



**Population in China:**  
 15,000 (1990)  
 19,350 (2000)  
 24,900 (2010)  
**Location:** Guangxi  
**Religion:** Polytheism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Beidalao

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Bay-dah-laow"  
**Other Names:**  
**Population Source:** 15,000 (1995 Wang Fushi – 1990 census); Out of a total Yao population of 2,134,013 (1990 census)  
**Location:** *N Guangxi:* Rong'an and Rongshui counties  
**Status:** Officially included under Yao  
**Language:** Hmong-Mien, Hmongic, Bunuic  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** BW100



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** Chinese linguist Wang Fushi (a specialist in the Hmong-Mien languages) listed a 1990 population of 15,000 Beidalao people in southern China.<sup>1</sup> The Beidalao inhabit parts of Rong'an and Rongshui counties in the northern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Rong'an and Rongshui are heavily populated by Miao, Dong, Zhuang, and Han Chinese people.

**Identity:** The Beidalao have only recently been acknowledged by Chinese experts as a subgroup of the Yao minority.<sup>2</sup> They were not noted in the 1982 census, when many of the smaller groups in China registered their names with the authorities. The Beidalao are one of 11 groups of Bunu people in southern China. The Bunu were then included under the Yao nationality by the authorities. Linguist Robert Ramsey explains the complications caused by this classification, "Yao is one of the most confused ethnic classifications in China. The many groups known by that name are scattered widely and have been influenced by many diverse peoples; there is very little in all of their cultures that is invariably and unmistakably the same. The 'Yao' call themselves by more than twenty different names."<sup>3</sup>

**Language:** The Beidalao language has yet to be studied in depth, although the fact

that the Chinese have recently added this group as a new "branch" of the Yao implies that they consider them linguistically distinct enough to be a separate group. The Beidalao language is part of the Bunuic branch of the Miao (Hmongic) language family. Because of their ethnically diverse location, it is likely that the Beidalao language has absorbed influences from neighboring languages such as Miao and Dong.

**History:** Various scholars have speculated on the historical origins of the Yao and Miao peoples (including the Beidalao) who now live scattered across southern China and

Southeast Asia. Egon Von Eickstedt has theorized that the Miao-Yao peoples and the Yi were originally part of the same Caucasian group in Central Asia, before they were driven from their homelands by drought in the first millennium BC. After living on the Tibetan Plateau for a time, they were compelled to move again to the empty lands in the south.<sup>4</sup>

**Customs:** The Beidalao have lost the use of their own customs, and have replaced them with numerous customs and ceremonies borrowed from the peoples alongside whom they have lived for centuries. Even their clothing reflects the Dong and Miao who live in the Rongshui County area.

**Religion:** Animism and polytheism are the major religions among the Beidalao. They also worship their "close" ancestors to the third or fourth generation. "Distant" ancestors (i.e., more than four generations) are not worshiped regularly but are included at annual ceremonies.

**Christianity:** The exact status of Christianity among the Beidalao needs to be clarified, but there are very few Christians of any kind in the areas where they live. Mission work prior to 1949 only scratched the surface in northern Guangxi before foreigners were forced to leave China.

