

Jiarong, Chabao

Approximately 15,000 speakers of the Chabao Jiarong language live in north-west Sichuan Province in western China. They are primarily concentrated in the Longerjia, Dazang and Shaerzong townships in Chabao District. Chabao lies within Barkam County in Aba Prefecture. Barkam is called Ma'er-kang by local Jiarong and Tibetans. One source states, 'Barkam has a mixed population of

Chinese, Jiarong, and Khampa Tibetans. The town was constructed in the 1950s on the site of a regionally important monastery after the Chinese built a road to open up this mountainous region.'¹ They live on grassland plateaus between several rivers that run through the region. The Chabao Jiarong dominate the total population of Chabao District.² Wars and diseases have kept the Jiarong population relatively low over the centuries. In the 1930s it was



Julian Hawken

reported: 'Aborigines [minorities] seize and kill members of other nationalities. . . . Abandoned hovels and wasteland due to pillage by them are common sights. Violent attacks on communities . . . as well as government punitive actions against them, cost many tens of thousands of lives.'³

The Chabao Jiarong have been counted as part of the Tibetan nationality by the Chinese government, even though the Chabao Jiarong language—which is not mutually intelligible with the other Jiarong varieties—is part of the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman. The Chabao Jiarong have been influenced by the Tibetans more than the four other Jiarong language groups have been. Consequently, most Chabao Jiarong can also speak the local dialect of Khampa. Jiarong adults are reported to have a 27

per cent literacy rate.⁴ Most scholars in the West (and some in China) believe that Jiarong is an independent language, while others think it is merely a dialect of Tibetan. 'Political and sociological arguments brought into this discussion tend to cloud objectivity.'⁵

The Chabao Jiarong have survived the extreme Barkam winters for centuries. Very

few fruits or vegetables grow in the area. Their main crop is barley. The Jiarong diet mainly consists of fat, meat and soured yogurt. 'The winters are harsh with heavy snows and subzero temperatures in northern regions. . . . Jiarong women wear hand woven belts, head-dresses, and aprons that are uniquely

Jiarong. The men wear traditional Tibetan tunic dress. Most of the area does not have running water, electricity, and telephones.'⁶

Approximately 10 per cent of the Jiarong follow the Bon religion.⁷ Bon, a mixture of black magic and demon worship, was the religion of all Tibetans before Buddhism arrived from India during the 7th century AD. Buddhism was incorporated into existing Bon rituals.

There are no known Christians among the Chabao Jiarong, and just two individuals among all the five Jiarong language groups are known to believe in Christ! They are an unreached people who have lived and perished in their remote part of China for centuries without any gospel light to show them the way to God.



Population:

14,170 (2000)
17,450 (2010)
21,500 (2020)

Countries: China

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: none known

Overview of the Chabao Jiarong

Other Names: Gyarong, Gyarung, Rgyarong, Chiarong, Jarong, Chabao, Northeastern Jiarong, Northern Jiarong

Population Sources:

12,197 in China (1993, Lin Xiangron)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Tangut-Qiang, Gyarong

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 90%

Practising Buddhists: 60%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

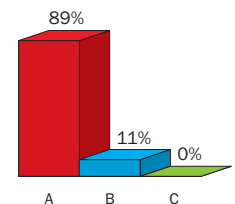
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: JYA

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