

Jiarong, Sidabao

**Population:**

5,580 (2000)
6,850 (2010)
8,400 (2020)

Countries: China**Buddhism:** Tibetan**Christians:** none known

Approximately 5,500 Sidabao Jiarong live in an extremely remote and relatively widespread area of north-west Sichuan Province in China. Most of its speakers live in the three townships of Caodeng, Kangshan and Ribu in the Sidabao District of Ma'erkang (Barkam) County, hence the language name Sidabao. Small outlying communities, however, exist both to the north in certain villages of Kehe and Rongan townships at the southwestern corner of Aba County, and, to the west, along the middle Doqu River between Wuyi and Shili townships in Zamtang

County, spilling over even to a small area near the confluence of the Sertar and Doqu rivers in Sertar County. Exact population statistics of Sidabao are not available, but should run to several thousand.¹

Although they have been officially included as part of the Tibetan nationality, Chinese scholars have considered the Jiarong distinct for several decades. In

1957, the Chinese Academy of Science listed a population of 70,000 Jiarong. One linguist notes, 'The Jiarong . . . are within the cultural orbit of Tibetan Buddhism but speak distinct languages.'²

Sidabao Jiarong is part of the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman. There are two main dialects of Sidabao: Ribu and Caodeng. Ribu further divides into 'several quite different local varieties, such as Shili in Zamtang County, Rongan in Aba County, Ribu proper and Dawei in Barkam County'.³ The Jiarong are looked down upon by both the Chinese and the Tibetans. 'Those

Jiarong in the towns hold no more than low-level clerical jobs, as they are generally poorly educated.⁴

One Chinese source claims that the Jiarong 'are a branch of Tibetans who moved in remote antiquity from Qungbu in Tibet to live in the Songpan Plateau of northern Sichuan'.⁵ Buddhism arrived in Tibet during the reign of King Songsten Gampo (c. AD 605–650). It officially replaced the Bon religion and gradually worked its way to the extremities of the Tibetan world, including the area inhabited by the Jiarong today.

There has been a revival of the ancient Bon religion in recent years among the Jiarong. For the past 13 centuries, Buddhism has been something of a veneer on ancient Bon rituals. The spiritism and black magic still prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism stem from Bon.

The few attempts to evangelize the Jiarong in

the past met with some success. In 1934, missionaries listed 34 Jiarong believers.⁶ Another book from the 1930s lists a number of Jiarong Christians, but presently there is no indication that there are any believers among them. 'Social ostracism of possible converts, and persecution to the extent of the placing of severe curses by the lamas, or poisoning through family members, are other hindrances to spreading the Gospel.'⁷

There are no Scriptures, gospel recordings or other ministry tools presently available to help evangelize the Jiarong.

Overview of the Sidabao Jiarong

Other Names: Western Jiarong, Western Jyarung, Gyarong, Gyarrung, Rgyarong, Chiarong, Jarong, Sidabao

Population Sources:

5,580 (2000, P Hattaway)

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

Dialects: 2 (Caodeng, Ribu)

Professing Buddhists: 90%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

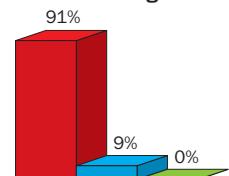
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: JIW

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



China Advocate