

Tai Nua



Population:

135,600 (2000)
172,800 (2010)
212,900 (2020)

Countries: China

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 20

Overview of the Tai Nua

Other Names: Dai Nuea, Tai Nuea, Paiyi, Tai Nue, Tai Nu, Dai Na

Population Sources:

100,000 in China (1987, D Bradley)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 50%

Practising Buddhists: 20%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

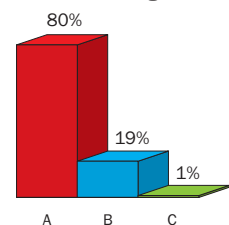
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TDD

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

There is a great deal of confusion regarding the names used to classify the various Tai groups in China. Many publications call the Tai in the Dehong Prefecture *Tai Nua*, a name meaning 'northern Tai'. The Tai in Dehong are profiled in this book under the name *Tai Mao*, according to the classification of linguist David Bradley, who says that 'The Tai Nua or "Northern Tai" live in south-western Yunnan along river valleys; they number about 100,000.'¹ Those

groups in Laos and Thailand who call themselves *Tai Nua* have also been included as *Tai Mao*. The Tai Nua discussed here are a group found only in Yunnan Province in China.²

The confusion of names is caused partly by 'the

Chinese tendency to group languages together into nationalities, exemplified by the Dai nationality, which includes all the Southwestern Tai languages of China'.³ Linguists have pointed out that Tai Nua is 'a name given to at least two quite different south-western branch groups'.⁴ Indeed, Tai Nua, Tai Mao and Shan are on one hand distinct, and yet they are also related! It is difficult to determine where one language stops and the other starts. The situation is not black and white, but one vernacular gradually evolves into another.

After a Tai Nua wedding ceremony, the bridegroom goes to live with his bride's family. Traditionally he must take with him gifts of tea, rice, meat, bananas, four eggs and two salted fish for his new in-laws. Upon arrival, the village elder takes the packets

of tea and rice out to the road and calls on the spirits of heaven and earth to witness the marriage. He then ties a white thread around the wrist of the bride seven times, and once around the wrist of the groom, to indicate their unbreakable commitment to each other.⁵

Although they are nominally Theravada Buddhists, the Tai Nua have mixed many aspects of animism and polytheism into their beliefs. The very first Tai god was

Shalou, the god of hunting. 'Before a hunt, sacrifices were . . . offered to Shalou to avert danger and to ensure success in the hunt.'⁶ Buddhism has less of a grip on the Tai Nua than it does on the Tai Mao north-west of them in the Dehong Prefecture, or on the Lu who live south of them. The Tai Nua region has fewer temples and monasteries, and the main connection

many Tai Nua have to Buddhism is through the observance of Buddhist rites at births, weddings and funerals.

There are just a few known Christians among the Tai Nua. Very little outreach is presently focused on bringing the gospel to them. Part of the problem is that visitors often struggle to see the difference between the Tai Nua and local Han Chinese, as many of those living near towns have become assimilated. Little improvement in the spiritual condition of the Tai Nua has taken place since the 1920s when one missionary lamented, 'There is not a missionary working south of Kunming to Mohei. . . I am here alone and my little candle is the only light. Yet in these mountains are thousands of tribes-men who have never heard of the Gospel.'⁷



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