

BOUYEI

The 1989 Vietnam census listed a total of only 1,420 Bouyei people in northern Vietnam (where their name is officially spelt *Bo Y*). Approximately three million Bouyei live in southern China, where they are the 10th largest of that nation's official minority groups. In Vietnam the Bouyei live in two main communities. In Ha Giang Province they still retain their own language, which is a member of the Tai linguistic family. In Lao Cai Province, however, the Bouyei now use Mandarin Chinese. Small numbers of Bouyei also live in the provinces of Yen Bai and Tuyen Quang.

The Bouyei in Lao Cai claim to have migrated to Vietnam about 250 years ago to escape oppression by their Chinese landlords. Their search for a

new life outside China may have been expedited by the 1797 Nanlang Rebellion when thousands of Bouyei were burned at the stake.

Although the Bouyei have been granted status as a distinct people group in Vietnam, linguists have determined that their language is basically the same as the *Giy* minority group.⁴

The Bouyei prefer to build their villages near a river or stream. Using an ingeniously constructed system of bamboo pipes, they are able to channel water into their villages.

When a Bouyei woman is in the process of giving birth, a tree branch is placed across the door to prevent

intruders from entering. An altar to the spirits is erected to ensure a smooth delivery. After the birth the baby's placenta is buried under the floorboards of the mother's bed in the house. This custom stems from the Bouyei's belief that after death the spirits who come to take the soul of the deceased need the placenta to help them ascertain the identity of the individual.

Thirty days after the birth a ceremony is held to name the baby. This initial name is discarded for another name when the person reaches adulthood.

During a Bouyei wedding the groom's family sends 8-10 people to meet the bride. They are accompanied by a horse, that the bride must ride to the wedding ceremony. She takes a pair of scissors and a hen from her parent's house, and on the way stops to release them on the road. This symbolizes the separation from her old life. Bouyei funeral rites dictate that children must be in mourning for a full 90 days after the death of their father. Children are forbidden to marry for a three-year period after the death of a parent. Many customs such as these act as a bond in Bouyei communities.

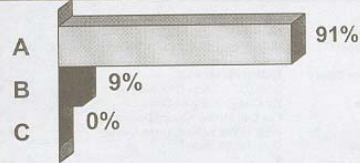
Population:
1,420 (1989)
1,760 (2000)
2,150 (2010)

Language:
Tai

Religion:
Polytheism

Christians:
none known

Status of Evangelization (Awareness of Christ and the Gospel)



A = have never heard the Gospel or the name of Christ
B = were evangelized but have not yet become Christians
C = adherents to any form of Christianity



In China the Bouyei had a bad reputation among other tribes. In the early 1900s missionary Samuel Clarke described the Bouyei in unflattering terms, "Crafty, lying, and dishonest...every Bouyei is reputed to be a thief, and from what we know of them we should not deny the charge."⁵ These days the Bouyei have a better reputation; and are renowned as warm-hearted and hospitable people.

The religious beliefs of the Bouyei are a complicated mixture of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, animism and polytheism. They also worship their ancestors. They have many superstitions which express themselves in various rituals and ceremonies.

The Bouyei worship a multitude of spirits, including the spirit of heaven, the earth, the mountains and soil. They also worship *Ha Ba*, the Emperor of the Waters, in addition to the spirits of fire, river, forests, etc. They also practice an ancient form of exorcism called *nuo*, when a family hires a shaman to cast demons out of their home or compound.

The Bouyei in Vietnam are a completely unreached people group with no known Christians. They have no access to the Gospel. In China there are approximately 5,000 Catholics among the Bouyei.

Although missionaries translated the Gospel of Matthew into Bouyei in 1906, the translation is now obsolete. Despite having a combined population of about three million people, the Bouyei have no Scriptures, *Jesus* film, Gospel recordings, or any other evangelistic tool available in their language.

A dictionary in the *Diou* dialect (a variety of Bouyei) was compiled by Esquirol and Williatte in 1908. If it is still obtainable, it may help people wanting to learn the Bouyei language.



Pray for the Bouyei

- 1 Ask God to send laborers among the Bouyei people, that many would soon turn from their sins and worship Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth.
- 2 Pray the Holy Spirit would help and guide those few workers who have a burden for the Bouyei. Pray they would receive God-given strategies that enable the Bouyei to hear the Gospel.
- 3 Pray many Bouyei churches would emerge among the hills of northern Vietnam.

Overview of the Bouyei

Countries : China, Vietnam
Pronunciation : "Boo-ye'e"
Other Names : Bo Y, Bui, Pau Y, Pu Di, Chungcha, Trung Gia, Bo-I, Pu-I, Pui, Trong Gia, Tu Di, Tu Din
Population Source : 1,420 (1989 census); 2,545,059 in China (1990 census)
Location : Ha Giang: Quang Ba District; Lao Cai: Muong Khuong District; a few in Yen Bai and Tuyen Quang
Language : Daic, Tai, Northern
Dialects : 0

Subgroups (2) : Tu Di, Bo Y
Religion : Polytheism, Ancestor Worship, Daoism, Buddhism, Animism
Christians : none known
Scripture : Portions 1906; work in progress
Jesus film : none
Gospel Recordings : none
Christian Radio : none
ROPAL code : PCC00