
Population in China:

70,000 (1990)

90,300 (2000)

116,400 (2010)

Location: Yunnan

Religion: Polytheism

Christians: 200

Overview of the Zaiwa

Countries: China, Myanmar

Pronunciation: "Zay-wah"

Other Names: Atsi, Tsaiwa, Atzi, Szi, Atshi, Aci, Azi, Atsi-Marur, Xiaoshanhua, Xiaoshan, Aji

Population Source:

70,000 (1990 J.O. Svantesson);

Out of a total Jingpo population of

119,209 (1990 census);

13,200 in Myanmar (1983)

Location: *W Yunnan:* Luxi, Ruili, Longchuan, and Yingjiang counties

Status:

Officially included under Jingpo

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Burmish, Northern Burmish

Dialects (3): Zaiwa, Langwa, Polo

Religion: Polytheism, Animism, Shamanism, Christianity

Christians: 200

Scripture:

Portions 1939; Work in progress

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: Atsi #01176

Christian Broadcasting:

Available (FEBC)

ROPAL code: ATB00

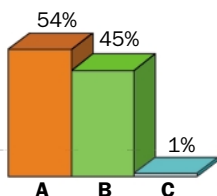

Paul Hattaway

Location: Linguist Jan-Olof Svantesson listed a 1990 population of 70,000 Zaiwa in China.¹ The Zaiwa comprise 73% of the total Jingpo population in Yunnan Province's Dehong Prefecture.² They are concentrated in the east and west mountains of Luxi County.

Identity: The Zaiwa are the largest subgroup of the official Jingpo nationality in China. The Zaiwa, who are called *Xiaoshan*, meaning "small mountain" by the Chinese, have a fearsome reputation. In 1911 James Fraser described the Zaiwa as "the wildest people around here by a long way. Inveterate robbers, their hand is against every man and every man's hand is against them. Dirty, unkempt, ignorant, everybody despises them. They are savages only and not cannibals."³
Language: In 1957 an orthography based on the Roman alphabet was devised for the Zaiwa.⁴ Previously the Zaiwa kept records by notching wood or tying knots. Calculations were done by counting beans.

History: The Zaiwa have forged a reputation for themselves as a local version of the Mafia. Their *gumsa* system encourages a "belligerent, competitive, authoritarian society whose chiefs are chosen by public consent."⁵ The large Zaiwa village of Banwa forced 44 neighboring villages, amounting

 to 1,020 households, to pay them "protection" money.⁶
Customs: The Zaiwa are enslaved by almost every kind of vice imaginable. Zaiwa young men "do not sleep at home. They usually spend the night flirting with young women at the youth club. Sexual relations are so disorderly as to have rendered them unfit for physical labor. A girl who gets pregnant without a proposal will not easily find another boy to marry her and will be considered a widow because of the heavy bride-price."⁷ In Banwa Village alone, there were 55 such "widows" from a total of 134 households.⁸
Religion: The Zaiwa are enslaved by evil spirits. In the past they even bullied Lisu households into paying a tax of three squirrels per year, to be used as an offering to the spirits.⁹ One tragic example of the Zaiwa's bondage is retold here: "Elder Dai's daughter-in-law died of fever after having a difficult labor. Before her death, several head of cattle were sacrificed to the demons. During the cremation, the firewood did not burn steadily due to its dampness. The sorcerer thereby proclaimed that the deceased's personal effects be thrown into the fire to annul her parsimony. As the fire still did not burst into a blaze, the sorcerer then attributed the cause to the deceased's reluctance to leave her newborn baby behind, thus resulting in the baby being thrown into the fire."¹⁰
Christianity: Despite living alongside strong Jingpo Christian communities, "the demon-worshipping Zaiwa never showed the slightest inclination to turn to Christianity."¹¹ Moreover, Zaiwa who became Christians in some of the mixed villages were ostracized by their own tribe, "who would expel them from the village and confiscate their land and livestock, compelling them eventually to abandon their alien belief."¹² There are a reported 4,000 Zaiwa Christians, mostly in Myanmar, with few in China.¹³ Gospel radio broadcasts in Zaiwa started in 1996, while work is in progress to translate the Scriptures into Zaiwa.

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