

# LAHU

Although only about 6,000 Lahu people live in northwest Vietnam, the Lahu represent one of the largest and better-known of Southeast Asia's peoples. More than 400,000 inhabit southern China, in addition to 125,000 in Myanmar, 28,000 in Thailand, and 2,500 in Laos. In Vietnam the Lahu reside in the mountainous areas of Muong Te District in Lai Chau Province. The Lahu are close neighbors of the Hani ethnic group.

The name *Lahu* means 'to roast tiger meat by fire'. They are also called *Khu Xung* by the Vietnamese, meaning 'miserable ones'. Since 1890, when the Lahu in China surrendered their Yi and Dai landlords, they have been viewed as cowardly by other minority groups in

the region. An old Lahu man said, "Ever since the defeat, the Lahu lost heart and were despised by other groups."<sup>24</sup>

The three subgroups of Lahu in Vietnam are the Yellow, Black and White Lahu. Although they speak slightly different dialects, the people are able to understand each other without too much trouble.

The Lahu in China rebelled more than 20 times throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The region they occupied west of the Mekong River was branded "a place of constant riot." It is almost certainly because of such rebellion against their Yi and Dai landlords, they have been viewed as cowardly by other minority groups in

and migrated across the border to start a new life in Vietnam. Lahu men love their dogs, which always accompany them on their hunting expeditions. When they migrated into Vietnam the Lahu were forced to kill their animals so that border guards would not be alerted by the dogs' barking.

Lahu women give birth in the privacy of their own rooms. Three days after the delivery they invite old people to a small feast, where a name is given to the child. However, if an unexpected visitor should come in the meantime, he or she is given the honor of naming the newborn. If the baby has a lot of sickness a new name is chosen to chase away the ill fortune.

Lahu communities have long been plagued by stealing and rampant alcoholism... "It is common to see a group of Lahu drunk and beating their fists on the roadside and shouting as they are led homeward."<sup>25</sup>

When a Lahu dies, three shots are fired into the air to scare away the spirits and announce the news to the village. Before burial, the corpse is placed on a mat on the ground. Lahu men dance around the body while trumpets are played, and food is

offered to the soul of the deceased. Coffins are made by hollowing out tree trunks. The tree is chosen by a shaman, who throws an egg into the forest. The nearest tree to where the egg breaks is cut down.

The Lahu practice ancestor worship, but it is confined only to the worship of their parents, and not more distant relatives. The ancestral altar is located at the head of the bed in their homes.

In addition to ancestor worship, the Lahu are animists. The main deities of their rituals are the spirit of the corn harvest (corn being their primary food) and the spirit of the tiger. They also worship the founder of the art of blacksmithing. Many Lahu men are skilled blacksmiths, and their business is requested by members of many other ethnic groups.

The Lahu believe in a supreme god, named *G'ui Sha*. Many Lahu villages have a temple consecrated to this deity.

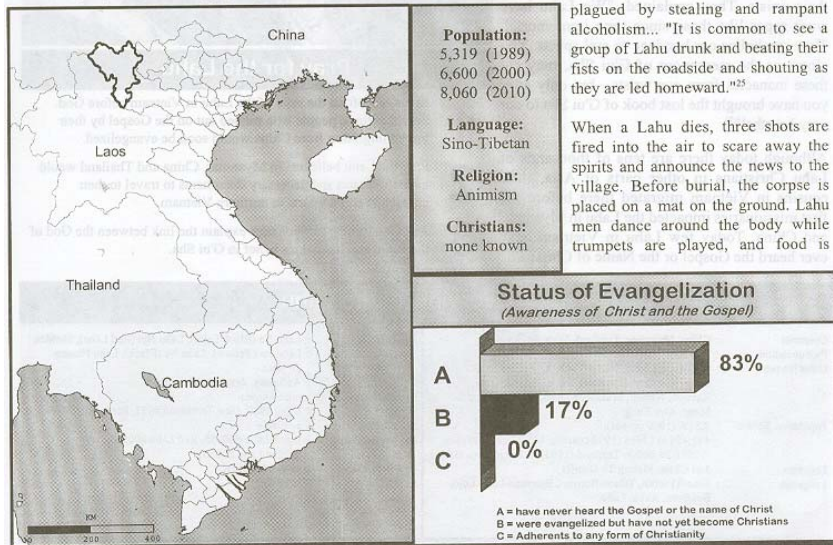
When American Baptist missionary William Young first preached the Gospel to the Lahu in northern Burma in 1901, they exclaimed, "We as a people have been waiting for you for centuries... We even have meeting houses built in some of our villages in readiness of your coming." Many of the Lahu men wore ropes on their wrists. They explained, "We Lahu have worn ropes like these since time immemorial. They symbolize our bondage to evil spirits. You alone, as the messenger of G'ui Sha, may cut these manacles from our wrists—but only after you have brought the lost book of G'ui Sha to our very hearths!"<sup>26</sup>

Although today there are tens of thousands of Lahu Christians in other parts of Asia, their cousins in Vietnam migrated there before the first missionaries impacted the Lahu in Myanmar and China. Today few Lahu in Vietnam have ever heard the Gospel or the Name of Christ.



## Pray for the Lahu

- 1 In prayer, lift up the state of the Lahu in Vietnam before God. Pray that these people who missed out on the Gospel by their forced migration from China would soon be evangelized.
- 2 Pray the Lahu believers in Myanmar, China and Thailand would have the vision and necessary documents to travel to their unreached counterparts in northern Vietnam.
- 3 Ask God to help missionaries explain the link between the God of the Bible and the Lahu's belief in G'ui Sha.



**Population:**  
5,319 (1989)  
6,600 (2000)  
8,060 (2010)

**Language:**  
Sino-Tibetan

**Religion:**  
Animism

**Christians:**  
none known

## Overview of the Lahu

Countries	: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos	Dialects (3)	: Lahu Na (Black Lahu), Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu), Sheleh
Pronunciation	: "La-hoo"	Subgroups (3)	: Lahu Su (Yellow), Lahu Na (Black), Lahu Phuang (White)
Other Names	: Xa Toong Luong, Xa La Vang, Xa Pui, Kha Qui, Co Sung, Kha Quy, Kha Sung, Lohoi, Launa, Laku, Kaixien, Nannen, Mussulu, Muliso, Musso, Mussar, Moso, Khu Xung	Religion	: Animism, Ancestor Worship
Population Source	: 5,319 (1989 census); 411,476 in China (1990 census); 125,000 in Myanmar (1993); 28,000 in Thailand (1993); 2,500 in Laos (1973)	Christians	: none known
Location	: Lai Chau; Muong Te District	Scripture	: Bible 1989; New Testament 1932; Portions 1924
Language	: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lole, Southern, Akha, Lahu	Jesuit film	: available
		Gospel Recordings	: Black Lahu #00085, Red Lahu #00566, Yellow Lahu #00565
		Christian Radio	: available (FEBIC)
		ROPAL code	: LAH00