

**Location:** The Riang tribe, also known as the *Riang Liang*, inhabit parts of Zhenkang and Baoshan counties in the Dehong Prefecture, in China's Yunnan Province. One source listed a 1990 population of 1,200 Riang in China,<sup>1</sup> but a 1995 figure indicated a Riang population of 3,000.<sup>2</sup> In addition, as many as 50,000 Riang live in northern Myanmar. The most recent population estimate was done by a missionary in 1955. He estimated there were 25,000 Riang in Myanmar at that time. All population statistics from Myanmar are highly unreliable. The last census was conducted by the British in the 1930s. The present Myanmar regime is unwilling to conduct a new census, probably because the results could inflame the many ethnic tensions that exist in that troubled nation.



Paul Hattaway

serpent-god) and a spirit.<sup>4</sup>

**Customs:** The Riang's belief in the above legend can be observed today in the dress of their women. "From their early teens, the women wear 40 or 50 cane hoops apiece, one resting upon another to a depth of a foot around their hips. The undulating movement when they walk resembles a snake's motion."<sup>5</sup>

**Identity:** The Riang, who have been officially counted as part of the De'ang nationality in China, have been known by several names in the past. The British mistakenly called them the *Black Karen* because of their appearance, but the Riang have no ethnolinguistic relationship with the Karen. The Riang are not related to the identically named Riang group in India and Bangladesh.

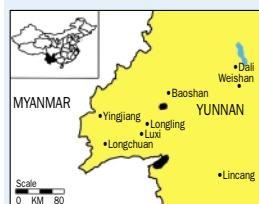
**Language:** Riang is the most divergent of the four De'ang languages in China. They cannot communicate with any of the other three De'ang language groups. This is mainly because they are animists, while the other three groups are Buddhists and their languages have

therefore been influenced by Buddhist terms. All Riang are bilingual in Shan or Tai Mao. In Myanmar the Riang use a Roman script.

**History:** The Riang in Zhenkang County are the only De'ang group that retains features of the ancient clan and village commune system that used to prevail. In the past, Tai landlords controlled all the land in the area. Strict demarcation lines were clearly signposted between different villages and plots of land. Stone posts can still be seen today in the fields of Zhengkang.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally the Riang and other De'ang groups believe their first ancestor, Phu Sawti, was hatched from a serpent's egg — the result of a union between a Naga (female

**Religion:** The Riang are the only De'ang group who have never embraced Theravada Buddhism. The majority of Riang today are animists. They believe spirits live in objects of nature and must be placated before peace can be experienced in their communities.

**Christianity:** Missionaries worked among the Riang in Myanmar until they were expelled from the country in 1962. The Gospel of Mark was translated into Riang in 1950. Few members of this tribe have responded to the offer of salvation, however, and today there are no known churches among the Riang in either Myanmar or China.



**Population in China:**  
 1,200 (1990)  
 1,540 (2000)  
 1,990 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Riang

**Countries:** Myanmar, China

**Pronunciation:** "Ree-ung"

**Other Names:** Riang Liang, Yang Sek, Yang Wan Kun, Yin, Yanglam, Black Karen, Black Yang

**Population Source:**  
 1,200 (1990 J.-O. Svantesson);  
 Out of a total De'ang population of 15,462 (1990 census);  
 20,000 in Myanmar (1955)

**Location:** *W Yunnan:* Zhenkang and Baoshan counties

### Status:

Officially included under De'ang

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

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Animism, Shamanism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** Portions 1950

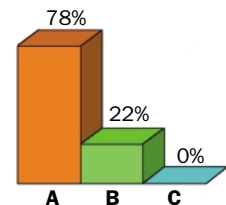
**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** RIL00

### 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