

PATHEN

Approximately 4,000 members of the Pathen minority group live in northern Vietnam. They are concentrated in Bac Quang District of Ha Giang Province, and the Chiem Hoa and Yen Son districts of Tuyen Quang Province. In addition, more than 32,000 Pathen live in Guangxi and Guizhou provinces in southern China, where their name is officially transcribed as *Baheng*.

Although in Vietnam the Pathen have status as an officially-recognized minority, in China they have been included under the Yao nationality. The Yao are a collection of numerous ethnic and dialect subgroups.

Many Pathen in Vietnam are situated along the banks of the Gam River.

Their villages average 30-40 houses, and are often located at the foot of a mountain. The construction of Pathen homes vary depending on location. In some places they are built on stilts, in others flat on the ground, and in some places the homes are half on stilts and half on the ground.

According to oral tradition and local records, the Pathen migrated into northern Vietnam from southern China in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Their homeland in China is not particularly close, being situated in southern Guizhou and northern Guangxi, at least 300km from the Vietnamese border. The Pathen consider themselves to be descended from eight ancient clans. Their name in Chinese reflects this (*Ba*=eight,

then=clans).

Today the clan system is still strong among the Pathen. Each clan has its own sacred totem. Detailed taboos exist that define how one clan relates to and treats another. Marriage between people from the same clan is strictly forbidden. A Pathen man must not have sexual relations with any woman of his clan. This taboo is strictly enforced. Pathen children are told horror stories of what will happen if they ignore this restriction. This prohibition stands for people of the same family name, even if they live in a different province and have never previously met.

After marriage the new husband is required by tradition to live with his in-laws for 12 years. After six years however, he is able to take his wife and make their own home if he has the consent of his wife's family. The Pathen believe only sons can worship their ancestors. If a family has no sons, the son-in-law must take the responsibility of honoring and caring for the souls of the dead.

After the birth of a child, the placenta is placed under the floorboards of the house. At the end of the person's life,

the Pathen believe they will make a journey back to the spiritual village of their ancestors. The dead person's soul must stop to pick up the placenta, which is believed to help the spirits identify who the person is.

The Pathen language fascinates linguists. Even though the Pathen have assimilated to Yao culture, it has been found they speak a Western Hmong language, distantly related to the speech of the Hmong today.

The Pathen in some locations believe a frog created the heavens and the earth. After a time of living in perfect contentment, man destroyed the harmony of his peaceful existence by killing the frog... "The frog's dying curse was to divide the world into a realm for humans and a realm for spirits. Before that time, mankind did not know sickness, and when a person would die, he would rise again from the dead on the 13th day. After the curse, this no longer happened."³⁹

The Pathen believe a person has twelve souls. When a body is placed in a coffin, it is sprinkled with 12 measures of grilled rice. Twelve sandstone bowls are put in along with the rice. Each Pathen home contains an ancestral altar. They believe the spirits of their ancestors are fed by placing rice and meat out on the table for them. The male head of the household calls on the spirits of his ancestors to come and share the feast and to protect his family from sickness and injury. In the past the Pathen worshipped fire and water, but today this practice has subsided.

The Pathen are a colorful, friendly people group, but few have ever had the opportunity of hearing that Christ died for their sins. In Vietnam and China they remain a completely unreached people group without a single known believer. Unfortunately, no Scriptures or Gospel recordings exist in their mother tongue.



Pray for the Pathen

- 1 The fervent prayers of a righteous man avails much. In prayer, lift up the state of the Pathen before the Lord. Ask Him to reach out and save the Pathen from their state of sin and hopelessness.
- 2 Pray that God would raise up workers to share the Gospel through relationships with the Pathen. Pray this precious people group would not remain uncivilized for long.
- 3 Pray that many Pathen would soon come to Christ. Ask God to glorify His Name among this people.



Population:
3,680 (1989)
4,570 (2000)
5,580 (2010)

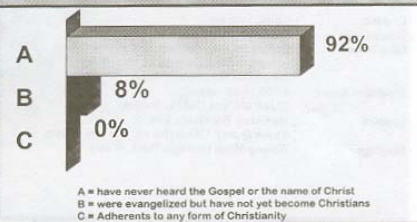
Language:
Hmong-Mien

Religion:
Ancestor Worship

Christians:
none known

Status of Evangelization

(Awareness of Christ and the Gospel)



Overview of the Pathen

| | | | |
|-------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| Countries | : China, Vietnam | Dialects | : 0 |
| Pronunciation | : "Pa-then" | Subgroups (2) | : Tong, Meo Lai |
| Other Names | : Baheng, Pa Hng, Pa Hng, Man Pa-Teng, Tong, Dunu, Baheng, Paheng, Bahengmai, Man Pa Seng, Pateng, Na-e, Miao Hoa, Flowery Miao | Religion | : Ancestor Worship, Animism, Polytheism, Daoism |
| Population Source | : 3,680 (1989 census), 32,000 in China (1987 D.Bradley) | Christians | : none known |
| Location | : Ha Giang: Bac Quang District, Tuyen Quang: Chiem Hoa and Yen Son districts | Scripture | : none |
| Language | : Hmong-Mien, Hmongic, Bunu, Pa Hng | Jesus film | : none |
| | | Gospel Recordings | : none |
| | | Christian Radio | : none |
| | | ROPAL code | : PHA00 |