

NGAI

The Ngai minority group are one of the smallest officially recognized by the Vietnamese authorities, numbering only 1,154 people in the 1989 census.

The Ngai are a combination of three tiny, Chinese-speaking communities. The name is derived from *San Ngai*, which means 'mountainers'. One Ngai subgroup, however, is the *Dan*, who have little to do with mountains. They are the boat-people of southern China. A 1972 study listed a population of about three million Dan people in China, living along the coasts of Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan Island. A further 150,000 lived on boats in Hong Kong at the time. By the 1980s the number in Hong Kong had diminished to about 50,000.³¹ In

addition, the Dan have migrated to several countries in Southeast Asia where they go by various names.

The chief location of the Ngai in Vietnam is in the island and coastal regions of Quang Ninh Province in the north. Others live in surrounding provinces. After 1954 some Ngai migrated to Saigon City at the southern end of the nation.

Although their numbers are now tiny, the Ngai claim to be the original inhabitants of Quang Ninh. A document from the 10th century, the *Annals of the History of the Viet Land*, records the existence of the Dan group in Quang Ninh for some time already. The various branches of the Ngai minority migrated to Vietnam at

various stages over a long period of time. The *Hac Ca* are the most recent arrivals, having come from China in the early 1800s.

The Dan prefer to call themselves *Soisangyan*, a name which means 'waterborne people' in their dialect. In China the Chinese insist "the Dan are not Han Chinese at all, but rather a distinct minority race."³²

Experts now generally agree that although the Dan are ethnolinguistically a Sinitic people (they speak a dialect of Cantonese), "there is no doubt that they have been discriminated against in the past, officially as well as socially.... It is clear they have developed a strong sense of group identity.... Such a castelike distinction is more typical of India than of China."³³

The uniqueness of the Dan was enforced by tales describing how they had short legs, useful only for life at sea. Not surprisingly, all customs of the Dan revolve around their lives on the water. Whole families live on small boats that "seldom is ever touch the shore. Children are born and raised on the boats, and dogs, chickens, and cats move freely from deck to deck. In the old days...little coffin boats carried



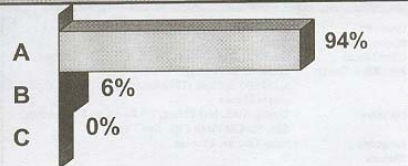
Population:
1,154 (1989)
1,430 (2000)
1,750 (2010)

Language:
Sino-Tibetan

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

each person to his or her final resting place on land. For some it was the first time on land as well as the last."³⁴

Today many Ngai are extremely wealthy people. They have formed fishing cooperatives, with nets capable of catching 50 tons of fish in one day. Despite their wealth, they continue to live on their boats. Five or six boats of friends or the same family pull their boats together and tie ropes to each other during the night.

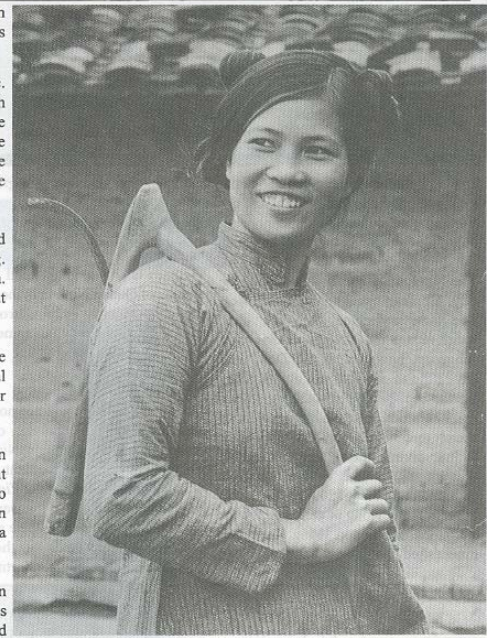
Even those who have been resettled on land continue to earn their livelihood by fishing. Women and children catch crabs and shellfish. Turtles are sometimes bred because of the great price they fetch in Chinese restaurants.

Ngai are often married off when they are just one or two years-old. The parents arrange the formal wedding ceremony when the children are 13 or 14 years old.

Strict taboos are observed by Ngai women when they are pregnant. They are not allowed to eat snail, beef or goat meat, and are not allowed to buy or make clothes. After the birth the woman must stay away from her parent's home for a period of 60 days.

When a Ngai person dies, a ceremony is held on the 21st, 35th, 42nd, 49th, 63rd and 70th days after the funeral to honor the soul of the deceased person. The Dan bury their dead at sea.

Not surprisingly, the unique lifestyles of the Ngai is reflected in their religion. They worship *Tin Hau*, the goddess of fishermen, whose image is carried in floating temples. They also honor the spirit of the fish, whale and sea-dragon. Natural elements are also honored, especially the spirits of thunder, lightning, wind and rain. There are no known Christian communities among the Ngai people of Vietnam.



Pray for the Ngai

- 1 Fervently pray for the precious souls of the unique Ngai people, whose unique lifestyles have contributed to them being unreached and unevangelized.
- 2 Pray those Christians who do have contact or trade with the Ngai would faithfully share the Love of Christ with them.
- 3 Pray that Jesus Christ would soon be worshipped out in the middle of the ocean on board the boats that serve as the Ngai's homes.

Overview of the Ngai

Countries	: China, Vietnam, Macau	Subgroups (5)	: Xin, Hac Ca, Dan, Khach Gia, Le
Pronunciation	: "Nai"	Religion	: Polytheism, Ancestor Worship, Buddhism, Confucianism
Other Names	: San Ngai, Dan, Danjia, Tunka, Xumin, Soisangyan	Christians	: none known
Population Source	: 1,154 (1989 census); 3,150,000 in China (1972 E.Anderson); also in Macau	Scripture	: none
Location	: Quang Ninh, Hai Phong, Ha Bac, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Ho Chi Minh City, Bac Thai	Jesus film	: none
Language	: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese	Gospel Recordings	: none
Dialects	: 0	Christian Radio	: none
		ROPAL code	: none