



Population in China:
 2,300 (1986)
 2,700 (2000)
 3,370 (2010)
Location: Guizhou
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Ai-Cham

Countries: China

Pronunciation: "Eye-chum"

Other Names:

Jiamuhua, Jinhua, Atsam

Population Source: 2,300 (1996 B. Grimes – 1986 figure); Out of a total Bouyei population of 2,545,059 (1990 census)

Location: S Guizhou: Libo County: 13 villages near Di'e and Boyao townships

Status:

Officially included under Bouyei

Language: Daic, Kam-Sui

Dialects (2): Di'e, Boyao

Religion: Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

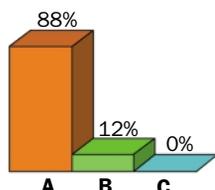
Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: AIH00

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Were evangelized but did not become Christians
C = Are adherents to any form of Christianity



Paul Hattaway

Location: Approximately 2,300 Ai-Cham people inhabit 13 isolated villages in southern Guizhou Province, near the Bouyei and the Baonuo people.¹ Hidden away among the never-ending range of mountains and the gushing rivers of Guizhou, the majority of Ai-Cham are concentrated near the towns of Di'e and Boyao in Libo County.

Identity: The Ai-Cham have been erroneously counted as part of the Bouyei nationality in China. The Ai-Cham believe themselves to be a separate ethnic group and are unwilling to be identified as part of the Bouyei. Whereas Bouyei is a Northern Tai language, Ai-Cham is part of the Dong-Shui branch of the Tai language family. The Ai-Cham were probably counted as Bouyei by Chinese researchers because most of them are able to speak Bouyei, which is the local trade language.

Language: The two Ai-Cham dialects, Di'e and Boyao, have phonological differences but are largely intelligible.² Ai-Cham — which is also known as Jiamuhua — is similar to the Mo language. There are six tones in the Ai-Cham language. Because the Ai-Cham possess no written orthography, Chinese is used as the literary language.

History: The Ai-Cham find themselves sandwiched between giant ethnic groups, including the Zhuang to the south, the Bouyei to the north, and more recently the Han Chinese who have migrated into southern Guizhou in large numbers since the 1950s. It is possible the Ai-Cham were originally a group of Dong or Shui who long ago moved south to their present location. The historical roots of the Ai-Cham remain uncertain.

Customs: The Chinese have long had this famous description of Guizhou: "There are not three days of sun, not three measures of flat land, and the people do not have three coins." This saying proves true today: Guizhou is still one of the poorest and least developed of China's provinces. Despite abundant rainfall, the inhabitants are cursed by poor harvests due to poor returns from the rocky ground.

Religion: The Ai-Cham are primarily polytheists. They worship a multiplicity of gods, ghosts, and spirit beings. They believe all of nature has a soul, including mountains, rivers, trees, and even large rocks. The Ai-Cham also worship their ancestors and put plates of food out several times a year for the souls of their deceased family members. In the past shamans held positions of great power among the Ai-Cham, but their influence was diminished during the antireligion campaigns of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976.

Christianity: The Ai-Cham are an unreached people group without a gospel witness. Few have any knowledge of Christ. Prior to the 1950s there were both Protestant and Catholic missionaries in southern Guizhou, although there is no record of any workers who specifically targeted the Ai-Cham. The Protestant efforts met with little success, but a small number of Catholic churches were established in some Bouyei villages. There are no Scriptures or recordings available in the Ai-Cham language to aid in their evangelization.