

More than 4,000 speakers of the Shangzhai Jiarong language live in an isolated and sparsely populated part of north-west Sichuan Province in western China. The area inhabited by the Shangzhai Jiarong was previously part of the Tibetan empire but was annexed by the Chinese and integrated into Sichuan Province. The Shangzhai Jiarong are located 'near the confluence of the Doqu River and its tributary, the Zhongke River, in Shili, Zongke and Puxi townships of Shangzhai District, in southern Zamtang County'.¹

Shangzhai is one of five distinct languages of the Jiarong ethnic group in China (six, if Ergong is included). The Chinese authorities have officially placed the Jiarong under the Tibetan nationality, even though their languages are far removed from Tibetan.² There has been some talk in Chinese circles of further investigation being conducted to see if the Jiarong should be classified

as a separate minority, but officials in Beijing believe that the task of classifying minorities has been completed and they will not consider any more applications.

Shangzhai Jiarong, and the other Jiarong languages, are members of the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman. Jonathon Evans notes, 'This language remains almost totally unrepresented in the available literature except for isolated words and sample paradigms in one source. Shangzhai seems closer to Ergong than to any other Jiarong languages. The internal diversity of Shangzhai is uncertain but its major local

varieties, Dayili, Zongke and Puxi, appear to be quite distinct.'³ The Dayili dialect was included in a survey of Qiangic languages in 1993.⁴

The Shangzhai Jiarong group is just one of many people groups in the area inhabiting what has been labelled an 'ethnic corridor'. 'This corridor, a borderland of Sino-Tibetan and Yi-Tibetan contact, has been an arena of political tug-of-war. This is also the area where the so-called Qiang, Di, and Rong ethnic groups lived and thrived and where many local governments of varying power



and duration have appeared . . . this area should be fertile ground for exploration by historians as well as linguists.'⁵

Tibetan Buddhism and spirit appeasement dominate the daily lives of the Shangzhai Jiarong. They live in three-storey rock houses.

'The bottom floor is for

animals, the middle floor for the living area, and the top floor is for grain storage and the god room. The god room is where they burn incense and offer food sacrifices to idols, for protection.'⁶

The region inhabited by the Shangzhai Jiarong has been closed to any Christian presence throughout its history. Lawless bandits, remote mountain ranges rising to 7,000 metres (23,000 ft.) above sea level, few roads and the powerful influence of Tibetan Buddhism have prevented the news of Jesus Christ from ever reaching the ears of the unreached Shangzhai Jiarong.



Population:
4,090 (2000)
5,040 (2010)
6,200 (2020)
Countries: China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Shangzhai Jiarong

Other Names: Gyarong, Gyarung, Rgyarong, Chiarong, Jarong, Chiajung, Shangzhai

Population Sources:

4,090 in China (2000, P Hattaway)

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

Dialects: 3 (Dayili, Zongke, Puxi)

Professing Buddhists: 90%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

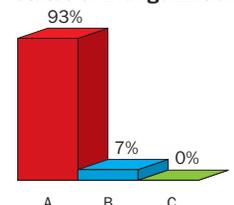
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: JIH

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