. However, Chinese officials make exceptions for its Tibetan minorities. Many Tibetans, however, don't marry until they are in their mid-20s. {19}, {20}, {29}

4.2

4.3 Family size tops out at seven, typically. Chinese officials only have an education plan for nomadic cultures in their autonomous prefectures. In Garze, three is the limit on children, and in Ngawa,

two children is the limit. However, if more children are birthed, officials do not punish them. Some families within Garze and Ngawa Autonomous Prefectures have large families for farming purposes. {21}, {22}, {23}

4.4

4.5 Today, it is normal for Tibetans and Tibetan subcultures to marry when they are in their mid-20s. {20}

4.6 Because of cultural and religious aspects on polyandry and submissiveness, the divorce rate within Tibetan subcultures are rare. Divorces in Tibetan Buddhist cultures are low because of their marriage customs, and kinship. In monogamous marriages, divorce is less than 10%. Further, in polyandrous marriages, it is very uncommon to divorce. In polyandrous marriages in Tibet and western China, when a woman marries a man, she is also taking in the brothers of her husband. When her husband dies, and she has no children, she “divorces” her dead husband to free herself from her late husband’s brothers. She can then go out and seek a new home. This is not mandatory. If the woman has children, she does not divorce, cares for her late husband’s brothers and children, and become head of household. If a couple cannot agree, they seek counseling, and if they still can’t agree, they “break a stick” and divorce. This is rare, and in these circumstances, the children stay with their mother until they are seven or eight, then they go to live with their father, and inherit his land. {12}, {24}

4.7 Because of Chinese government takeover, polyandry in the Himalayan Mountains are much less common that it historically was. Historically, Tibetans were one of the largest fraternal polyandry societies known. This benefited those who lived in the mountainous regions because the men could work the land, and the women could tend to the home. There is no exact percentage known of how many polyandrous marriages exist in the Himalayan peoples, but it is likely very low, because of Chinese takeover in the 1960s. {25}, {26}

4.8 “Bride wealth is when gifts given to the girl's parents by the future husband or his family, or property the man brings when a marriage is introduced. Customarily, tents should be provided by the man's family, but the woman's parents are also willing to send a tent as art of the dowry if the groom is too poor to afford it. Marital payments often include wool tents, sheepskin coats and wool coats ” {27}, {28}

4.9 Children inherit land and assets from their father, even though, family is matrilineal. {12}

4.10

4.11

4.12 The vast majority of Tibetans and Tibetan subcultures are endogamous. Each person married within their own class. This is a common theme among Tibetan Buddhists. {30}

4.13 Fathers play a part within a child’s role among the peoples of the Chinese Himalayans. Those children inevitably inherit their father’s land. {12}

4.14

4.15

4.16

4.17 Cross-cousin marriages are accepted, but are not the norm for Tibetan culture and its subcultures. {30}

4.16

4.19

4.20

4.21 In some instances of polyandry, Horpa and other Tibetan subcultures have a woman, her husband, and her husband’s brothers, with whom she does not have sex with. “The PRI attributes this lower proportion of married females to the high ratio of spontaneous abortions, high maternal mortality, and high infant and child mortality. Since many young and adult Tibetans become lamas who cannot marry, Buddhism contributes to the high rate of unmarried in Tibet. In 1951, 9.5% (110,000) of

the population were lamas. Women can have 1 husband. Tibet has a high mean age at 1st marriage (24.6 years for males and 23.1 years for females). It also has a low sex ratio (97.84, 1982) and age specific sex ratios compared with other major ethnic groups in China. The sex ratio is growing, however (100.13, 1990).”{20}

4.22

4.23

4.24

4.25 Horpa and other Tibetan subcultures are matrilineal. Family is traced from mother. However, land is inherited by father, and there have been some instances of walking marriages, which were the traditional form of marriage historically. {12}, {31}

4.26

4.27 “Before the wedding, another auspicious day will be chosen for the wedding ceremony by the groom's family. On previous day of wedding ceremony, the groom's side sent a suit of beautiful clothing and a hair ornament wrapped by silk to the bride for wearing. On wedding day, the groom's side will find a man with good status to take a group of people and colorful arrows decorated with mirrors, jades and jewels, along with a finely decorated horse of pregnancy whose color match the bride's birth pet to bride's house. The bride's side will offer Qiema as a ritual of farewell before the groom's side arrives. As greeting bride party arrives, a colorful arrow will be plugged on the bride's back and a jade will be put upon her head to show bride now belongs to the bridegroom's side. A bride maid from the bride's side is sent to escort her in the greeting party. When bride leaves, someone of the bride's family will hold a colorful arrow in one hand and a mutton leg in another, standing in any high place and shout out "don't take away fortune of the family" until the bride's greeting party is out of sight. The convoy is usually led by the astrologist, who wears a white gown. He rides on a white horse and holds a picture of the Nine Courts and Eight Diagrams. Following behind are the welcoming group, the bride, accompanied by a bride maid on her side, and finally members of the groom at the end. The whole team sings loudly all the way while the bride weeps due to her separation from her family. On the way, the family members of bridegroom are waiting beside the road and toast to the greeting party for three times. If coming across patients carried, people who are dumping garbage or carrying empty basket, the greeting party deems it as bad omens. If so, monks should be invited to chant scriptures for removing ill fortune after wedding days. All greeting members are chanting XieQin in the proceed while bride is crying. Before the arrival of the bride, the groom would have the gate decorated and a cushion of barleys laid in front of his house. The cushion is covered with a piece of colorful embroidered cloth, on the top of which are some kernels in the shape of the propitious swastika. His family members welcome the bride with chang and chemar (a propitious funneled box with barleys and Tsambas separately put inside and butter sculptures stuck onto). Upon arrival at the groom's house, the bride has to tramp on the road with barleys and tea leaves, symbolizing the harvest she is bringing into the family. After accepting the Khatag presented by the groom, she enters the house. The bride and groom will then sit together in the living room to receive good wishes, Khatag and other gifts from guests. Then the newly wed are sent to their room, where lamas recite sutras to bless them. The family holds a banquet for the guests. Friends and relatives will sing and dance to celebrate. During the night, they will play funny games to tease the couple. For some rich families, the wedding ceremony in Tibet could last as long as thirty days, but generally it lasts three days or two days.”{32}

4.28

4.29

4.30 Marriages within Tibetan subcultures are typically arranged. Because of the Tibetan Buddhist beliefs of love in marriage, a woman dresses in vibrant clothing to show males she is open for suitors. After the future bride finds her partner, her parents arrange the marriage with the parents of the male.

A dowry is expected, in most cases in Tibetan society. {32}, {33}

4.31

Warfare/Homicide

4.14

4.15 “Most people think of Tibetans as kind and peaceful. While that is true for many regions of Tibet, it isn't necessarily true of the Tibetans from Kham. Kham Tibetans have long been known as a violent group of bandits terrorizing the Tibetan Plateau on horseback. In his book "Seven Years in Tibet" Heinrich Harrer described Kham Tibetans as forcing their way into nomad tents stealing anything of value. He also reported that they would sometimes kill pilgrims, monks and nuns. Even today, it is rare to find a Kham man without a large knife (more like a sword) on his side.” {34}

4.16 Recently, there have been regular incidences of self-immolation by Tibetans and Tibetan subcultures in western China, specifically in Sichuan Providence. These immolations are mostly monks, nuns or former monks or nuns. This is the main cause of death outside health issues. {35}, {36}, {37}

4.17 Because of their close relationship with Tibetan Buddhism, Ergong monks have close ties to those Tibetan monks who worship in the Temples in Garze and Ngawa prefectures. Other monks are of other Tibetan subcultures, as well. {7}, {13}

4.18

5. Socio-Political Organization and Interaction

5.1 Because Horpa are semi-nomadic, they typically live in yak-wool tents as a family unit, and meet in the small villages in western Sichuan. {38}

5.2 Ergong and other Tibetan subcultures have historically taken days to travel between villages by foot or by donkey (or even in some pictures, yaks), working their way through the hostile terrain of high mountains. However, today, with paved streets, it is much easier to travel. While cars can be found in the region, it is pretty rare. Most travel by donkey, goat, yak or horse. {3}, {7}

5.3

5.4 After a man and woman marry, the woman goes to live with her husband. After six months of marriage, she will return to visit her family. {39}

5.5

5.6

5.7

5.8 “Tibetan nomads live either in black yak wool tents or in white canvas tents. Their lives are simple and their possessions are few. Inside the tent, there will be a stove in the center. There are no trees in the nomadic regions of Tibet so the main fuel used is dried yak dung. Each morning, the women go and spread yak dung out to be dried. This is one of the most important chores since all the cooking and boiling of water as well as heating the tent depends on the use of dried yak dung. The nomadic regions of Tibet are extremely cold and can often times have snow even in the summer. Outside the tent there is usually a huge long wall of dried yak dung. Often times, Tibetan Buddhist symbols are made in the dried yak dung. Inside the tent there is also a small pile of dried yak dung. Tibetan nomads sleep on thin sleeping mats and use quilts as well as sheep and yak skins to keep warm at night. In the back center of nomad tents, there is usually a small alter with Buddhist scripture, incense, a few pictures of well-known Rinpoche's and a few butter candles. Nomads can be heard chanting mantra's throughout the day.” {38}

5.9

5.10 “Tibetan nomads sleep on thin sleeping mats and use quilts as well as sheep and yak skins to keep warm at night.” {38}

5.11

5.12

6. Ritual/ Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.1 Nomads can be heard chanting mantras throughout the day, and Horpa monks spend as much time as possible training and worshipping. {38}

6.2 *Lancea tibetica* (spa yag rtsa ba) is a small plant with impressive purple flowers which grows in the high mountains at an elevation up to 5000m. It is distributed in Gansu, Tibet, Qinghai, Sichuan, Xizang, and Yunnan of China and Bhutan, India (in the Himalaya), Mongolia and Sikkim. In Ladakh pieces of the roots were roasted and smoked with tobacco because of its exhilarating effect. It is also consumed in milk. It is considered as stimulating. The flowers, leaves and fruit are used in Tibetan medicine, they are said to have a sweet and bitter taste with a cooling potency (also in my experiences the taste of the leaves is very mild and cooling). They are used in the treatment of pulmonary disorders and retention of the menses, whilst the leaves are used for healing wounds. It is also used for treatment of leukemia, heart disease, influenza, pneumonia and asthma. {40} Fresh Sichuanese pepper (花椒). This is the way Tibetans sometimes try to revive the body and mind at high altitude. {41}

6.3 "Presenting a Hada (a white woven scarf which symbolizes purity and loyalty) is a traditional practice in Tibet to show respect and hospitality. In some areas of Tibet, when a daughter reaches the age of 16, a coming of age ceremony/party is held on the second day of the Tibetan New Year. On this day, parents prepare beautiful clothes and various ornaments for their newly grown-up girl. After the rite of passage, there are some noticeable changes about the young woman. Her hairstyle, clothing, ornaments, and name will be changed to show her newly acquired womanhood. Braiding their hair into more than ten braids, girls are particularly subject to customs relating to headgear which is called "heavenly head" ("wearing the head of the sky"). It is an initiation rite practiced in all Tibetan-inhabited areas, but its meaning varies from place to place. It is as grand as a marriage ceremony and its purpose is to show that the girl is grown up and is available for marriage. After the Tibetan girl's rite of passage, she is eligible for marriage. One of the most important and interesting parts of a Tibetan's life is the wedding ceremony. During the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom will kneel down in front of the groom's parents and a photo of the Buddha while monks chant. The bride will then take her ring finger and flick milk tea three times to salute heaven, earth, and the Buddha. The wedding feast will then begin. Sometimes the groom and the bride are nearly buried beneath the large number of Hadas draped across their necks. When the ceremony is over, a party is held, at which everyone sings and dances till dawn. The wedding ceremony can be as short as one day, but frequently can be as long as ten. During the celebrations, the host will prepare sumptuous food, tea and wine for the guests, who will enjoy themselves to their hearts content.

The most common burial in Tibet is the Celestial Burial or Sky Burial. It is the show of Tibetans' respect for nature and an understanding of life. Sky Burial is how commoners have been buried for centuries. A sky burial is not considered suitable for children who are less than 18, pregnant women, or those who have died of infectious disease or accident. The ritual of sky burial usually begins before dawn. The corpse is offered to the vultures which are regarded as the "Sky Dancer", and they are believed to take the soul into the heavens, which is understood to be a windy place where souls await reincarnation into their next lives. This mystical tradition arouses curiosity among those who are not Tibetan. However, only the funeral party is allowed present at the ritual, and they all strongly object to visits by the merely curious." {19}

6.4

6.5 Because the Horpa and other Tibetan subgroups adhere to Tibetan Buddhism, many use the Tibetan Creation Myth. {43} Oxford Dictionary of Asian Mythology: In Tibetan mythology there is a distinction between the mythology of the indigenous Bön (see Bön) religion and that of the later

Buddhism (see Tibetan Buddhism), although the two sometimes flow together. The myths of the Bön religion are almost always associated with origins, beginning with 'O-lde spu-rgyal, said to have been sent to rule humans by the gods above. Origin myths were told in order to make any ritual effective. If a person was sick, the curing ceremony involved a recitation of origins or Creation. Marriage ceremonies included the retelling of the first marriage—that between the goddess who was daughter of the god of the world and a human man, Ling-dkar. Arguing with the reluctant god for his daughter's hand, the man suggests that the union of man and the gods should mean worship for the gods and protection for humans. Upon leaving Heaven, the goddess is given a third of her parents' inheritance (her brother, as a male, receives two thirds). Her father gives her the masculine arrow and her mother gives her the feminine spindle. In actual Bön wedding ceremonies each action is tied to this origin myth. For instance, the priest presents the groom with a piece of gold and the bride with a piece of turquoise, and then the priest and the couple sing the story of the arrow and the spindle. They sing of how at the beginning of time the union of two immortals resulted in three eggs. From a golden one came a golden male “arrow of life” with turquoise feathers. From a turquoise egg came a turquoise arrow of the female with golden feathers. From a white egg came a golden spindle, and from the sky and the ocean mist came Bön. A rich mythology surrounds both the Bön and Buddhist religions (see Avalokiteśvara, Bardo Todrol, Bodhisattva, Gesar Saga, Mandala, Mountain Mythology, Song-sen-gam-po) and, as has been noted, the two religions often blend together in certain myths. One such myth sees the Tibetans as descendants of a monkey (see Monkey) and an ogress. The monkey was sent to Tibet by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. There, as he meditates on the virtues of the bodhisattva, he is confronted by an ogress who takes the form of a woman and asks him to marry her. If he refuses, she will unite with a demon and produce a race of life destroying demons. The monkey returns to Avalokiteśvara and asks for advice. The bodhisattva, with the assent of the goddess Tārā (see Tārā), releases his disciple from his vows of chastity and orders him to marry the ogress, prophesizing the coming of Buddhism to Tibet. The union of Monkey and the ogress results eventually in a tribe of monkeys who then become so populous that they starve, until Avalokiteśvara, from the sacred Mount Meru (see Meru) scatters grains in the world of the monkeys, thus providing crops. Gradually the monkeys lose their tails, and learn to walk upright, to talk, and to wear clothes. Their descendants are the Tibetans. In some versions of this myth, the first monkey's name is Ha-lu-ma-da, which could well be related to the Indian monkey god Hanumān (see Hanumān). In any case, the Monkey is sometimes associated with Avalokiteśvara and worshipped as a bodhisattva. There is also a Buddhist tradition that Gautama Buddha (see Gautama Buddha) had been a monkey in one of his former lives. {44}

6.6 “The Ergong live in distinctive white, flat-roofed houses, supported with red timber. Inside their homes are elaborate paintings depicting Buddhist scenes. These paintings are usually done by a family member and sometimes take many months to complete.” {7}

6.7

6.8 “In the early twentieth century, two French Catholics built a Christian school in Daofu. While they had success in Daofu converting 70% of Chinese in Daofu to Christianity, few Tibetans converted. After the Communist government took power, the Frenchmen were kicked out of the country, and no new believers existed in Daofu. The school was converted to a dormitory, and after more time, a Tibetan Buddhist temple.” {7}

6.9

6.10 Tibetan Buddhists believe very strongly that life is meant to learn spiritual strength for the afterlife travel and stages, called Bardos. {45}

6.11

6.12

6.13 “Buddhism became a major presence in Tibet towards the end of the 8th century CE. It was brought from India at the invitation of the Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen, who invited two Buddhist

masters to Tibet and had important Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan. First to come was Shantarakshita, abbot of Nalanda in India, who built the first monastery in Tibet. He was followed by Padmasambhava, who came to use his wisdom and power to overcome "spiritual" forces that were stopping work on the new monastery. Today, Chinese Buddhists are between 660 million-1 billion people, which is over half of China's population. {46}

7. Adornment

- 7.1
- 7.2
- 7.3
- 7.4
- 7.5
- 7.6
- 7.7
- 7.8
- 7.9

8. Kinship Systems

- 8.1
- 8.2 In some instances within the Tibetan subgroups, a woman whose husband dies either divorces herself from her husband's dead body, freeing herself of her late husband's brothers, or she stays with the brothers of her deceased husband. {12}, {24}
- 8.3

9. Other Interesting Cultural Features

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