

# SAN CHAY

Approximately 140,000 members of the San Chay minority group live in northern Vietnam. They are mostly concentrated in Tuyen Quang, Bac Can, Thai Nguyen and Bac Giang provinces. Smaller settlements of San Chay are found in Quang Ninh, Yen Bai, Lang Son and Phu Tho provinces.

In addition, some 40,000 Cao Lan live across the border in southern China. The Cao Lan are one of the two groups in Vietnam that make up the San Chay minority. In China it is very difficult to gauge the status of the Cao Lan because they have been included in the massive Zhuang nationality—a generic classification containing about 18 million speakers of Tai-related languages.

The San Chay in Vietnam are divided into three main groups: *San Chay Ban* (commonly called the Cao Lan), *San Chay Hu* (Mountain Thatching Grass San Chay), and *San Chay Moc* ('Forest San Chay'). The official name for this group, San Chay, means 'people who live on pilings'.

The San Chay in Vietnam migrated from southern China in two main waves, the first one in the early 1600s and the second at the beginning of the 19th century. They claim to have originated in the area near the juncture of China's Hunan, Guangxi and Guangdong provinces. Some scholars account for the large differences in customs and language between the San Chay and Cao Lan groups by claiming that the migration of the Cao

Lan stopped for a while in Tai-speaking areas in southern China, where their language was influenced by Tai varieties like Nung. The latter group however, migrated through Chinese-speaking areas in Guangxi, and today use Cantonese (or perhaps a local variety of Chinese known as Pinghua) as their mother tongue. Other scholars suggest the San Chay were originally neither Tai nor Chinese in origin, but rather a Yao group.

Today when the Cao Lan and San Chay meet, they cannot understand each other unless they use a third language. The only words they do share are those relating to spiritual ceremonies that have been memorized by the shamans, and some folk songs.

San Chay communities are divided into various family lineages, each clan having their own peculiar customs and its own protective spirit. The San Chay joined with a powerful Hmong army in northern Vietnam in the 1860s. They took possession of large tracts of land and raided Buddhist temples of their gold. The San Chay were deceived into following Sioung—a charismatic, self-proclaimed Hmong king.



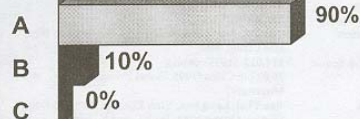
**Population:**  
114,012 (1989)  
141,600 (2000)  
172,700 (2010)

**Language:**  
Tai

**Religion:**  
Ancestor Worship

**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

Strict morality codes are practiced among the rural San Chay. Women must observe strict rules and customs. In the past, whenever a woman encountered a man in a social position superior to her husband's, she was required to hide behind bamboo. Today she is allowed to hide behind any object within reach, such as a bamboo pipe, a flower, or a piece of wood.

When a San Chay person dies seven coins are placed into the coffin for a man, and nine for a woman. The number of coins corresponds to the orifices of the body (eyes, nose, ears, mouth etc.). The coins represent the *Khue* star which they believe guides the person's soul to his or her ancestors in the other world.

Spirit worship takes a major place in the lives of the San Chay population. Each branch of the nationality worships a different spirit such as the spirit of the river, the trees, the crops, etc. Elaborate festivals include the playing of castanets, copper bells, drums, cymbals and wind instruments. Each village has a shaman, called *khan thu*, who is responsible for all religious activity. The *khan thu* usually doubles as the village headman, and is highly respected among the community.

The San Chay are unreached with the Gospel. Very few have had any exposure to the Christian message and the Name of Christ remains unknown. Historically the San Chay have been denied a Christian witness. Northern Vietnam and southern China have been Communist strongholds for three generations.

There are no Scriptures, Gospel recordings, or *Jesus* film currently available in the San Chay language, and no Christian ministries or western mission organizations are known to be targeting them. Because they do not have a written script of their own, the few San Chay who can read use the Chinese script.



## Pray for the San Chay

- 1 The San Chay are one of the most untouched and needy people groups in Vietnam. Pray Christians from all over Vietnam would obey God's call to reach these precious people.
- 2 Pray against the spiritual forces of darkness that war against the advancement of the Gospel among the dozens of unreached people groups in northern Vietnam.
- 3 God created the San Chay for His glory and purpose. Pray they will soon enter into a relationship with their Maker.

## Overview of the San Chay

Countries	Vietnam, China	Language	Dafc, Tai, Central
Pronunciation	"Sahn-Chai"	Dialects	0
Other Names	Cao Lan, Man Cao Lan, San Chi, Son Tu, Hon Ban, Hon Chung, Man	Subgroups (2)	Cao Lan, San Chi
Population Source	114,012 (1989 census); 36,677 in China (1995 Global Evangelization Movement)	Religion	Ancestor Worship, Animism, Polytheism
Location	Bac Thai, Lang Son, Vinh Phu, Ha Bac: Son Dong District; Quang Ninh: Binh Lieu and Tien-Yen districts; Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai	Christians	none known
		Scripture	none
		Jesus film	none
		Gospel Recordings	none
		Christian Radio	none
		ROPAL code	MLC00