

Location: Approximately 14,000 speakers of the Chabao Jiarong language live in northwest Sichuan Province. They are primarily concentrated in the Longerjia, Dazang, and Shaerzong townships in Chabao District. Chabao lies within Barkam County in Aba Prefecture. Barkam is called *Ma'er-kang* by local Jiarong and Tibetans. The Chabao Jiarong live on grassland plateaus between several rivers that run through the region. The Chabao Jiarong dominate the total population of Chabao District.¹

Identity: The Chabao Jiarong have been counted as part of the Tibetan nationality by the Chinese. "Barkam has a mixed population of Chinese, Jiarong, and Khampa Tibetans. The town was constructed in the 1950s on the site of a regionally important monastery after the Chinese built a road to open up this mountainous region."²

Language: Chabao Jiarong — which is not mutually intelligible with the other Jiarong languages — is part of the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman. The Chabao Jiarong have been influenced by the Tibetans more than the four other Jiarong language groups have been. Most can also speak the local dialect of Khampa. Jiarong adults are reported to have a 27% literacy rate.³ Most scholars in the West (and some in China) believe Jiarong is an independent language, while others think it is merely a dialect of Tibetan. "Political and sociological arguments

brought into this discussion tend to cloud objectivity."⁴

History: The Jiarong population has been kept relatively low over the centuries because of wars and disease. In the 1930s it was reported: "Aborigines [minorities] seize and kill members of other nationalities... Abandoned hovels and wasteland due to pillage by them are common sights. Violent attacks on communities... as well as government punitive actions against them, cost many tens of thousands of lives."⁵

Customs: The Chabao Jiarong have survived the extreme Barkam winters for centuries. Little fruit or vegetables grow in the area. Their main crop is barley. The Jiarong diet mainly consists of fat, meat, and soured yogurt.

Religion: Approximately 20% of the Jiarong follow the Bon religion.⁶ Bon, a mixture of black magic and demon worship, was the religion of all Tibetans before Buddhism arrived from India during the seventh century



Paul Hattaway

AD. Buddhism was incorporated into existing Bon rituals.

Christianity: The good news that Christ has defeated the devil has not yet reached the ears of the Chabao Jiarong. Isobel Kuhn once wrote, "The only person who does not believe that the devil is a person is someone who has never attempted to combat him or his ways.... The simple tribesman going through his animistic incantations is wiser than such a drugged intellectual. He, at least, knows there is a devil; and he has ways to appease him temporarily."⁷



Population in China:

12,197 (1993)
14,170 (2000)
17,450 (2010)

Location: Sichuan

Religion: Tibetan Buddhism

Christians: None Known

Overview of the Chabao Jiarong

Countries: China

Pronunciation: "Cha-baow-Gee-ah-rong"

Other Names: Gyarong, Gyarung, Rgyarong, Chiarong, Jarong, Chabao, Northeastern Jiarong, Northern Jiarong

Population Source: 12,197 (1993 Lin Xiangron); Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)

Location: NW Sichuan: Chabao District of Barkam County

Status:

Officially included under Tibetan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Jiarong

Dialects: 0

Religion: Tibetan Buddhism, Bon

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: JYA00

