

Location: Fifty-two thousand speakers of the Jiamao language were reported in a 1987 study.¹ They live in the southeastern part of Hainan Island, concentrated in the eastern and southern parts of Baoting County, as well as in parts of Lingshui and Qiongzong counties. They live near Wuzhi (Five Finger) Mountain — the highest peak at 1,867 meters (6,124 ft.) on the island. The Lingshui River flows through Jiamao territory.

Identity: The Jiamao Li derive their name from the area they inhabit. Other Li groups call them *Kamau*. The Jiamao refer to themselves as *Tai*, which simply means “people.”²

Language: The Jiamao language differs most from the other Li varieties and shares only about 40% of its lexicon with the other Li languages.³ There are considerable differences between the Li languages, both phonetically and lexically. The Jiamao language consists of five tones, but “they do not correspond to those of the Ha, Qi, Bendi and Meifu dialects.”⁴ There are no dialect variations reported among the Jiamao.

History: The various Li groups, including the Jiamao Li, are proud of the fact that they are the original inhabitants of Hainan Island. During the Song and Yuan dynasties (960 – 1368), the Li staged 18 large-scale uprisings against oppressive Chinese rule on the island.⁵ During the China-Vietnam War in the late 1970s, it was feared the Vietnamese would invade Hainan, but this fear proved

unfounded. In recent years, territorial disputes over the Spratley Islands, which lie to the south of Hainan, have greatly increased tensions in the region. Virtually every country in Southeast Asia lays claim to the hundreds of tiny, oil-rich islands.

Customs: For centuries Li women observed the custom of tattooing their bodies and faces at the onset of puberty. This was considered a mark of beauty. The Chinese have discouraged this practice. Today only old Li women can still be seen with tattoos.

Religion: The Jiamao Li are animists. They traditionally consulted shamans and witch doctors to deal with sickness. Today this practice has been replaced by Western and Chinese medicine. In the past, the Jiamao sacrificed animals to their gods and spirits. A chicken was killed for a minor sickness and a pig for a more serious illness. If someone was in danger of dying, the required sacrifice was to slaughter an ox in a vain bid to appease the offending spirits.



Paul Hattaway

Christianity: The first recorded Christian presence on Hainan were the Jesuits, who came from Macau in 1630 and established a chapel at Fucheng.⁶ The American Presbyterian Mission commenced work on Hainan Island in 1885 when Charles McCandliss was appointed as a missionary to the island. McCandliss and his wife lived on Hainan for 40 years. Their upright lives gave Christianity a good name among the people, and many came to Christ. Today there are a relative handful of Jiamao Christians. Most Jiamao have yet to hear the gospel, although gospel recordings are available in their language.



Population in China:
 52,000 (1987)
 71,600 (2000)
 92,300 (2010)
Location: Hainan Island
Religion: Animism
Christians: 50

Overview of the Jiamao Li

Countries: China
Pronunciation: “Jeeeah-maow-Lee”
Other Names: Kamau, Tai
Population Source:
 52,000 (1987 LAC);
 Out of a total Li population of 1,110,900 (1990 census)
Location: SE Hainan Island:
 Baoting, Lingshui, and Qiongzong counties
Status:
 Officially included under Li

Language: Daic, Kadai, Li-Laqua
Dialects: 0
Religion: Animism, Polytheism, Shamanism, Christianity
Christians: 50
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings:
 Li: Baoting
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: JI000

