



Population in China:

444,000 (1986)
 614,300 (2000)
 782,600 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Buddhism
Christians: 2,000

Overview of the Tai Lu

Countries: China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, USA, Vietnam

Pronunciation: "Tie-Leuu"

Other Names: Pai-i, Shui Pai-i, Lue, Lu, Dai Lu, Ly, Xishuangbanna Dai, Sipsongpanna Dai, Shui Dai

Population Source:
 550,000 (1986 T'ien Ju-K'ang);¹
 Out of a total Dai population of 1,025,128 (1990 census);
 200,000 in Myanmar (1981 SIL);
 119,100 in Laos (1995 census);
 78,000 in Thailand (1993);
 4,000 in USA (1998);
 3,684 in Vietnam (1989 census)

Location in Yunnan:
 Xishuangbanna Dai Prefecture

Status:
 Officially included under Dai

Language: Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai, East Central, Northwest

Dialects: 0

Religion: Theravada Buddhism, Animism, Christianity

Christians: 2,000

Scripture: New Testament 1933 (Reprinted 1996); Portions 1921

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: Lu #01147

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: KHBO0

Location: More than 600,000 Tai Lu live in Xishuangbanna Prefecture in the extreme southwestern corner of China. Researchers vary on the population of the Tai Lu, with estimates ranging from 250,000² to 770,000.³ Because Tai Lu varieties are spoken in a diverse area, population estimates are "especially precarious."⁴ Xishuangbanna is a transliteration of the Tai name, *Sip-Song-Pan-Na*, which means "twelve thousand rice fields." The Tai Lu are also located throughout Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar. Massive deforestation and rapid population growth have virtually destroyed the ecology of Xishuangbanna.⁵

Identity: The Tai Lu are part of the official Dai nationality in China. Although the name "Tai" is said with a "t" sound, the Chinese pronounce it as "Dai." One early missionary described them in unflattering terms: "The Lu impressed me as less civilized as any Tai people I had ever met. They are less polite and deferential, more talkative, even rude in their manners. But they are less timid, more sturdy, more hospitable, more receptive."⁶

Language: The Tai Lu possess an ancient script, still used by Buddhists in the region. This profile refers to the Shui (Water) Dai in China who speak a different language from the Han Tai and Huayao Tai.

History: By the ninth century AD, the Tai Lu had a well-developed agricultural system. They used oxen and elephants to till the land

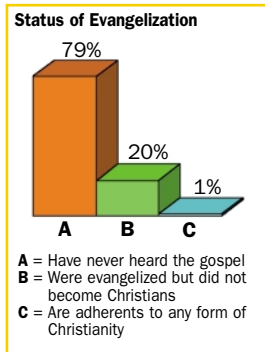
and constructed extensive irrigation systems.⁷

Customs: Each year the Tai Lu celebrate the Songkran Festival, when people splash water over each other, symbolizing the cleansing of sin from the previous year and a fresh start for the new year.

Religion: The Tai Lu are Theravada Buddhists. They believe that if they live good lives they will be reborn into a higher social position, but if they are wicked they will come back as degraded animals.⁸ At certain times the Tai Lu pay homage to the spirits of those who have contributed greatly to the well-being of their descendants. "Sacrifices are offered to the spirits [and] the village is shut in on itself; all roads and tracks giving access to the community are blocked with barricades of trees and branches... the whole village is encircled with ropes made of straw or a line of white cotton thread, to represent

symbolically an encircling wall preventing entry or exit. No outsiders of any description, not even monks or members of the elite ruling class, are permitted to attend these rites."⁹

Christianity: Not just physical barriers but also spiritual blockages exist among the Tai Lu. They have proven to be relatively resistant to the gospel. Presbyterian missionary Daniel McGilvary and his coworkers first ventured into Tai Lu territory in 1893 — riding elephants north from their base in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand — and shared the Gospel wherever they went.¹⁰ The first Tai Lu church was formed in the early 1920s. Persecution against the new believers forced them to construct their own village, Bannalee, which remains Christian today. The Tai Lu New Testament was first translated in 1933 and reprinted in 1992 and 1996 for Tai Lu believers in China and Myanmar.¹¹



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