

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 on the ground, as opposed to the wooden homes of the neighbouring Lu that are built on stilts. Small numbers of Huayao Tai also live along the banks of the Honghe River in Yuanjiang County.<sup>1</sup>

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>2</sup> Although the Huayao (Flowery 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 Lu, but the two are reported to be mutually unintelligible.<sup>3</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

but the Huayao Tai language and self-identity are strongly separate from those of all other groups.

Huayao Tai women are instantly recognizable because of their huge circular hats. They also carry small bamboo baskets 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> One of the greatest festivals of the Huayao Tai calendar is the annual Flower Street festival.<sup>5</sup>

The Huayao Tai practise a mixture of Theravada Buddhism and animism. Buddhism is more prevalent in locations where the Huayao Tai have been influenced by their Lu neighbours, although few Huayao Tai villages have Buddhist temples. Shamans are also consulted on special occasions. They pray and chant to the tree god, asking for protection from floods and pestilence, and to be bestowed with good luck and prosperity for the coming year.<sup>6</sup>

A small number of Huayao Tai Christians 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 Lu and Chinese Scriptures. Gospel recordings have recently been produced in the Huayao Tai language.



Paul Hattaway

Huayao Tai are also able to speak Lu, which serves as the lingua franca of the region.

Many people mistakenly believe that the term *Huayao Tai* merely represents a social distinction within the Lu,



**Population:**  
70,000 (2000)  
89,200 (2010)  
109,900 (2020)

**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Theravada  
**Christians:** 200

## Overview of the Huayao Tai

**Other Names:** Hwayao Dai, Flowery Belt Dai, Flowery Waist Dai, Color Belt Dai

### Population Sources:

55,000 in China (1990, official Chinese government figure)

**Language:** Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Northwest

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 55%

**Practising Buddhists:** 25%

**Christians:** 0.2%

**Scripture:** none

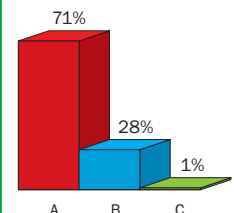
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Hua Yao Dai, Hua Yao Gasa

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

## Status of Evangelization



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to some form of Christianity