

**Location:** Approximately 11,000 Tai Kao live on the banks of the Honghe River in Jinping County in the southern part of Yunnan Province. Jinping borders Vietnam where approximately 200,000 Tai Kao live — a similar number to the Tai Kao population in northern Laos. Small Tai Kao refugee communities are also found in France and the United States.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** Although the Tai Kao are part of the official Dai nationality in China, they possess their own spoken and written language and are fiercely proud of their distinct ethnic identity. Their name *Tai Kao* means “white Tai.”

**Language:** Tai Kao is part of the Southwestern Tai language family, which also includes Tai Lu and Tai Dam. One linguist notes that there are 190,000 speakers of Tai Kao in Vietnam, and that the language is also spoken in southern China. “Speakers who have had prolonged contact with Tai Dam [Black Dai] have become bilingual in it.”<sup>2</sup> A Tai Kao dictionary has been compiled by J. Donaldson.

**History:** The majority of the Tai race in north China lived farther to the north prior to the thirteenth century, when invading Mongol armies pushed the Tai into southern China. Some groups — such as the Tai Kao, Tai Dam, and Red Tai — moved from Guangxi into Yunnan Province and farther south into Vietnam and Laos.<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** The Tai Kao live in compact communities along the Honghe River. Most are engaged in agriculture and fishing.

**Religion:** The animistic Tai Kao have never converted to Buddhism. They “have a number of statues and altars... to the spirit of the soil, to the tiger god, and to Tan Sin and Kouan-Yin, local heroes now deified by the White Tai.”<sup>4</sup> Unlike most people in this region, the

Tai Kao believe in a sovereign, supreme god who is active in their lives. “One of their legends states that their ancestors emerged from a pumpkin in which they had taken refuge during a divinely decreed flood that drowned all the other inhabitants of the earth because of their wickedness.”<sup>5</sup>

**Christianity:** Despite the availability of weekly gospel radio broadcasts and Scripture portions in the Tai Kao language since 1969, few have shown any interest in Christianity. They have been described as “the most unreached of all the Tai groups.”<sup>6</sup> Little has changed since the 1920s,



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when missionaries in the region outlined their strategy for reaching the branches of the Tai in southern China: “We are not deaf to the call to plant and preach over the whole world; not among certain promising races only, nor alone in coastwise provinces. Neither do we put much reliance in the project to have the Chinese Christian assume entire responsibility for the evangelization of this disgracefully big unoccupied territory in Southwest China. There is too much racial antipathy. Chinese, unless under foreign guidance, will ever patronize the Tai... and the Tai are as proud as the Chinese and resent being either abused or patronized.”<sup>7</sup>

**Population in China:**  
 10,000 (1995)  
 11,350 (2000)  
 14,500 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Tai Kao

**Countries:** Laos, Vietnam, China, France, USA  
**Pronunciation:** “Tie-Kaow”  
**Other Names:** White Tai, Dai Kao, Thai Trang, Tai Don, Tai Kaw, Tai Blanc, Tai Lai, Tai Khao, Tai D  
**Population Source:** 10,000 (1996 B. Grimes – 1995 figure); Out of a total Dai population of 1,025,128 (1990 census); 200,000 in Laos (1995 AMO); 190,000 in Vietnam (1984); Also in France, USA  
**Location:**  
 S Yunnan: Jinping County

**Status:** Officially included under Dai  
**Language:** Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Animism, Polytheism  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** Portions 1969; Work in progress  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** White Tai #04322  
**Christian Broadcasting:** Available (FEBC)  
**ROPAL code:** TWH00

