



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** More than 4,000 speakers of the Shangzhai Jiarong language live in an isolated and sparsely populated part of northwest Sichuan Province. 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.”<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** Shangzhai is one of five distinct languages of the Jiarong ethnic group in China (six if Ergong is included). The Jiarong, in turn, were officially placed under the Tibetan nationality by the Chinese authorities, even though their languages

are far removed from Tibetan. 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 the task of classifying minorities has been completed and will not consider any more applications.

**Language:** 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> The Dayili dialect was included in a survey of Qiangic languages in 1993.<sup>4</sup>

**History:** The Shangzhai Jiarong are one of many people groups in the area who inhabit what has been labeled 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.”<sup>5</sup>

**Customs:** Visually and culturally the Jiarong are similar to the Tibetans who live in the area. Today, the Jiarong dress identically to the Tibetans, eat the same food, and celebrate the same festivals.

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism and spirit appeasement dominate every aspect of the daily lives of the Shangzhai Jiarong.

**Christianity:** The area inhabited by the Shangzhai Jiarong has been blocked off from Christian presence throughout its history. Lawless bandits, remote mountain ranges rising to 7,000 meters (23,000 ft.) above sea level, lack of roads, and the powerful influence of Tibetan Buddhism have prevented news of Jesus Christ from ever reaching the ears of

the unreached Shangzhai Jiarong.



**Population in China:**  
 4,000 (1999)  
 4,090 (2000)  
 5,040 (2010)  
**Location:** Sichuan  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Shangzhai Jiarong

- Countries:** China
- Pronunciation:** “Shang-jai-Gee-ah-rong”
- Other Names:** Gyarong, Gyarung, Rgyarong, Chiarong, Jarong, Chiajung, Shangzhai
- Population Source:** 4,000 (1999 AMO); Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)
- Location:** NW Sichuan: Zamtang County
- Status:** Officially included under Tibetan
- Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Jiarong
- Dialects (3):** Dayili, Zongke, Puxi
- Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism
- Christians:** None known
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** JIHOO

