



**Population:**  
 3,270 (2000)  
 4,030 (2010)  
 4,950 (2020)  
**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Tibetan  
**Christians:** none known

## Overview of the Yonzhi

**Other Names:**

**Population Sources:**

3,000 in China (1996, Asian Minorities Outreach)

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Tibetic, Tibetan, Northern

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 60%

**Practising Buddhists:** 25%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

More than 3,000 members of the Yonzhi tribe, a nomadic Tibetan people group, live in a virtually inaccessible area of eastern Qinghai Province in north-west China. They primarily inhabit the Heha Chen Valley, near the town Tibetans call Cheb Chu. The Yonzhi area lies within Gonghe County, east of the Yellow River. The imposing Anye Machen Mountain range, considered sacred by all Tibetans, lies to the east of the Yonzhi tribe. The highest peak is the 6,282-metre (20,604 ft.) Machen Gangri. In the short summer months the area comes alive with flowers. 'Red and blue poppies, bright, fresh, and unharmed, looked happily out of their bed of snow. . . . The scenery became more and



Julian Hawken

more beautiful as we descended. The little meadows, clearings in the juniper forest, were full of flowers . . . out in all their glory.'<sup>1</sup> The Yonzhi share their homelands with many blue sheep, gazelles and wolves.

The Yonzhi are a distinct ethnic group who live in a remote area that has changed little for hundreds of years. The Chinese government does not recognize them as a distinct ethnicity. Instead, they are considered to be a part of the Golog, who in turn are officially counted as part of the Tibetan nationality in China. The Yonzhi speak a variety of Golog Tibetan, the regional language. Few have any knowledge of Chinese.

For countless generations the Yonzhi have lived simple lives, unaffected by events in the rest of the world. Joseph Rock, the

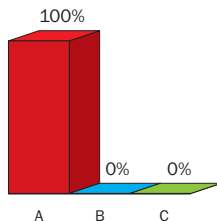
famous botanist and explorer, stumbled across the Yonzhi in 1929. He recalls, 'The people were astonished at sight of our party. One asked, "Why this array of arms and force when visiting our territory?" We continued up the valley to the very foot of [Anye Machen], the mountain god of the Yonzhi tribe. The last few tents we passed were cursed by some plague, the nomads said. The inmates lay dying outside, covered with yak-hair rugs.'<sup>2</sup>

The Yonzhi are nomadic, living in yak-hair tents and moving every few weeks to find new pastures for their yaks, sheep and goats. In addition to Tibetan Buddhism, the Yonzhi worship Anye Machen, the Yonzhi's mountain deity. The Yonzhi believe that the nearby Anye Machen Mountain contains a powerful god of the same name. He is often represented in pictures riding a white horse, with the sun and a rainbow to his

right and the moon to his left. 'All Tibetans worship Anye Machen; every monastery has either a picture or image of him. Anye means "old man" and corresponds to our "saint". Ma means "peacock" and chen "great".'<sup>3</sup>

The Yonzhi are one of the most unreachable people groups in China—if not the entire world. Their region is snowbound for most of the year with temperatures plummeting to minus 40 degrees Celsius (-40° F). The Yonzhi move around frequently, relocating their homes and herds to new pastures. Their communities are only accessible by foot or horseback. To the Yonzhi, the gospel remains untold. It is possible that no Yonzhi has ever heard the name of Jesus Christ.

### Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel  
 B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians  
 C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity