ENGAGING THE Zhuang

A Strategic Prayer and Information Guide for the Language Groups of the Zhuang
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Thank you for reading and praying through this prayer guide for the Zhuang. Each page is devoted to a major language group of the Zhuang, written by workers living among or near them. Some language groups have no one focused specifically on reaching them, and it is our hope that God would call more workers to plant churches among these unengaged groups.

The Zhuang as a whole have many cultural similarities across their language groups and dialects, but are cut off from communicating with each other because the languages can be so dissimilar. Church planters are needed to target specific groups that are isolated by language and geography. So far, fewer than 0.25% of the Zhuang have become believers. Please join with us in prayer to see that all tribes of the Zhuang are represented before the throne of God!

For more information on the Zhuang and how you can be involved, use the following email addresses and web sites.

**Zhuang Strategic Alliance:**
zhuang@ywamsf.org
https://www.ywamsf.org/nations/china

**Joshua Project:**
http://joshuaproject.net/clusters/322

**International Missions Board (IMB):**
estasia@imb.org

### Explanation of Info Boxes

- **Population** - Ethnologue, 17th Edition
- **JF** - Jesus Film
- **CIF** - Create International Films
- **FEBC** - Far East Broadcasting Programs
- **CBS** - Chronological Bible Storying
- **GRN** - Global Recordings Network
- **MV** - Megavoice Recordings
Major Zhuang Language Groups and Related Peoples

Northern Zhuang
- Guibian (1,091,449)
- Guibei (1,450,651)
- Liujiang (1,654,356)
- Central Hongshuihe (1,080,000)
- Eastern Hongshuihe (1,200,000)
- Liuqian (370,000)
- Youjiang (856,519)
- Yongbei (2,310,580)
- Qiubei (212,069)
- Lianshan (33,200)

Southern Zhuang
- Yang (+674,000*)
- Minz (+162,000*)
- Zuojiang (1,643,455)
- Yongnan (1,967,390)
- Dai (152,950)
- Nong (580,183)

Related Groups
- Bouyi (?)
- Vietnam (?)

Counties with 85% or more Zhuang are underlined. Population figures represent 2000 Census, except where noted (*) which represent recent unconfirmed figures.

Note: Thousands of Zhuang men and young adults especially from rural areas are currently working short-term in factories in the Guangzhou and Shenzhen areas.
Northern Zhuang Language Groups
Located in the northwest corner of Guangxi Province, the Guibian Zhuang live in small villages spread far apart in hilly and mountainous areas. In the six counties that make up this area, the Zhuang are only 70% of the population, and live side by side with many other minorities. Longlin County has the largest number of different minorities in Guangxi, with Yi, Buyi, Dong, Miao and Yao minorities living among the Guibian Zhuang. This is possible because the Zhuang place such a high value on harmonious relationships, and are able to develop good relationships with them all.

However, with a land so mountainous, it is hard to grow crops and there are no large prosperous cities here. Le Ye, one of the six counties in this area, is the poorest in all of Guangxi, and only 30% of the people in this area can read. Most villagers feel it is a waste of money to send their children to school beyond the sixth grade, and in the county seat towns, it is common for one to see a number of youths standing about with nothing to do.

Since this area is considered remote and one must do a good deal of hard traveling in order to visit the villages, it has had little Christian witness. Most people in the area are animists, and worship large trees or the dragon god. They feel that dragons are asleep, thus making the humps in the hills that are all around. Hence, in an effort to keep things in their area peaceful, they worship them. Some villagers are so unaccustomed to seeing people they don’t know that they become hostile to foreigners and throw stones at them so they will leave. But a small group of Chinese believers have helped to establish about 15 house churches scattered out in the villages in the area. All of these groups worship in the local Zhuang language, and even a Zhuang from outside the Guibian language must have a local translator. When some training for house church leaders was provided a few years ago, the local leaders were thrilled to realize that someone knew about them.

Prayer Points

Pray for more people who understand the difficulty of traveling to this area will be burdened to be committed to spread the gospel among the Guibeizhuang.

Pray for Christians, from the outside, that they would have an opportunity to move into this area to live and minister to the people as tourism and industry related to the new hydroelectric station develops.

Pray for those who lead the small village house churches that despite little training and support, they would be taught by the Holy Spirit and would remain faithful in leadership.
For generations, the Zhuang speakers of the Guibei language have been living in their mountain homes and isolated from others. They largely consist of poor, rural farmers. A curious people but extremely cautious, the most common question asked when newcomers arrive is, “Why would anyone want to come here?”

The Guibei Zhuang follow animism and ancestor worship. The younger generation will claim that they just believe in themselves, but these traditional ties still run deep in their hearts because of their families. The two largest festivals are the Singing Festival and the Bronze Drum Festival. Every town and village has an altar where the people regularly worship their chosen local god. Village altars are normally one of the first buildings one sees when entering a village. These altars are usually located at the tops of mountains as well as within the town itself. Consequently, there is a spirit of oppression in this area. Premarital sex, entertainment, materialism, and fears of going against family are also strongholds which must be broken. Cults, especially Eastern Lightning, have also infiltrated the area.

The younger Guibei Zhuang desire better paying jobs and will travel to other provinces searching for work. They hope that this wealth will provide them with happiness.

Students also desire better English in the hope that it will lead them to better colleges or career opportunities. However, the more educated the person, the more likely they would have been indoctrinated by an educational system that is godless. As a result, they do not hear the gospel clearly without preconceived ideas from their teachers.

There are very, very few believers among the Guibei. The majority have never even heard the name “Jesus.” Just as misty fog shrouds their mountain homes, their hearts have long been shrouded by spiritual darkness. In sharing the Christmas story, everyone’s reaction was, “I’ve never heard this before!”

While sharing the Easter story, one person responded with, “I’ve only heard that Jesus died on the cross. No one has ever told me what happened next.” This illustrates the great need for the gospel to spread among the Guibei Zhuang.

Prayer Points

- Pray for the Father to tear down the strongholds and pour out His Spirit among these people.
- Pray for the Father to continue calling the Guibei Zhuang and rescue them from the domain of darkness. (Col. 1:13-14)
- Pray for the Father to raise up local laborers, brothers and sisters, who will partner in working the fields. (Luke 10:2b)
Traveling up into the mountains, we veered off the little two-lane road onto a dirt track high above the river. Scenic but treacherous, we dodged several washouts where the riverbank had been washed away and the road had collapsed into the river. Finally, we arrived at a small carved rock staircase leading down to the riverbank. We paid our fare and the local boatman poled us down the river on his bamboo raft around protruding rocks and through a long cave to the waterfall, where we disembarked. Up the narrow slippery, rocky footpath, and over the bamboo bridge, we traversed the waterfall and emerged into the valley. We then climbed the stone stairs into the fields and walked along the paddy, weaving our way closer to the village.

“Where is Grandma Wei?” we asked in the official language as we entered the village. We pulled out the picture—a gift for Grandma Wei, and showed it about. Smiles and knowing nods are given as we are directed to her house. “Grandma Wei, Grandma Wei,” we called out as we entered the old house. Greeting us with an ebullient smile, we were welcomed. “Grandma Wei, we have a gift for you.” She called to her grandson to help her. He didn’t understand us. We turned to our Zhuang friend who drove us. Even though his Zhuang village and her Zhuang village are close, they do not speak the same language. We spoke the official language to him. He spoke the trade language to his grandson.

Then the grandson spoke the village Zhuang to Grandma Wei. We were rewarded with smiles.

Living in the mountains of northern Guangxi, the Liujiang Zhuang are a beautiful and hard-working people. They are subsistence farmers harvesting rice to live on and sell. If this year’s crops were bountiful, they will then raise corn, sugarcane, fish, pigs or garden vegetables for profit. Often the men and women of working age leave the village to go to factories in Shenzhen or Shanghai. Many parents must seek work away from the village, leaving the keeping of the fields and raising of the children to the grandparents left behind.

Prayer Points

Pray for the Liujiang Zhuang, that they would hear the gospel in their heart language, understand, and believe.

Pray for the Father to continue to raise up leaders from amongst them and that these leaders will desire to reach beyond their village with the gospel.

Pray for new ways to gain sustained access among the Liujiang Zhuang.
In the narrow valley of the Red Water River (Hongshuihe), nestled between steep-sided limestone hills, tiny fields of paddy rice and corn, along with sugarcane and other subsistence crops fill every nearly-level piece of ground. This is the heartland of the one million speakers of the Central Hongshuihe Zhuang language. Considered one of the poorer areas of Guangxi, there is little economic development and high underemployment. Vices such as gambling and drinking are widespread, especially among the men.

The Zhuang are Taoist-animist and therefore revere and worship their ancestors. They believe that the world is controlled by spiritual forces, and often make offerings to these spirits to prevent misfortunes or to appease them when adversity strikes. Among their most important festivals are Qingming Jie, when ancestral graves are swept and offerings are made to the ancestors, and Zhongyuan Jie, when sacrifices are made to many spirits in the hope of securing good fortune for the coming year.

Ministry has begun among the Central Hongshuihe, but is still in its infancy. There are a growing number of small groups that meet in two of the counties. Many more workers are needed to build up the believing community and strengthen the young believers who often face great opposition from family and neighbors and thus have to make difficult decisions in the light of their new faith.

One example of this is a family of believers who were building a new house. They had to decide whether to begin work on the house on the day and time prescribed by the ritual masters, and make the customary offerings to the spirits which always mark the beginning of any major project. Failure to do so could result in blame should anything go wrong during the building project, not just with their house, but also with their neighbors’ houses which were being built at the same time. This family chose to stand firm and not take part in the rites. Praise God!

Prayer Points

Pray for more workers to be sent to work among the Central Hongshuihe Zhuang.

Pray for the small groups meeting to grow in faith and truth.

Pray for the Zhuang believers to have strength in the face of opposition from their families and neighbors.
Although indistinguishable from the Chinese in everyday dress, the Eastern Hongshuihe Zhuang are proud of their language and heritage. Many are multilingual, speaking some form of Chinese as well as Zhuang, but prefer their own language. Even in the county towns, Eastern Hongshuihe Zhuang is widely spoken, and within the villages, not many are fluent in Chinese. There is a need to reach this group in their own language, helping believers use their heart language in their small groups and personal worship times to facilitate spiritual growth.

For millennia, these people have been ancestor-worshiping animists. They take care of the graves of their ancestors, some for as far back as three generations, some for many more. Their worship consists of chopping back the weeds, heaping dirt up on the grave-mounds, setting off firecrackers to frighten the evil spirits, lighting incense, taking a brief prayer posture before the grave, and setting out bowls of food for their departed relatives. They also have altars in their homes where they offer incense and food. Sometimes, certain old large trees will be places for offering sacrifices as well. When something goes wrong, they often call the local shaman, both male and female, to help them manipulate the spirit world.

In the spring, when the Zhuang go to care for their ancestors’ graves, they also have a tradition of a certain type of singing, whereby men and women compete in teams to try and create verses of song in clever response to what the opposing team had just sung. Since many older people still enjoy this tradition, this could be a powerful way to spread the gospel among the Zhuang.

Unlike many who come to faith in the West, Eastern Hongshuihe Zhuang have come to Jesus without any form of preconceptions or background. This makes them fresh and passionate believers, but also leaves them as easy marks for false teachers. Accurately communicating the gospel in a way that they can understand and teach others in their heart language is vital among the Eastern Hongshuihe Zhuang.

Prayer Points

Pray for the translation of Scripture into Eastern Hongshuihe language and the use of it in Zhuang worship.

Pray for the Zhuang to see the futility of ancestral worship for receiving peace and blessings.

Pray for a response to the gospel on the part of older women and other Zhuang who know little Chinese and converse mainly in their own language.

Population: 1,200,000
ISO Code: zeh
Alternate Names: None
Scripture/Media: No scripture, no JF, no CIF, no FEBC, no CBS, 2 GRN, 1 MV
The Liuqian Hongshuihe, much like the rest of the Zhuang, are often indistinguishable from the Han Chinese. A casual observer would consider them to be a “hidden” minority. Many are full of energy, extremely hardworking individuals, hospitable and pragmatic. They are often quick to respond to the gospel, but also quick to syncretize. As new believers, they have a limited capacity to sort truth from error and as a result, can get caught up in cult practices which are rampant in this area. One particularly evil cult called Eastern Lightning has sought to find and subvert house churches by preaching a female Christ that has already returned and is waiting in China to reveal herself. These sorts of teachings exemplify the numerous oppositions that new believers face after receiving the gospel.

There is a great need for the word of God to be translated into the many languages of the Zhuang. A translation worker was looking at the book of Jonah with a new believer, someone who came to know the Lord late in life. The new believer was trying to render the story in his dialect of Zhuang and was confused. He asked the worker, “Let’s see, whose son is Jonah—Jehovah’s or Amittai’s?”

The Liuqian Hongshuihe struggle with being an economic level or two below the majority Han Chinese population. They consider making money the key to a successful life for themselves and their children. As a result, they are often happy to have their children leave their village, language and traditional ways for a life in the city. Even so, the Liuqian Hongshuihe Zhuang want family to care for them from the time when they are no longer able to work until they die—and beyond. For young people who have accepted Christ, to refuse to go to worship at the graves of their ancestors is very difficult. To do so is viewed as breaking the tradition of caring for the spirits of the dead which has dated back to time immemorial. Parents are reluctant to embrace the gospel as a family if it means that no one will provide for them in the afterlife.

Prayer Points

Pray for wisdom to refute the teachings of the Eastern Lightning cult.

Pray for the protection of new Zhuang believers from syncretism and false teachings.

Pray for wisdom for new believers that desire to respect their elders, but not participate in ancestor worship.
The region where the Yongbei language is spoken is a mixture of rural areas and large towns. These towns are growing rapidly due to such factors as development of large aluminum factories or proximity to the capital city and ever improving high-speed roads. Even many rural villages have recently laid single-lane concrete roads connecting them to the nearest market towns.

With the development of the economy, the Yongbei Zhuang have the desire to pursue more material things as they see many people driving cars back from the city to celebrate the traditional feast days of their home villages. Perhaps unexpectedly, more contact with the outside has not made them assimilate to the Han Chinese culture. Instead there is a new awareness and pride in the ancient Zhuang customs and culture. Ancient bronze artifacts are dug up and plans for museums are drawn up; folk stories and information about historical figures are compiled and old temples refurbished as “Dragon Mother” goddess and “Luo Ye King” god are worshipped; Nanning and Guangxi TV stations all send cameras and reporters to cover a Taoist ceremony at the ancient tree that is worshipped because its sap runs red like blood. So while things may look a bit more modern, the people’s hearts are still held captive by their animistic ways.

There are also people who travel along the newly paved roads bringing the good news.

In two county seats within the language area there are now small groups of believers meeting. In one of these counties, there are groups of believers established in two or three market towns, and furthermore those believers have started to plant churches in villages around those towns, so that there are now six vibrant meeting points in the county. One elderly woman who recently heard the first two chapters of Genesis in her native Yongbei Zhuang said, “I am already 81 years old. All my life I have worshipped the earth and the sky. Why am I only hearing about the God who created everything now, after so many years?”

**Prayer Points**

- Pray for newly translated scriptures to be distributed in appropriate ways.
- Pray for people to continue to spread the good news, so that more can hear about their Creator and worship him instead of the old folk heroes or trees and stones.
- Pray for the Yongbei Zhuang to be open to the gospel and growth in the small groups.
As rice fields and sugar cane snake through the valleys of jutting mountains, villages of two to five thousand people are located endlessly around each bend. Once in awhile, one might come upon a market town of as many as 40,000, and from time to time a county seat town of up to 200,000. 90% of all these would be members of the YouJiang Zhuang, but nearly 100% of those have never heard the name of Jesus, much less had someone visit them who had a personal testimony about the saving power of the one true living God.

This area is known for its aluminum raw materials underground, its abundant agriculture above ground, and its peaked mountains that rise up into the sky. The people are friendly, mainly gaining their income from farming, odd jobs, and small shops that dot the sidewalks. Nearly everyone from this area is either a farmer, or has family who still farms in villages throughout. From tourism to mangos and from factories to rice fields, making a consistent living is never an easy task.

Sadly, nearly everyone who claims Zhuang heritage is also committed to ancestor worship. Being animists, they believe life is dictated by the spirits, and anything that might appease the spirits, even to the point of witchcraft is considered a normal part of life. They will also often worship stones, old trees, lands and birds, believing that all things in nature have a spirit within.

Recently, a large worship center for the Zhuang was built in the YouJiang Zhuang area. A large idol representing Buluotuo, a god and the first ancestor of the Zhuang, is the centerpiece. He is said to be invincible and to have contributed to the creation of the heavens and men. Every Lunar New Year, over 100,000 people gather at this idol to worship and bow down to this false god.

Prayer Points

Pray for God to raise up people of peace (Luke 10:6) who are sympathetic to the gospel and serve as mustard seeds (Matthew 13:31-32), to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the Zhuang.

Pray for every YouJiang Zhuang believer that they would witness and disciple others, and that every church would plant other churches, and that the YouJiang Zhuang would quickly become a Christian nation reaching out to its neighbors for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Pray for permission for foreigners and Guangxi Christians to live in this area.
Lianshan County is the only county of Guangdong that is home to people of the Zhuang nationality. Situated in the northwest of Guangdong Province, Lianshan was established in the year 506 AD, making the county over 1490 years old. There are both Yao and Han people living there that also speak their own languages and maintain a diverse way of life. Lianshan Zhuang customs are varied and compelling. Some examples are the custom of self-expression known as “striking up a tune three steps out the door,” unique and elegant Zhuang marriage customs, spirited and versatile bamboo pole and board-shoe dances, and the Zhuang maidens of the Shangsi Festival.

During the lunar New Year, the Lantern Festival showcases several of the dances, customs, performances and songs of the Lianshan Zhuang. There are distinctive and different festivals that occur later in the year such as the Zhuang plowing holiday, the Kai Gang festival and the Duan Wu Jie Festival which are popular happenings among the Lianshan Zhuang. This is an area where three rivers meet and three provinces have their borders. Here, one can smell the hot spices of Hunan, see the mountains and rivers of Guilin, and appreciate Guangdong all at the same time. Nature abounds and the forests are filled with tropical treasures such as banana trees and rattan bamboo. One of the unique hallmarks of this region are the bridges built by the Zhuang and the Yao people.

Three major enterprises that pioneer the region are lean pork, fruit, and Dongshan lamb. The rural areas, however, are quickly developing electrical power, concrete, minerals, lumber, and food processing enterprises. It is estimated there are 10,000 Christians in Liannan Yao Autonomous County, but not as many Zhuang believers as compared to Han. Over 81% of the families have an income of under 600 yuan ($88) a month, hence poverty is rampant in this region.

Prayer Points

Pray for these Christians that they may be effective witnesses to their people in spite of their poverty.

Pray for believers that have come to faith through a medical clinic and have been encouraged to be a part of the government-sponsored church.

Pray for a church planting movement specifically reaching the Lianshan Zhuang.
A worker heard of a Sha man who lay in the hospital dying of cancer. Taking a local believer with her, they rushed to the hospital. The man was in great pain and they did not know how much of the gospel story he was able to take in. After praying with him, they asked his grown daughter if she would like a Bible to read to him. She eagerly accepted.

A week later the worker felt prompted to call the daughter who informed her that her father had just passed away an hour ago. Not knowing how to respond, the worker asked if she would like her to come to the hospital. The daughter said yes. As the worker walked into the room, she saw the body all bagged up and the family waiting to carry the body to an awaiting vehicle. The daughter welcomed her with tears in her eyes. Grasping her hand, she whispered, “The book you gave me has been such an encouragement.”

Though the younger generation are mostly bilingual, many older adults only speak the language of Sha Zhuang. The people are friendly, hospitable, and maintain close-knit family relationships. Often households have four generations of family living under one roof. Not many Zhuang parents can afford to support their children’s education beyond junior high and some may not even place that high value on education. Medical concerns, lack of clean water, financial hardships, and educational access for children, are important needs in the villages.

As is true with other Zhuang living in rural areas, the Sha Zhuang are animistic. They believe there are spirits behind objects such as a specific large tree, rock, or a mountain in a village. They would seek to appease these spirits through sacrifices in order to resolve misfortunes, cure illnesses, or bring prosperity and good fortune. A local shaman, or spiritual leader, is consulted to assist with these matters. One of the customs they practice is that when a woman has just given birth, the family places leaves and a hat in front of the house to warn people not to enter in order to prevent bad luck.

Prayer Points

Pray for many Sha Zhuang that they would find Jesus through the written word and that there would be resources available in print or other media in the heart language of these people.

Pray for community development workers to come and help the Sha Zhuang with their physical as well as spiritual needs.

Pray for God to reveal himself to the Sha Zhuang as greater than all the spirits that they fear.
Southern Zhuang Language Groups
The area that the Yang Zhuang live in is known for its beautiful waterfalls, mountains and scenic tourist spots but it is also very animistic and people live in constant fear of evil spirits. For many centuries, Satan has held the Yang Zhuang in spiritual darkness and is not ready to surrender any of them without a fight. Here are some stories illustrating the extent the Evil One has on the Zhuang:

Every morning in front of a Christian leader’s home, a “crazy” woman begins ranting and raving in a language no one can understand.

In a village, the mother of a family recently became a Christian, but ever since her now deceased husband moved the bones of some of their ancestors several years ago, her children have displayed symptoms of demon possession and at times become so violent that they have to be locked up in their rooms.

An older village woman decided to follow Christ and a few days later she saw a vision where angels dressed in white came and had tea with her and told her that she didn’t need to worship idols now that she had decided to follow Jesus. She was amazed by the dreams but in the weeks to come, when her own children began to ridicule her, she decided to stop following Jesus.

The Yang Zhuang believe that if an owl hoots while perched on your house it means that death will come to your home within one day, unless you catch the owl. A brand-new Christian couple heard an owl hoot outside their home one night. They went outside to see where it was and to their horror, it was perched in their window. They were unable to catch the owl and their hearts sank when it flew off and then landed on their neighbor’s house. They were very afraid but remembered what they had learned about the power of prayer and poured out their hearts to God asking Him to protect them from death. The next day nothing happened to them, but that evening they found out that their neighbor fell from a construction site and died.

The best way to explain these events is simply spiritual opposition to the establishment of God’s kingdom in this area and the enemy’s desire to keep the Yang Zhuang fearing evil spirits and in bondage to superstitions.

Prayer Points

Pray for the triumph of Jesus and his power in spiritual happenings among the Yang Zhuang.

Pray for believers to be successful and effective in translating the Bible into this Zhuang language.
The Min Zhuang language area has been historically and remains until today, very tightly controlled by the government, perhaps because it shares a border with Vietnam. Many villagers here have poor health and suffer through difficult living conditions due to their isolation. In the past, a number of young house churches have experienced some significant persecution from the government because Christianity was relatively new to the area but recently the government has portrayed themselves as being more open and willing to help Christians.

Currently, there is only one known house church movement from other parts of China working in this area and no Christian media of any type has ever been translated into this language. Locals are needed in the Min dialect with gifting and experience in translation work. There are a handful of churches in this area and one of them has even reported success starting a new church in a village of a different ethnic group! This is not surprising when one remembers that the Zhuang are known to value friendship and harmony and thus often have good relationships with other minorities.

The Black Clothing Zhuang are also a part of this language area. They are famous for their shiny black handmade garments that they make from local fibers and natural dyes. The Black Clothing Zhuang have capitalized on bringing tourists to their area but it has also caused many of them to become addicted to alcohol and gambling, and susceptible to negative influences from outside. A strong and vital house-church movement that incorporates much of the Black Zhuang culture into their worship services and practices is needed so that Christianity will truly feel indigenous and “at home” among the Black Clothing Zhuang. Developing media resources that can help evangelize and disciple Min Zhuang in their own language can speed up the spread of new churches within this community.

Prayer Points

Pray for Christians to come and live out the Gospel by helping poor Min people to develop their economy and improve their dental and medical care.

Pray for relevant and effective media that can quickly be translated into this language and that it will be rapidly, effectively and boldly used to evangelize and disciple people.

Pray for Black Clothing Zhuang Christians to be shining lights among their people and that they would be fruitful in seeing many come to honor and follow Christ.
Early in our ministry among the Zhuang, we went out with a local friend to visit a believer in her village who was, at that time, the only Christian we knew in our area of 1.6 million people. Shortly after arriving, a door opened for us to share the Good News with her friend and family. As our stories about Jesus and the difference He made in our lives progressed, her friend was showing more and more interest in Jesus, but her family was growing more and more uneasy. In the middle of our gospel presentation, her father left the living room area, went out, grabbed some pork and incense, and came back to offer the pork to his ancestors. He was afraid that we might have offended his ancestors by talking about Jesus. So he offered up the food in the hopes that the ancestors wouldn’t become evil spirits that would give them bad luck and haunt them. Although the friend did receive Jesus as her personal Lord and Savior that day, we knew that the Enemy was alive and active, seeking to deceive anyone he could.

The Zuojiang Zhuang are often overlooked as a people group in need of the gospel. They do not have many distinguishing customs from the rural Han farmers and have been largely assimilated into Han culture. More workers are needed to bring the gospel to these people and the best ones to do that would be the Zuojiang Zhuang themselves. However, the believers don’t often make it a priority to meet regularly with other brothers and sisters. Their concept of worship is something that takes place only a few times a year, so the idea of weekly (or even bi-weekly) worship seems like too huge a commitment.

Generally speaking, they are hard working farmers who are warm, friendly, and inviting. I have been frequently welcomed as a stranger into their homes. Although farmers do grow corn, soybeans, peanuts, chili peppers, and some rice, the vast majority of farming is sugarcane. Because of the proximity to Vietnam, the area where the Zuojiang Zhuang live does have greater exposure to and drug problems than other areas. Many villagers gamble away what little they make.

Prayer Points

Pray for people of peace from the Zuojiang Zhuang who will partner with us in reaching their own people with the gospel.

Pray for believers among the Zuojiang Zhuang that would make it a priority to meet regularly with other brothers and sisters to worship and create a spirit of community.

Pray for the few Zuojiang Zhuang believers that they would become bolder in sharing their personal testimonies and the Creation to Christ story with others.
Today I spent time with a Yongnan Zhuang believer who was discouraged because none of his friends or family believe in Jesus. He often feels lonely and longs to fellowship with other believers. He often says things like, “Our Father is very big and He will take care of us.” There are only a handful of churches among the Yongnan Zhuang. We continued to share with his friends and family and prayed that God would open their hearts to understand who Jesus is and help them recognize their need for a savior like Jesus Christ!

The Yongnan Zhuang are primarily farmers that harvest sugar cane. Some of the biggest sugar cane factories in East Asia are found in their counties. Other farmers plant rice and corn. They are a poor people that live with poor sanitation, poor diet, and thus often have poor health. The younger generation is looking for a way to get out of the countryside and into the provincial capital which is nearby. Many of them live in fear of evil spirits. As a result of the difficulties of farming, the Yongnan Zhuang often struggle with poor health. Some villages we visited had many children that are malnourished. With a poor family unit, bad health, and lack of good teaching, the Yongnan Zhuang continue to be uneducated and are consequently left behind by the rest of the world.

They do desire for a better life, to be healthier, to have better agricultural practices, and believe in something that is true. But the pressures of the community and the culture around them make these desires simply that—desires. When a new idea is introduced, whether it be a new way to plant corn or the story of Jesus Christ, some Yongnan Zhuang feel that even though the old way may have its share of problems, they are at least familiar with it. These unmet desires lead to hopelessness and despair. As a result, the Yongnan Zhuang are trapped in the confines of centuries of doing things the same way just because the generation before them did it that way.

Prayer Points

Please pray that God will show this young believer and all of the Yongnan Zhuang just how big He is.

Pray that an oral Bible would get to the ears of the Yongnan Zhuang within the next three years.

Pray that the gospel would go directly to the farmers and a church planting movement would spread from village to village.
When Esther had first heard of Jesus she listened eagerly. Could there really be such a God that would still love her? She seemed ready to believe and just needed some people to follow up with her. Unfortunately, the workers in her area are few and although people may pray for her, little contact has been made as she has moved to a more distant, rural area.

Prayer Points

- Pray for translated Christian tools that will facilitate evangelism and help new believers to continue toward having Christ-centered families and lives.

- Pray for long-lasting discipleship that will greatly benefit the Dai Zhuang and in turn develop their own individual Christian communities.

- Pray for protection from wayward thinking, such as cult activities and other traditional rituals that impede their Christian growth.
Compared with the Zhuang in Guangxi, the Nong are quite traditional, with many women and girls still wearing the traditional clothing on a daily basis in the rural areas. The language also has less influence from Chinese than many other Zhuang languages. The Nong Zhuang pride themselves on hospitality and will open their homes to any visiting stranger and feed them with their best. The women enjoy producing beautiful embroidery, colorful woven plaid cloth and appliqué designs. For several thousand years, the Nong have practiced wetlands riziculture and water their terraced paddies with waterwheels and networks of bamboo piping. Other traditional agricultural tools include water- and foot-powered mortar and mallet-style mills. Certain Nong are gifted in singing and poetry and sing epic-length chanting songs at weddings and other festivals.

Most Nong Zhuang live their lives according to an animistic worldview. Professional mediums and ritual masters are consulted to help manipulate the spirits. Male priests study traditional forms of fortune-telling, such as chicken bone divination, while female spirit mediums invoke or chase away spirits to cure diseases.

Alcoholism is quite common, and heavy drinking of strong liquor is a core element of every Nong celebration. While the Nong are not as poor as some other minority groups, many rural families lack the finances to pay for school fees, medical care, farm equipment, or even seed for their crops. In some poor villages, people are still not adequately fed and in many areas the diet is not well-balanced, and consists of primarily rice, corn and pork fat. Ethics, including sexual mores, are still fairly traditional in the villages but when young people go to the big cities to work as unskilled labor, they fail to abstain from sexual activity and the young women often end up getting abortions.

Prayer Points
Pray for effective evangelism to occur among the Nong Zhuang and that true discipleship opportunities will also develop.

Pray for translated materials to help the Nong Zhuang identify with Christianity and in turn maintain Christ-centered marriages and families.

Pray for spiritual protection from the traditions that try to enslave the Nong Zhuang believers to turn to false gods and comforts.
Zhuang Cities and Special Topics
The people in Nanning are very friendly. They love to talk with you in almost any situation: on the bus, by the sidewalk, or standing in line to buy something. A significant percentage are from a variety of minority groups and this makes for a rich blend of cultural exchange in any group gathering. The newer generation are more homogenized, as in other large cities but here, they also retain much of the “warm climate” culture.

Though this city has many minorities, when people come here, they tend to drop their minority identity and assimilate. This generation is unique in having to deal with very rapid change while their worldview and way of thinking has not had a chance to change nor are there people they trust to help them adjust accordingly. There is really a lot to adjust to in such a short-time.

Communistic creeds are readily taught to the younger generation in schools, although most may not believe in them. They remain traditional in following the cultural “duties,” however, in terms of faith the younger generation do not have much. The middle-age and older generation do follow superstitious customs such as putting up incantations, setting off fire crackers for warding off spirits, etc. Despite this, it is clear that many are still searching for something, even looking to the media, or trying to move to the cities or being influenced by ideas outside their country.

Once, we were invited out to an orange orchard just outside the city. The land was basically all flat except for a very small hill. We walked to it to get a closer look and noticed some small holes. Each hole held an urn. We did not notice that our friends’ relative had stopped moving toward the hill. Upon returning he asked, “Are you now afraid of the spirits?” We quickly answered, “We are Christians and have the true God on our side. We are not afraid of anything other than disobeying our Lord.” He was taken aback. We trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to work on that family.

Prayer Points

Pray for people to develop a healthy view for their life pursuits away from materialism and superstition.

Pray for awareness of their needs for spiritual and personal healing that is only found in Jesus.

Pray for a sense of urgency among the believers in Nanning to reach the lost. Many other faiths are contending for the soul of the people.
In the past, Liuzhou was a walled city, a southern outpost that served as an exile colony for disgraced political officials. Many of the would-be exiles would rather commit suicide than face life in this forgotten part of China. The city got its name from one of these exiled officials who came here and instituted law and cultural reforms sometime around 800 A.D. He was a prolific poet and is much celebrated in local lore for his contributions toward “civilizing” this city.

These days the city is known as the industrial center of Guangxi Province, less prestigious than its provincial capital Nanning to the south, and the tourist mecca of Guilin to the north. Hopes are that the city will become the “Motown” of China with its emphasis on manufacturing steel, heavy equipment and automotive parts.

The people here are friendly and casual, but serious about “getting ahead.” Parents look for any opportunity to give their child an advantage in school in order to secure their child’s (and parents’) future. The people of Liuzhou are curious about foreigners and wonder why some would choose to live in this polluted city when China has so many other larger, more glamorous locations to offer.

Most believe that the quest for money, earnings and possessions will give meaning to their lives. Many also think that the Party is largely irrelevant, though jobs with either the Party or the military are highly coveted because of the high salaries and the extra perks. They are fairly superstitious and plan for their major life events to take place on certain “auspicious” days.

Liuzhou has been overlooked for many years, and for a while there was only one missionary family focused specifically on reaching the people of the city. Other workers have passed through and lived here while attending language school, but their work had been concentrated on the neighboring countryside with ethnic minorities that were considered unreached. Recently, this family found other indigenous believers who have a passion for reaching the lost of this city, so they are more encouraged in their work.

Prayer Points

Pray for church-planting efforts directed toward the medical community, educational establishment, business and factory communities, and the migrant/indigent population.

Pray for protection for local believers who share our vision of reaching this city with the gospel.

Pray for persons of peace within each of these communities who will welcome us and the good news.
The city of Baise is a training hub for teachers and medical workers among the Zhuang. It is the hottest spot in the province. To picture the city, imagine 100 degree temperatures, mango tree-lined streets, and old men fishing alongside its abundant waterways.

Coming out of the socialist education system, Baise residents usually claim to be atheists; however, many educated Zhuang still go to shamans, in their home villages, to receive future guidance for their families. City-dwellers give detailed attention to burning incense to their ancestors. In the suburban areas, at harvest time, farmers offer thanksgiving worship to ancestors and during the “San Yue San” festival, many make offerings to the first Zhuang ancestor and their creator idol, Buluotuo.

Compared to other areas of Guangxi, Baise officials are more restrictive and less tolerant of local or missionary Christian activities, perhaps due to the fact that the city is a center for “red tourism” and communist party leader Deng Xiao Ping’s historical rise to power. Nevertheless, sporadic foreign missionary activities continue to persevere, though the number of workers falls far short of what is needed to reach the three million people in all 12 counties of the Baise administrative district. Occasionally, Han Chinese missionaries, from more open areas of Asia, come to Baise to do community projects and supportive activities with the small government church in town. Some are quietly discipling during forays into the area.

There is a feeling of hopelessness in Baise, often conveyed through rampant gambling and drinking. Zhuang men are known for bonding through ritualized drinking games. One of the requirements expressed by bosses in job interviews is the ability to drink large quantities of distilled rice wine during banquets. Many men are out drinking four to five times a week, and their wives and children feel neglected at home. When asked to stop, men simply reply that there is no way out of the drinking situation that is connected so directly to their success at work.

Prayer Points

Pray for young Zhuang converts to resist the urge to leave the Baise area and stay on to share the gospel among their people.

Pray for government officials to re-evaluate their restrictive stance towards Kingdom growth.

Pray for a real movement of the Lord to begin among the thousands of students studying in Baise City.
Jessie looked at the staff person to whom she had introduced to a westerner and spoke sharply, “It is all right to be friends with foreigners, but one must not believe what they believe.” When these words were repeated through the grapevine to the westerner, she felt crushed and hurt. Jessie had been her tutor and had often sought her for counsel. Since Jessie was living with them, she felt it was best to ask Jessie to move so that she would not influence other staff. Jessie reluctantly moved out. A year passed.

Then Jessie returned to the westerner and explained that her life was in a mess. She knew now that she needed Jesus and was ready to become a child of God. A few months after receiving Jesus, she told her western friend that the year before, the secret police had approached her to be an informer for them. Fortunately, she had been asked to move out at the same time. Ironically, the secret police request had sparked her curiosity. What was there about this Jesus that caused some people to oppose him so much? This question eventually led to her finding Jesus to be true and worthy of her trust.

Now Jessie has become eager to share the gospel with her family. Her mother had two dreams. In one dream Jesus appeared to her and caused all the dark spirits which had been chasing her to be put to flight. In another dream she was overwhelmed by darkness. In her dream, she recalled someone telling her to call upon Jesus. She did and saw light overcome the darkness. So, recently she asked her husband if he would be opposed if she did not worship the ancestors during the upcoming ghost festival. He said she was free to choose.

Wenshan is the largest Zhuang populated city in Yunnan, with half the city ethnically Han Chinese, and the remaining half consisting of many ethnic minorities, including the Zhuang. Since the area was cut off from the rest of China for many years, security has been tight regarding the spread of the gospel because of fears that it will disrupt the social order. However, Bible translation and other materials are still needed in the local Wenshan Chinese dialect, their heart language, in order to spread the gospel among the Zhuang in Wenshan.

Prayer Points

Pray for the revelation of Jesus to families, not just individuals. We long to see whole families meet him.

Pray for more Christian gatherings to occur and that evangelism will spread throughout the city.

Pray for more materials in the local dialect to better reach the Zhuang in Wenshan City.
For the past ten years in China, there has been a stream of rural people migrating to large cities and finding work that pays much more than they will ever earn on the rural farms. The results of the last census show that there are 30 million people living in Shenzhen, a city across the border from Hong Kong, and of these, only 6 million are actually from that area. The remaining 24 million, are mostly rural people working in factories, and it is estimated that 250-300,000 of them are Zhuang, from villages in Guangxi.

Many of the young factory workers are women, and are preferred because their hands are smaller and more adept at putting small parts together or sewing garments. It’s a hard and lonely life, with most workers feeling they can only trust and depend on themselves. Factories usually provide a dorm where the workers live with eight or ten to a room and sleep on simple bunk beds. They also provide all meals and so it is not uncommon for them to only leave the factory once or twice a month. Work days are usually 12 to 14 hours, and there is heavy competition to work one’s way up from the basic assembly-line jobs. Most will send 50-70% of their income home to their families, and return to their villages each year at Chinese New Year bearing gifts.

There are hundreds of factories in Shenzhen owned by Christian businessmen from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and many of these want to provide a good working environment and share the gospel with their workers. A Tuesday night church service held in one of the factories last year was completely organized by the workers. After the worship time they divided the 50 people in attendance into small groups to pray for each other and answer questions about Christ. Several girls wept as they shared the difficulties they were having there and about their family back in the village. Another girl asked how she could become a Christian, and was immediately helped by two others who were new believers.

It was a wonderful experience of Christian love and sharing, but this is only a small fraction of the factories that would allow a church service held for the workers.

Prayer Points
Pray for more Christian factory owners who would become burdened to reach their workers for Christ.
Pray for Christian workers that would be compassionate and share the gospel with their coworkers.
Pray for Chinese believers to rise up to take the challenge of moving to these areas specifically to reach these millions of factory workers.
Culturally, ethnically and linguistically related to the Zhuang in Guangxi Province, the 3.9 million Bouyei are generally poor subsistence farmers living in remote mountain villages in the south and southwest of Guizhou Province. Typical Bouyei are hospitable, yet both shy and humble. Most have never even met, or even seen, foreigners. Many village women still wear traditional garments which are made by hand using a process of growing cotton, spinning thread, weaving cloth and dying it a deep dark blue. Most village men, on the other hand, dress similarly to Han Chinese.

Like the Zhuang, most Bouyei worship local “deities.” Worshiping the spirit of the oldest tree in the village is central to their spiritual lives. They usually depend on a local shaman as an intermediary between them and the spirits, and make decisions by consulting with him. Many Bouyei also worship their ancestors. Some, living in more urban areas, have embraced the atheism taught by the ruling party. There are a very few Bouyei Christians. Most of them have come to faith while working in the factories of far-off cities near the east coast. Both the Bouyei and Zhuang share many similar festivals and customs as well. Antiphonal singing of epic stories and histories, ballads, and match-making songs are often done during competitions. Five-colored rice is dyed and shared among the family along with special dances and games in order to commemorate special holidays and seasonal times. It is only during these family festivals that some of the relatively few Bouyei believers come home from their jobs in distant places to share the gospel with family and friends.

As the tourism industry grows in Guizhou, more and more Bouyei will come into contact with outsiders. Transportation and communication infrastructures are being improved. This is in contrast with the abysmally poor delivery systems for health care and education in most Bouyei areas. Illiteracy is rampant, especially among middle-aged and older villagers. The Bouyei language, with its three dialects, is widely spoken, but is read by virtually no one. There is no Scripture in the Bouyei language as they have not been taught to read it. No curriculum exists for non-Chinese speakers to learn to speak Bouyei.

Prayer Points

Pray for the authorities to turn a blind eye toward the Bouyei brothers and sisters who are trying to evangelize on their own to plant churches.

Pray for the Bouyei who are being trained in evangelism and reproducible church planting methods.

Pray for workers who are learning the Bouyei language and developing discipleship materials.
Further complicating the process of reaching all the Zhuang peoples with the gospel, are the five or more related people groups over the border from China who are spread across the northernmost provinces in Vietnam. The Nùng and the Tày are the largest of these groups numbering about 2.2 to 2.4 million when combined. Both are considered official nationalities in Vietnam and encompass a number of mutually unintelligible languages. The two nationalities are closely related, but the Zhuang in southern Vietnam, who migrated more recently are called the Nùng, whereas those who can claim a homeland there before the beginning of recorded Vietnamese history are classified within the Tày.

The Nùng and Tày both primarily support themselves from growing rice, growing orchard products or cultivating maize or sweet potato. The Nùng seemed to have retained more of their traditional culture than the Tày. Their traditional clothing is also dyed with indigo, just like the Black-Clothing Zhuang. They also have many stories and songs that strengthen their ethnic identity and make them less open to outside influence. Their talent for handicrafts such as making items from bamboo and rattan as well as weaving cloth, is an undeniable characteristic. The Tày, on the other hand, have special songs of courtship and in their culture, it is more common for Tày woman to wear long sarongs, like other peoples in Southeast Asia.

Most of the Tày adhere to spirit and ancestor worship and place an altar for their ancestors in a central location inside their homes. Historically animism was most popular, but over the years the influence from Chinese and Vietnamese cultures have affected some of their animistic rituals. The Nùng practice shamanism but their beliefs combine elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. They fear the spirit world and dread the consequences of angering the spirits. More research is needed to find out the many languages that are spoken within these two peoples and the best way to reach them with the gospel.

Prayer Points

Pray for workers to be sent to share the gospel to the Nùng and the Tày people.

Pray for culturally sensitive ways to communicate the gospel in a way that values their particular culture and language.

Pray for research to be done to find out more information on these groups and whether media tools that have been developed for the Zhuang in China could also be used to reach the Nùng and the Tày.
You should see the joy on our Chinese friend’s face last week when he bought his first livestock. This was a very unlikely turn of events, since he has just graduated from college. This is a man that should be going to find a job that will help him make as much money as he can. Instead he has given his heart to the Lord and dedicated himself for the purpose of helping see that the Zhuang are no longer a lost people.

Why would this college graduate buy animals? He has a desire to move to a village and tell the Zhuang about Jesus Christ. By learning better agricultural techniques, he has a reason to move there and teach local farmers these improved methods. This should help gain him trust in the community and provide him sufficient proximity and time with farmers in order to share with them the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ.

How will a city boy be able to help these farmers with practices that have been passed down for hundreds of years? These practices are time-consuming, whereas the new methods church planters are taught increase the farmers’ profits and amount of free time so they can share the gospel with other Zhuang people in return.

Since the Zhuang are already farmers, this is a lifestyle in which they are accustomed. If they can go and teach other farmers about Jesus Christ while also teaching them better farming practices, they can take hold of the gospel and the Zhuang can be responsible for reaching other Zhuang. People want to tell others about Jesus, and sometimes they need a little help establishing a livelihood to make this possible. We want to see church planters trained in improved agricultural techniques so that, like the apostle Paul, they will have a skill to support themselves as they tell people about their hope and a risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Prayer Points**

Pray for these church planters to be able to help others improve their quality of life while telling the story of Jesus Christ.

Pray for Zhuang farmers to have the patience to practice and understand these new agricultural techniques.

Pray that Zhuang farmers would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel appropriately in their own context and that God would open their hearts.
The other day, we went to visit a friend in her hometown and asked her two cousins if they wanted to spend the day with us. One of the girls answered, but the three-year-old didn’t respond to our questions. At first we thought she was shy, then we realized that she didn’t speak the national language. She only spoke the language of her village.

We had come to this 900-year-old village, situated on the banks of a large river, to share with our friend and her family the good news of Jesus Christ. It was a perfect day and we were excited to see how God would move, but what we experienced was shocking to us. As we tried to share, we didn’t expect to find such an incredible language barrier. We thought people would be proficient in the national language, but as we talked about the spiritual realm, they were not at all familiar with the words and sentences that we were using.

As believers in Jesus, we know that the best story is found in the Bible. The challenge is getting God’s story to this people who have no Biblical resources in their heart language. With more than 50 dialects spoken among the Zhuang, it is unrealistic for us to expect each Zhuang person to have a complete Bible that they can read and understand in the near future. At the same time, it is unacceptable to continue to see generation after generation pass away without any opportunity to hear of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This moves us to consider other options so that the Zhuang can hear and worship in the language God has created uniquely for them.

In the interim time, short Bible stories can be translated and used in culturally appropriate ways to express the core of the gospel. These stories can then be retold to friends and family. Other tools that can be utilized include short videos or audio resources that are produced in the Zhuang language that would move their hearts towards a Biblical worldview and a decision to follow Jesus Christ. We know that one day God will be worshipped for all eternity in each specific Zhuang language. Pray with us that the young girl we met in the village will be among those that are counted on that day.

Prayer Points
Pray for an increasing number of Zhuang believers that have the desire and time to translate Bible stories into their heart language.
Pray for God to reveal to those involved in translation and church planting among the Zhuang which stories should be used and what resources need to be developed.
Pray for not one more generation of Zhuang people to pass away without evangelistic and discipleship resources made available in every Zhuang language.

Zhuang Bible Storying