



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** The Fuma are located in just one village north of the town of Changcheng in the western part of Hainan Island. Changcheng is about 50 kilometers (31 mi.) north of the city of Dongfang (formerly known as Basuo). The Fuma live on the very top of a mountain in the area. As a result of isolation, they have an independent mind-set.

**Identity:** The Fuma have been officially counted as part of the Han Chinese nationality, even though they speak their own language and hold to their own identity. The Fuma are considered by some to be a subgroup of the Cun, but locals say the Fuma are a distinct people group. *Cun* means “village” and is a generic term applied to Chinese people living in western Hainan who speak languages related to Li.

**Language:** The Fuma language is part of the Li branch of the Kadai linguistic family. It is closest to the Ha Li language which is spoken by the majority of the Li on Hainan. Fuma is described as a “Li language isolate.”<sup>1</sup> Many Fuma also use Ha Li as a common trade language in the area. Some Fuma men are bilingual in Chinese, although most women and children are only able to speak their own language.

**History:** Hainan Island has witnessed wave after wave of immigrants from the Chinese Mainland over the past 2,000 years. Most settled in the northern part of the island, forcing the original inhabitants of the island, the Li, southward and westward. Today most of northern Hainan is inhabited by Han Chinese and Lingao — members of a mixed race who speak a

language resembling Zhuang. In the areas located near the boundaries between Chinese and Li culture, however, a great deal of fusion has taken place. Because of centuries of interaction between the Han and Li, people groups have been formed who are ethnically and historically Han Chinese but speak a Li language. The Fuma fall into this category. In other locations the fusion has occurred the other way around. Ethnic Li people can be found throughout Hainan who can speak only the Chinese language.

**Customs:** The Fuma have few customs that distinguish them as a people group. They do not wear any traditional dress and are some of the poorest people in all of China. For generations they have struggled to survive in their remote location.

**Religion:** Most Fuma do not practice an organized religion, although many have a deep reverence and respect for their ancestors.

**Christianity:** In the mid-1990s a Hong Kong-based mission discovered the Fuma people and commenced evangelistic work among them. They found that the Fuma were sensitive people, willing to embrace God’s truth. Several families immediately became Christians. The Fuma fit this 1920s description of China’s tribal people: “The children of the hills are much more responsive than the sons of the Han. They are not so proud, not so reserved, not so phlegmatic. Their women and girls are free as are women and girls of Western

lands. They are not secluded nor do they bind their feet. They are allowed to meet and to talk with the men, and there is no mock modesty amongst them.”<sup>2</sup>



**Population in China:**  
 800 (1994)  
 860 (2000)  
 970 (2010)  
**Location:** Hainan Island  
**Religion:** No Religion  
**Christians:** 20

## Overview of the Fuma

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** “Fuo-ma”  
**Other Names:** Fu Ma  
**Population Source:**  
 800 (1994 AMO);  
 Out of a total Han population of 1,042,482,187 (1990 census)  
**Location:** *W Hainan Island:* North of Changcheng  
**Status:** Officially included under Han Chinese  
**Language:** Daic, Kadai, Li-Laqua  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** No Religion, Animism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity  
**Christians:** 20  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None

