

**Location:** More than 640,000 speakers of Lingao inhabit four counties in the northern part of Hainan Island, including the provincial capital Haikou, and as far west as Bolian Township. Visitors to Hainan are often surprised at the number of modern vehicles and electrical appliances used there. This is the result of government corruption during the 1980s. In 1983 the central government allocated massive amounts of valuable foreign exchange funds to Hainan, in an effort to improve the island's infrastructure and to make the province more attractive to foreign tourism and investment. Hainan officials saw it as an opportunity to indulge themselves. US\$1.5 billion was used to purchase 90,000 new Japanese cars from Hong Kong. Most of these were then transported to the Mainland and sold at a massive profit. The shopping list also included 2.9 million color TVs, 252,000 video recorders, and 122,000 motorcycles.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** The Lingao, despite speaking their own Tai language, have been officially included as members of the Han Chinese nationality. "Although they regard themselves as Han people, they are regarded as Li people in historical records and by the Han people on Hainan Island."<sup>2</sup> The Lingao call their language the "village language" — the same name as the Cun people on the west coast of Hainan. To avoid confusion, the Chinese have labeled this group *Lingao*.

**Language:** Although the use of the Lingao language is widespread, "it has no orthography and is not taught in schools."<sup>3</sup> Scholars disagree regarding the linguistic affiliation of Lingao. Some consider it "closely related to Bouyei, Giay, and Northern Zhuang."<sup>4</sup> Many city-dwelling Lingao are bilingual in the local dialect of Chinese, and some speak Mandarin as a third language. Most rural Lingao, especially women and children, are unable to speak any language except their own.<sup>5</sup>

**Customs:** Many Lingao fish in the Beibu Gulf between Hainan and the Chinese Mainland. Every year, between May and October, severe storms lash the area.

**History:** The Lingao language suggests they may have originally been Zhuang who migrated from the Mainland. Hainan has belonged to China for about 2,000 years. "Yet the Chinese have occupied little more than its fringe, and among them the legend still persists that the wild men of the interior have tails!"<sup>6</sup>

**Religion:** The majority of Lingao are animists. In some locations a multiplicity of spirit beings and ghosts



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are worshiped. Ancestor worship is also common.

**Christianity:** In 1630 Jesuit priests from Macau came and set up a chapel in Fucheng — then the capital of Qiongzhou.<sup>7</sup> More than 250 years later, in the 1880s, Danish missionary Carl Jeremiassen also "settled down in Fucheng, Qiongsan County, where he bought the Ancestral Hall... and turned it into a church."<sup>8</sup> Today, most of the Christians on Hainan are in the northern part of the island. Many Han and Lingao youth have found Christ in recent years, as both official and underground churches report overflowing crowds at their meetings.



**Population in China:**

520,000 (1982)  
641,700 (2000)  
725,100 (2010)

**Location:** Hainan Island  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** 5,000

**Overview of the Lingao**

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Lin-gaw"  
**Other Names:** Be, Ongbe, Vo Limkou, Limkou, Limkow  
**Population Source:** 520,000 (1982 census); Out of a total Han population of 1,042,482,187 (1990 census)  
**Location:** North Central Hainan Island: Lingao, Dengmai, Qiongsan, and Dan counties  
**Status:** Officially included under Han Chinese

**Language:** Daic, Kadai  
**Dialects (3):** Lincheng (350,000), Qiongsan (170,000), Lingao  
**Religion:** Animism, Polytheism, No Religion, Ancestor Worship, Christianity  
**Christians:** 5,000  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** ONBOO

