

More than half a million Tai Mao people live in China and several neighbouring Southeast Asian nations. The majority, more than 350,000, live in the Dehong Dai Autonomous Prefecture in China's Yunnan Province.¹ They are part of the official Dai nationality in China, which includes more than ten Tai language groups.

Approximately 80,000 Tai Mao—sometimes called Mao Shan, or in Burmese *Shan Tayok*, meaning 'Chinese Shan'—are located in northern Myanmar near the Chinese border, centred around the towns of Namkham and Muse. A further 40,000 Tai Mao make their home in Laos and a mere 100 inhabit one village in northern Thailand.²

Many researchers lump the Tai Mao together with the Tai Nua and / or the Shan. Indeed, the Tai Mao spoken language is closely related to varieties of Shan spoken in northern Myanmar, but the two groups use different scripts. The Tai Mao use a 'square' orthography. 'This has been revised and improved, and is still in use in China.'³

The Tai Mao have long possessed an advanced culture. By the 13th century they had created a calendar, as well as written books explaining the eclipses of the sun and moon, and they had composed a number of poems, legends and fairy tales. One 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.

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*. Between mid-July and October every year the Tai Mao do not celebrate 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



Myanmar Faces and Places

The Tai Mao are unevangelized, despite the fact that they live in a region with many Christian churches among the neighbouring peoples. Scripture portions were translated into Tai Mao in 1931. Missionary John Kuhn of the China Inland Mission conducted meetings among the Tai Mao in China in the 1940s. He reported 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

For several years Far East Broadcasting has broadcast gospel radio programmes in the Tai Mao language, which they label 'Chinese Shan'. This, along with some coordinated outreach by local Christians, has resulted in a small but growing Tai Mao church in both China and Myanmar.



Population:

509,700 (2000)
566,500 (2010)
630,800 (2020)

Countries: China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, possibly Vietnam

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 600

Overview of the Tai Mao

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, Mao Shan, Mau, Northern Shan, Shan Tayok, Tai Che, Tai Khe, Tai Lhong, Tai Yai

Population Sources:

350,000 in China (1990, A Diller)
72,400 in Myanmar (2000, B Grimes [1983 figure])
35,000 in Laos (1995, L Chazee)
100 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [2000 figure]) possibly also in Vietnam

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Northwest

Dialects: 3 (Southwestern, East Central, Northwest)

Professing Buddhists: 85%

Practising Buddhists: 65%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: Portions 1931

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Tai Mao

Christian Broadcasting: available in 'Chinese Shan'

ROPAL code: TDD01

Status of Evangelization

