

**Location:** Fifty-five thousand Huayao Tai were reported in a 1990 official Chinese government survey. They live in stockaded villages in the foothills of the mountains in Xinping and Mengyang counties in the southern part of Yunnan Province. The Huayao Tai live in simple flat-roofed adobe homes that are built flat on the ground, as opposed to the neighboring Tai Lu who build their wooden homes on stilts. Small numbers of Huayao Tai also live along the banks of the Honghe River in Yuanjiang County.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** Although the Huayao (Flower Belted) Tai are a part of the officially constructed Dai nationality in China, they desire to be recognized as a separate minority group. Their language shares some similarities to Tai Lu, but the two are reported to be mutually unintelligible.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the Huayao Tai were a Tai group who originally lived in eastern Yunnan and migrated to their present location in the Xishuangbanna Prefecture. All Huayao Tai are also able to speak Tai Lu, which serves as the *lingua franca* of the region. The Huayao Tai observe different festivals from the other Tai groups. They do not celebrate *Songkran*, the annual Water Splashing Festival.

**Language:** Most people erroneously believe *Huayao Tai* is a term used merely for social distinction within the Tai Lu, but Huayao Tai language and self-identity are strongly separate. Where they live near Tai Lu, their language seems to have changed to

accommodate communication with the Lu, but the speakers of more isolated Huayao Tai villages have great difficulty in communicating with other Tai speakers. Most Huayao Tai under the age of 40 are also able to speak and read Chinese.

**History:** The Huayao Tai are historically part of the great and ancient Tai race. One writer claimed that the Tai predate even the Chinese. "Gathered from Chinese and Burmese annals, as well as from their own, this history shows them to be older than the Hebrews or the Chinese themselves, to say nothing of such moderns as the Slavs, the Teutons or the Gauls."<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** Huayao Tai women are instantly recognizable by their huge circular hats. They also carry with them a small bamboo basket, containing needle and thread, cosmetics, or food. The distinctive dress of the Huayao Tai differs from one area to another, "by variations in their dress and the ornaments which they wear."<sup>4</sup> The Huayao Tai celebrate the annual Flower Street Festival.<sup>5</sup>



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**Religion:** The Huayao Tai practice a mixture of Theravada Buddhism and animism. "Animism in its Tai form ranges from the worship of natural forces... to include the practice of shamanism, sorcery and black magic."<sup>6</sup>

**Christianity:** A small number of Huayao Tai believers live in Mengyang County. In recent years evangelists have been active among them, establishing several house churches. Few Huayao Tai outside of Mengyang have heard of Christ. The Huayao Tai believers use the Tai Lu and Chinese Scriptures. Gospel recordings have recently been produced in the Huayao Tai language.



**Population in China:**  
55,000 (1990)  
70,000 (2000)  
89,200 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Buddhism  
**Christians:** 200

## Overview of the Huayao Tai

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Hwa-yaow-Tie"  
**Other Names:** Hwayao Dai, Flowery Belt Dai, Flowery Waist Dai, Color Belt Dai  
**Population Source:** 55,000 (1990 official figure); Out of a total Dai population of 1,025,128 (1990 census)  
**Location:** SW Yunnan: Mengyang, Yuanjiang, and Xinping counties  
**Status:** Officially included under Dai

**Language:** Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai, East Central, Northwest  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Theravada Buddhism, Animism, Christianity  
**Christians:** 200  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** Hua Yao Dai #04795  
Hua Yao Gasa #04941  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None

