



Population in China:
 15,000 (1983)
 20,900 (2000)
 25,750 (2010)
Location: Sichuan
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Zhaba

- Countries:** China
- Pronunciation:** "Zhar-ba"
- Other Names:**
Zaba, Zhaboa, Buozi
- Population Source:**
15,000 (1983 Sun Hongkai);
7,700 (1991 EDCL);
Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)
- Location:** *W Sichuan:* Zhamai District of Yajiang County and Zhaba District of Daofu County; Possibly also in Litang and Xinlong counties
- Status:**
Officially included under Tibetan
- Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Zhaba
- Dialects (2):**
Western Zhaba, Eastern Zhaba
- Religion:**
Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism
- Christians:** None known
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** ZHA00



Paul Hattaway

Population: A 1983 source listed 15,000 people belonging to the Zhaba ethnolinguistic group.¹ They live in parts of Yajiang and Daofu counties within the massive Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in western Sichuan Province. The area was originally part of Kham Province in Tibet until it was annexed by the Chinese in the 1950s. The Sichuan-Tibet highway, begun in 1950 and completed in 1954, "is one of the world's highest, roughest, most dangerous and most beautiful roads.... Towns experience cold temperatures, with up to 200 freezing days per year; summers are blistering by day and the high altitude invites particularly bad sunburn."²

Identity: The Zhaba are counted as part of the Tibetan nationality, although they speak a Qiangic language. The Zhaba may call themselves *Buozi*. *Zhaba* appears to be the name used to describe them by their Khampa Tibetan neighbors.

Language: The Zhaba language belongs to a recently discovered branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family, which has amazed linguists and anthropologists. One scholar explains, "The most exciting recent development in Tibeto-Burman studies is the discovery of a new branch of the family, hitherto virtually unknown to Western scholars. These are the Qiangic languages

of Sichuan. Extensive lexical and grammatical material has been collected on a dozen languages of the Qiangic group. Besides Qiang, other languages in the group include Baima, Ergong, Ersu, Jiarong, Guiqiong, Minyak, Namuyi, Pumi, Shixing, and Zhaba."³

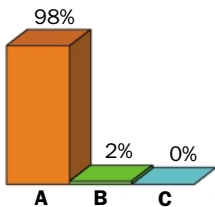
History: When Marco Polo passed through rural Tibetan areas in the thirteenth century he found unique local customs. Polo wrote, "No man of that country would on any consideration take to wife a girl who was a maid; for they say a wife is worth nothing unless she has been used to consort with men.... When travelers come that way, the old women of the place get ready, and take their unmarried daughters... to whomsoever will accept them.... In this manner people traveling in that way... shall find perhaps 20 or 30 girls at their disposal."⁴

Customs: Promiscuity continues to be rife among the Zhaba. A 1950s survey of the Garze area found the rate of venereal diseases was 40% among people in peasant areas and 50.7% among people living in the pasture areas.⁵

Religion: The Zhaba worship a wide variety of demons and ghosts. These influences date back to the pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion of Bon. They believe large demons live inside mountains, and so they offer frequent sacrifices to appease them.

Christianity: There are no known Christians among the Zhaba, although there are a few Tibetan Catholics farther west near Litang. The Zhaba lead hard lives. Workers seeking to reach them will need to help them physically and not just spiritually. Isobel Kuhn, a missionary to the Lisu, said, "I have been a missionary for 27 years, but have never met a heathen tribesman who was looking for salvation.... They don't know enough to reach out a hand for heavenly aid. Their eyes look not up but down — down on the earth and upon their bodily appetites."⁶

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Were evangelized but did not become Christians
C = Are adherents to any form of Christianity