



Midge Conner

**Location:** More than 4,000 members of the Rumai De'ang group live in Longchuan and Ruili counties, in the farwestern part of China's Yunnan Province.<sup>1</sup> In 1977 more than 135,000 Rumai were reportedly living in Shan State, northern Myanmar.<sup>2</sup>

**Identity:** The Rumai have been combined with the Pale, Shwe, and Riang groups in China to form the official De'ang nationality. Each group speaks its own language and wears a different style of traditional dress, although all the groups acknowledge a common ancestry.

**Language:** The Rumai language contains four tones. It has been influenced by the Shan and Tai Mao languages more than the other three De'ang

varieties in both China and Myanmar. Rumai is not intelligible with either the Pale or Shwe De'ang languages. Speakers must revert to either Chinese or Tai Mao to communicate with each other.

**History:** The De'ang claim to be the original inhabitants of northern Myanmar. Historical evidence does little to dispute their assertions. Before they migrated to Myanmar, the ancestors of the De'ang were reportedly settled in communities along the Nujiang River in northwest Yunnan as early as the second century BC.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese claim the De'ang have been living in China continuously for more than two thousand years. Many of the current communities of De'ang in China, however, are almost certainly

descended from small groups who migrated back into China earlier this century to escape military campaigns launched by the British against insurgents in northern Burma (Myanmar).

**Customs:** The Rumai De'ang celebrate many of the festivals of their Tai and Shan neighbors, including *Songkran*, the Water-Splashing Festival which takes place every April. The De'ang have a traditional drum called the *gelengdang* which is made from a hollowed tree trunk. Its ends are covered with ox-hide. Before using it, "it is filled with water through a hole in its body to make the ox-hide and inside of the drum damp so that the desired resonance can be produced."<sup>4</sup>

**Religion:** Despite their conversion to the Theravada sect of Buddhism many centuries ago, the De'ang retain many of their pre-Buddhist animistic and shamanistic rituals. Many Buddhist monks are also the village witch doctors. They enter trances in order to contact the spirit world. The De'ang believe they should strive to do good works to gain merit for the next life.

**Christianity:** Like most Theravada Buddhists, the De'ang believe fate predetermines the events of their lives. This results in them having little concern about changing their ways. Their consciences have long been silenced regarding sin. There are no known Christians among the Rumai in either China or Myanmar. There are no Scriptures, gospel recordings, or *Jesus*

film available in their language, and no Christian organizations are known to be targeting them.



**Population in China:**

3,600 (1990)  
4,640 (2000)  
5,990 (2010)

**Location:** Yunnan

**Religion:** Buddhism

**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Rumai De'ang

**Countries:** Myanmar, China

**Pronunciation:** "Deh-ung-Roo-mai"

**Other Names:** Palaung Rumai, Humai, Ruomai, Rumai

**Population Source:**

3,600 (1990 J.-O. Svantesson); Out of a total De'ang population of 15,462 (1990 census); 135,400 in Myanmar (1977 Voegelin & Voegelin)

**Location:** *W Yunnan:* Longchuan and Ruili counties

**Status:**

Officially included under De'ang

**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Palaungic, Eastern Palaungic, Palaung

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:**

Theravada Buddhism, Animism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** RBB00

