

Location: A 1985 publication reported the Ake to have a population of “not more than 1,000 people.”¹ In 1996 researcher Dwayne Graybill counted 900 Ake, including 95 families living in three villages of Menghai County with additional Ake living in Jinghong County.² Both counties are located in Xishuangbanna Prefecture, the most ethnically diverse region in all of China. Small numbers of Ake also live in Laos, Myanmar, and northern Thailand.

Identity: Not to be confused with the large Akha group who live in the same area of China, the Ake are a small, distinct tribe. The Chinese in 1985 listed the Ake in a list of groups “yet to be identified and classified.”³ More than ten years later this situation remains the same. The Ake were also included on a list of groups which “need further investigation.”⁴ The Ake view themselves as totally different from all other minorities even though their genealogies show they were once related to the Akha.⁵

Language: The Ake language is a member of the Bi-Ka branch of Tibeto-Burman, related to Biyo, Kado, and Enu.⁶ The Ake claim to have once possessed a written script prior to their migration from Mintang, an area in central Yunnan Province, to their present location in southern Yunnan.

History: The Ake claim a history going back at least 20 generations. The names on the Ake ancestral tree are handed down orally from generation to generation. Until recently, slash-and-

burn agricultural techniques were common practice among the Ake; they relocated their villages every few years after exhausting the land. Malaria often had free rein among the Ake, decimating their population and causing havoc to entire communities.

Customs: The Ake lived in a very isolated society until recently. They kept records and reminders by carving notches on wood, tying knots on rope, or counting beans. Ake frequently intermarry with other minorities, a practice which has kept their population low. Marriages are only allowed to take place between January and April each year. Ake are frequently seen selling pans and brooms at the marketplace. Those who remain in the villages grow rice, tea, and sugarcane.

Religion: When asked what they believe, most Ake will say they do not have a religion. In practice, the majority worship their ancestors. They also attempt to live at peace with nature and the spirits which they believe control their communities. An increasing number of Ake youth are becoming atheists and do not feel the need to continue the practices of their parents.



Dwayne Graybill

Christianity: Few Ake have ever heard the gospel, and they did not comprehend the meaning of the word when asked if they had ever heard the name of Christ. Despite their ignorance, the Ake appear quite receptive to Christianity. The nearest Christian communities to the Ake are among the Tai Lu and Han in Jinghong, but up to this point the church there has not reached out to the Ake. Most mission agencies and research ministries have never heard of the Ake, and little prayer has ever gone up to the throne of God on behalf of this completely unevangelized and needy people group.⁷



Population in China:
 900 (1996)
 1,000 (2000)
 1,290 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Ancestor Worship
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Ake

Countries: Laos, China, Myanmar, Thailand
Pronunciation: “Ah-ker”
Other Names: A-ke, Akeu, A-k’o, Ako, Akui, Keu
Population Source: 900 (1996 D. Graybill); 2,000 in Laos (1995 L. Chaze); Also in Myanmar and Thailand
Location: SW Yunnan: Xishuangbanna: Menghai, and Jinghong counties; Also in Myanmar and Thailand

Status: Counted in census as an *Undetermined Minority*
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Southern Lolo, Akha, Hani, Bi-Ka
Dialects: 0
Religion: Ancestor Worship, Animism, No Religion
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

