



Paul Hattaway

Location: The Tai Mao — sometimes called *Mao Shan*, or in Burmese *Shan Tayok* meaning “Chinese Shan” — are a group living in the Dehong Prefecture of western Yunnan Province.¹ There are approximately 320,000 Tai Mao speakers in China, in addition to sizable communities in Myanmar, Laos, and possibly Vietnam.

Identity: The Tai Mao are known by a variety of names, including Dehong Dai, Shan, Chinese Shan, Kang, and Dai Nua. They are part of the official Dai nationality in China, which includes more than ten Tai language groups scattered throughout Yunnan and Sichuan provinces.

Language: The Tai spoken in Dehong is closely related to varieties of Shan spoken in adjacent areas of northern Myanmar; however, linguists say it is similar but not identical to Shan in Myanmar. The same Shan language of Myanmar is

spoken in only one village in China.² The Tai Mao and Shan also use different scripts. The Tai Mao use a “square” orthography. “This has been revised and improved, and is still in use in China.”³

History: The Tai Mao have long possessed an advanced culture. By the thirteenth century they had created a Tai calendar, written books explaining the eclipses of the sun and moon, and composed a number of poems, legends, and fairy tales. A Tai tale tells of a cataclysmic flood that long ago destroyed most of the people and animals of the world. Through intermarriage among the survivors, the people began to multiply so much that soon the land could not support the needs of so many people.

Customs: “Door Festivals” are held every half-year to help the people focus on agricultural production. Between 15 July and 15

October, the Tai do not hold any social or religious activities, nor do they visit their relatives or arrange marriages. “When the busy season is over, they hold the Door Opening Festival, during which time people beat gongs and drums, and dance... to announce the end of the farming season.”⁴

Religion: The Tai Mao are Theravada Buddhists, although aspects of animism and shamanism influence their belief system. The Tai Mao also revere family ancestral spirits, called *diulahagun*.

Christianity: The Tai Mao are an unevangelized people group, despite living in a region with many Christian churches among the neighboring peoples. Scripture portions were translated into Tai Mao in 1931. Some Tai Mao are also able to read the Bible in the Shan script of Myanmar. John Kuhn conducted meetings among the Tai Mao in Longling in the 1940s. He reported that there were “some fifty thousand people right on that spot and without a single witness to the Gospel.... We preached to a group in a home... a young lad in his late teens raised his hand to say ‘I will let the Saviour in.’ He belonged to the Kang clan of the [Tai Mao] race. I sat and gazed at the young Kang as the first convert in all that area!”⁵ In 1993, 34 Tai Mao received Christ after a short-term missions team from Taiwan traveled to Dehong.⁶ For several years now, FEBC has broadcasted gospel radio programs in the Tai Mao language.



Population in China:
 250,000 (1990)
 318,500 (2000)
 405,800 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Buddhism
Christians: 200

Overview of the Tai Mao

Countries: China, Myanmar, Laos, possibly Vietnam

Pronunciation: “Tie-Maow”

Other Names: Kang, Kong, Chinese Shan, Maw, Mao, Dai Mao, Tai Long, Tai Nuea, Dehong Dai, Dehong, Tai Dehong, Tai Le, Dai Le, Tai Loe, Dai Loe, Tai Mo, Dai Mo

Population Source: 250,000 (1990 J.-O. Svantesson); Out of a total Dai population of 1,025,128 (1990 census); 72,400 in Myanmar (1983); 35,000 in Laos (1995 L. Chazee); Possibly in Vietnam

Location: *W Yunnan:* Dehong Prefecture

Status: Officially included under Dai

Language: Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai, East Central, Northwest

Dialects (3): Southwestern Tai, East Central, Northwest

Religion: Theravada Buddhism, Animism, Christianity

Christians: 200

Scripture: Portions 1931

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: Available in “Chinese Shan” (FEBC)

ROPAL code: TDD01

