



**Population in China:**  
 6,500 (1982)  
 9,890 (2000)  
 12,750 (2010)  
**Location:** Guizhou  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Rao

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** "Raow"

**Other Names:** Raojia, Yao Miao, Yao Bei Miao, Yaojia, Shui Gelao

**Population Source:**  
 6,500 (1982 *Minzu Shibie Wenxian Ziliao Huibian*);  
 7,000 (1997 D. Graybill)

**Location:** SE Guizhou: Duyun and Majiang counties

**Status:** The Rao in Duyun have been officially included under Bouyei, while the Rao in Majiang have been officially included under Yao since 1991. The Rao were included in a group of *Undetermined Minorities* in the 1982 census.

**Language:** Hmong-Mien, Hmongic, Eastern Hmongic

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Animism, Polytheism, Ancestor Worship, No Religion

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** None



Dwayne Graybill

**Location:** Approximately 10,000 members of the Rao tribe are located in Guizhou Province. More than 4,000 live in six large villages in the Long Shan (Dragon Mountains) in Majiang County, west of Kaili City.<sup>1</sup> A further 2,454 Rao live in 21 villages in Duyun County to the south of Majiang.<sup>2</sup> The largest Rao villages in Duyun are Yako (356 Rao people), Ping (311), Xiao (215), Wan (181), and Zhahe (172).<sup>3</sup> Most Rao communities are isolated, set back into the mountains a few hours' walk from the nearest road. The Chinese characters for Guizhou mean "precious state." However, the original name for the region was *Kingdom of Demons*.<sup>4</sup>

**Identity:** The official classification of the Rao is a confusing matter. They are not recognized as a distinct group by the Chinese authorities, who have placed them as part of two other minority groups. The Rao in Majiang County have been officially included as part of the Yao nationality since 1991,<sup>5</sup> while those in Duyun, about 100 kilometers (62 mi.) to the south of Majiang, have been counted as part of the Bouyei nationality. Before 1949 the Rao in Majiang used another name, which meant "sudden death."<sup>6</sup>

**Language:** The Rao language is a part of the Miao linguistic family. Sixty percent of

Rao vocabulary reportedly consists of Miao words.<sup>7</sup> The Rao speak a language distinct from any others in the area. One study has discovered that Rao is close to the Hmu language in Guizhou.<sup>8</sup>

**History:** The Rao claim to have migrated from Yunnan long ago. They say they were a Yao group who separated and gradually formed their own ethnic identity.<sup>9</sup> During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) the Rao were repeatedly attacked by the Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

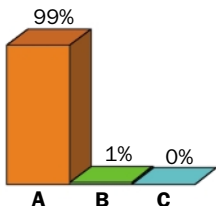
**Customs:** The Rao are hardworking peasants. The medical care in rural Guizhou is the worst in China. United Nations

figures show the ratio of health workers to rural population is 1:1263. The next worst area in China is Xinjiang with a ratio of 1:752.<sup>11</sup> Every November the Rao hold a winter festival where they remember their customs and acknowledge their uniqueness as a people. Each Rao village consists of members of the same family name. Rao are only permitted to marry within their own clan. Single women wear an embroidered headdress; but once they are married they wear black or dark blue headdresses.

**Religion:** In the past the Rao were animists, but they were forced to discontinue all spiritual practices during the antireligious campaigns of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

**Christianity:** The Rao are a relatively untouched people group. They have never had a single known Christian believer, and no more than a relative handful are aware of the existence of Jesus Christ. There are no Scriptures or gospel recordings available in their language. The person privileged to take the gospel to the Rao will need the tenacity of Samuel Zwemer, who stated, "Frequent set-backs and apparent failure never disheartened the real pioneer. Occasional martyrdoms are only a fresh incentive. Opposition is a stimulus to greater activity."<sup>12</sup>

### Status of Evangelization



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Were evangelized but did not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to any form of Christianity