

Location: The Chinese census of 1982 listed 153,589 speakers of the Dongnu language in southern China. This makes Dongnu the largest language group among the Bunu people, who totaled 439,000 in 1982. The Dongnu inhabit a geographically widespread area across 15 counties in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and as far west as Funing County in southeastern Yunnan Province.

Identity: The official classification of the Dongnu is complicated. Dongnu is one of 12 distinct ethnolinguistic groups within the Bunu group. The Bunu, however, were not granted status as one of China's official minorities but were included as part of the Yao nationality, even though they are comprised of many different ethnic groups and languages. Even most of the Bunu groups, including the Dongnu, do not consider themselves related to other Bunu groups such as the Numao, Baonuo, Wunai and Younou. Because the Chinese government has effectively hidden these people groups, they tend "not to exist." The Dongnu, despite now numbering more than 200,000 people, have never before appeared in any Christian mission lists.

Language: The Dongnu language was originally listed as one of four "dialects" of the Bunao Bunu language by the Chinese, but further research has shown all four qualify as distinct, mutually unintelligible languages.¹ The confusion between dialects and languages is caused by

the Chinese term *fangyuan*, which they render as "dialects" but which are considered distinct languages in the Western sense. Dongnu is a language related to Miao and contains eight tones. Other Bunu languages have up to 11 tones. The Dongnu do not have their own orthography; however, some men and educated women can now read Chinese. In addition, many Dongnu now speak Northern Zhuang, having lost the use of their mother tongue.

History: The Dongnu live in an ethnically complex region. For centuries they have interacted with people from other minority groups such as the Yao, Miao, and Zhuang.

Customs: Dongnu women usually give birth in a hut that has been constructed away from the house. The placenta is saved and buried in a safe place in the forest. The Dongnu believe that when people die they will need to have their placenta in order for their ancestors to recognize them.

Religion: The religious belief system of the Dongnu contains elements of



Dwayne Graybill

animism, Daoism, and ancestor worship. Ancestors are worshiped down to the fourth generation. It is primarily the job of the oldest son to take care of the ancestral altar.

Christianity: Although they number more than 200,000 people, the Dongnu are without a single known church or Christian believer. Their ethnic, geographic, and linguistic isolation has caused a barrier to the introduction of the gospel. Most mission work in Guangxi prior to 1949 targeted the southern part of the province. Few outsiders have even heard of the Dongnu people. The Dongnu are one of the largest people groups in China without a single known Christian in their midst.



Population in China:
153,589 (1982)
233,800 (2000)
301,500 (2010)
Location: Guangxi, Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Dongnu

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Dong-noo"
Other Names: Tung-Nu, Beilou Yao, Basket-Carrying Yao
Population Source: 153,589 (1982 census); Out of a total Yao population of 2,134,013 (1990 census)
Location: *Guangxi:* Du'an, Bama, Dahua, Hechi, Yishan, Bose, Debao, Tiangang, Tiandong, Pingguo, Shanglin, Bingyang, Masha, Long'an, and Laibing counties; *SE Yunnan:* Funing County

Status: Officially included under Yao
Language: Hmong-Mien, Hmongic, Bunuic, Bunu
Dialects: 0
Religion: Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship, Daoism
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: BWX01

