

LAHA

The 1989 national census of Vietnam listed a population of only 1,396 Laha people. Despite their small numbers they were granted status as an official minority group.

The Laha are divided into two distinct groups, the *Khla Phlao*, or 'Dry Laha' who live in Son La Province and the *Laha Ung* ('Wet Laha') who inhabit Lao Cai and Yen Bai provinces. Many Laha live on the banks of the Red and Black rivers.

The Laha do not claim to have migrated into northern Vietnam from China or Laos, as do almost every other ethnic group in the area. They claim to have always been in Vietnam. The Laha language is not spoken outside Vietnam, which adds some

credence to their claims. Although the Laha have been acknowledged in Vietnam for a long time, ethnographic studies on them only commenced in the 1960s.

Laha is a language belonging to the Kadai branch of Tai languages, related to Lati, Gelao and Pubiao in Vietnam. Today few Laha under the age of 50 are able to speak their language. They live alongside the Thai and Khang and have gradually adopted their dress and languages as their own.

According to the present Vietnamese government, the Laha were virtual slaves of the Thai before they were "liberated" in the 1950s. Each Laha was required to work without payment for Thai landowners for between 100-

200 days per year. The Laha were also expected to give gifts and tribute to their oppressors.

Today the Laha tend to their own fields and also raise pigs, poultry and cattle. They use water buffaloes to plow their fields.

Sexual activity between Laha youth is not only permitted but encouraged. The traditional way is for a young man to go to the house of a young lady who has caught his eye. He plays the flute and two-stringed violin and sings a romantic song for her from outside her window. If she likes him, she will go outside and the couple will walk to a secluded spot. The young man lives in the house of his wife's parents for between 4 to 8 years before the wedding ceremony is conducted.

If her husband dies, the widow must live with her sons or with her late husband's family. Although she is allowed to remarry, she is only considered truly married to her first husband. Although a marriage between a widow and her brother-in-law is strictly forbidden, a widower is allowed to marry his sister-in-law if he so chooses. Marriage between cousins are not allowed for fear of inbreeding.



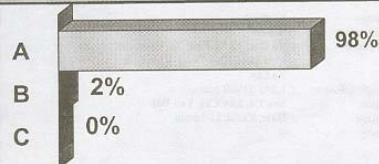
Population:
1,396 (1989)
1,730 (2000)
2,120 (2010)

Language:
Tai

Religion:
Animism

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

When a Laha person dies they are buried in a coffin made from a hollowed-out tree trunk. An amount of money, clothing, and a bowl of rice are placed in the grave and in boxes around the funeral hut, in the belief that the soul of the deceased will not lack any provision on his journey to the after-life. Four white and yellow flags are planted in the four corners of the funeral hut.

Relatives and friends of the deceased return to the house and let off fire-crackers, strike gongs and shout as loudly as they can to scare off any evil spirits that may have come to attack the family. While people who die from a natural death are buried, children and those who die from an accident, or some other unnatural way, are cremated.

The Laha practice ancestor worship. Every year at the time the flowers begin to blossom, thanksgiving ceremonies are held to give thanks for their parents. Strangely for animistic tribes in Southeast Asia, the Laha only venerate the souls of their parents and do not bother with their grandparents.

The Laha believe each person has eight souls. After death they believe the souls are released from the body and become the spirits of the house and the fields. The Laha also worship the spirits of the village, forest, water and even a spirit they believe causes mist.

There are no known Christians among the Laha. Being a small group tucked away in a remote location, few have had the chance to hear the Gospel before.

There are no Christian communities in the area, and no Scriptures available in a language understood by the Laha. They are a small group in desperate need of prayer and attention.



Pray for the Laha

- 1 Pray the small Laha people would not be forgotten in the midst of such overwhelming spiritual needs in northern Vietnam. Ask God to soon send laborers to them with the Gospel.
- 2 The Bible says there will be representatives from every tribe, language and nation around the throne of Christ in heaven. Ask Him to call out those Laha who will follow Him.
- 3 Pray that God's Kingdom would come among the hidden Laha people.

Overview of the Laha

Countries : Vietnam
Pronunciation : "La-ha"
Other Names : Xa Cha, Xa La Nga, Xa Khao, Khla Phlao, Klla Dong, Khla Don, Khla Dung, Khla Liik, Laha Ung, Xa Chien, Xa Lay
Population Source : 1,396 (1989 census)
Location : Son La, Lao Cai, Yen Bai
Language : Daiic, Kadai, L1-Laqua
Dialects : 0

Subgroups (2) : Laha Ung, Khla Phlao
Religion : Animism, Ancestor Worship
Christians : none known
Scripture : none
Jesus film : none
Gospel Recordings : none
Christian Radio : none
ROPAL code : LHA00; possibly includes Khao (XAO00)