



Population in China:
 66,000 (1987)
 89,500 (2000)
 114,000 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Animism
Christians: 200

Overview of the Tai Pong

Countries: China

Pronunciation: “Tie-Pong”

Other Names:

Pong, Dai Pong, La, You

Population Source:

100,000 (1987 D. Bradley);¹
 Out of a total Dai population of
 1,025,128 (1990 census)

Location: *S Yunnan:* Along the Honghe River valleys, including Jinping County

Status: Most are officially included under Dai, while some have been included under Zhuang.

Language:

Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai

Dialects (2): La, You

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

Christians: 200

Scripture: None

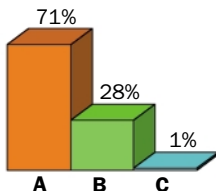
Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: TDD02

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

Location: Various subgroups comprising the Tai Pong language group live in a widely scattered area along the banks of the Honghe River in the southern extremity of Yunnan Province. The Honghe River changes its name to the Red River once it crosses into Vietnam. No speakers of Tai Pong are reported there. Linguists say Tai Pong is spoken “by as many as 100,000 speakers.”² This figure includes the 34,000 members of the Ya ethnic group who have been profiled separately in *Operation China*.

Identity: The official classification of the Tai Pong is confusing. Most Tai Pong have been included in the Dai nationality by the Chinese government, but others have been included under the Zhuang.³ In addition, there are various subgroups among the Tai Pong — such as the La and the You — which may qualify as distinct ethnolinguistic

groups. Little research has been conducted into the relatively obscure Tai Pong.

Language: Linguist David Bradley states that the Tai Pong use “an Indic orthography, the furthest northeast example, and is composed of a variety of named subgroups along the rivers of south-eastern Yunnan. From north to south, these include Tai La, Tai You and Tai Ya (with further subgroups Tai Ka and Tai Sai). A few of the Zhuang nationality in Yunnan form part of Tai Pong, but most are [members of the] Dai nationality.”⁴

History: Records of contact between the Tai and the Chinese date back to 109 BC when Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty established the Yizhou Prefecture in present-day southern China. The Tai sent tribute to the Han Court at Luoyang and also sent musicians and acrobats to entertain the emperors. The Han Court

gave the title “Great Captain” to the Tai chief.⁵ The Tai Pong have lived along the Red River for centuries. They use the same script as the Tai Dam and Tai Kao, which suggests historical kinship between these different groups.

Customs: Many of the Tai Pong are indistinguishable from the local Chinese and Hani, alongside whom they have lived for many generations. Most Tai Pong no longer wear traditional clothing, nor do they celebrate any of their own historical festivals.

Religion: Because the Tai Pong live at the eastern extremity of the Tai groups in China, they did not come under the influence of Theravada Buddhism when it first arrived from India. They have retained their polytheistic and shamanistic practices, although many of the younger generation of Tai Pong are nonreligious and consider themselves atheists.

Christianity: There are a small number of Christians today among the Tai Pong. Mission activity among them was already underway in 1919. In 1945 missionary John Kuhn joyously reported his visit to a mission station among the Tai Pong: “I shall never forget the Red River Valley. At Mocha I attended the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of the Shan [Tai] church and school there.”⁶ Presently, however, the majority of Tai Pong have yet to receive a clear gospel witness. The small number of known Tai Pong believers are concentrated in one or two areas.



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