



Nevin Bowman

Location: More than 34,000 Tai Dam live in Jinping County in southern China's Yunnan Province. The majority of Tai Dam are found in northern Vietnam where approximately half a million live around the city of Dien Bien Phu. They also extend into nearby areas of Laos and "to the south-west into central Thailand due to conquest and deportation by the (Bangkok) Thai in the early nineteenth century."¹ Most of the 50,000 Tai Dam now living in Laos fled there in the 1950s after the Communist terror in north Vietnam.² Refugee communities of Tai Dam are also located in such diverse places as Iowa, USA,³ Sydney, Australia; and Paris, France.

Identity: The Tai Dam (Black Tai) are so named because of the predominant color of their traditional clothing, and also because they live along the banks of the Black River. In China, where they have been included in the official Dai nationality, the Tai Dam

are also known as the *Jinping Tai* after the county they inhabit.

Language: The Tai Dam use an ancient Indic script, which seems to have been the forerunner of the current script used by the Thai people in Thailand. Tai Dam has some intelligibility with Tai Kao.⁴

History: The Tai Dam people are believed to have originated in southern China but gradually migrated into Southeast Asia due to oppression by the Chinese. The Tai Dam even had their own government in north Vietnam for a short time in the 1950s. The spread of smallpox, cholera, tuberculosis, and malaria was rampant among the Tai Dam in the past, decimating entire communities.

Customs: It is common for all the elders of a Tai Dam family to be equally responsible for raising children. Each village is

under the control of a *Chao Muong*, or prince.⁵

Religion: The Tai Dam are one of the few members of the great Tai race never to have embraced Buddhism. They are animists. They believe that "non-human objects have spirits, and that people have multiple souls.... These spirits must be appeased so that they might avoid curses and receive blessings."⁶ The Tai Dam in Vietnam believe in the *King of Heaven* who founded the city of Dien Bien Phu, formerly called "Heavenly City" by the Tai Dam. They believe there used to be a vine which reached from the earth to heaven. One mother was upset because her son kept climbing the vine to fellowship with God. She cut the vine and ever since then the Tai Dam have been unable to communicate with God.⁷

Christianity: Several years ago a young Tai Dam man was imprisoned in southern Vietnam. He found Christ through the witness of a Vietnamese pastor, who was incarcerated at the same time for his faith. After his release, the young man returned to his village and shared his new faith. Impressed by the dramatic change in the ex-criminal's life, 753 Tai Dam turned to Christ and were baptized.⁸ In contrast to the Tai Dam church in Vietnam, which now numbers several thousand,⁹ few of their counterparts in China have ever heard the gospel. Translation work is currently under way to bring more of God's Word to the Tai Dam people.¹⁰



Population in China:
 30,500 (1995)
 34,700 (2000)
 44,200 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Animism
Christians: 50

Overview of the Tai Dam

Countries: Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, China, USA, France, Australia

Pronunciation: "Tai-Dahm"

Other Names: Jinping Dai, Black Tai, Black Dai, Tai Noir, Thai Den, Do, Tai Do, Ty Dam

Population Source:
 30,500 (1995 GEM);

Out of a total Dai population of 1,025,128 (1990 census); 500,000 in Vietnam (1993); 50,000 in Laos (1995 L. Chazee); 20,000 in Thailand; 4,000 in USA; 1,500 in France; Also in Australia

Location:
S Yunnan: Jinping County

Status:
 Officially included under Dai

Language: Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai, East Central

Dialects: 0

Religion:
 Animism, Polytheism, Christianity

Christians: 50

Scripture: Portions 1982; Available in the Tai Dam, Vietnamese, and Lao scripts; Work in progress

Jesus film: In progress

Gospel Recordings:
 Tai: Black #00794

Christian Broadcasting:
 Available (FEBC)

ROPAL code: BLT00

