

**Location:** Approximately 55,000 Han Tai people inhabit the mountains of Mengyuan County in the Xishuangbanna Prefecture of China's Yunnan Province. "The area contains 539 species of wild animals and birds, including elephants, wild oxen, tigers, leopards, bears, wild boar, gibbons and monkeys."<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** Although the Han Tai have never previously appeared in Christian research lists, they are a people group with their own customs, self-identity, and language. While Tai Lu (Shui Tai) women wear long, colorful sarongs, and put their hair up in a bun, "Han Tai women wear black, hand-woven sarongs with a bright blue fitted blouse and black turban."<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Han Tai speak their own distinct language. Most Han Tai (except those in more isolated villages) are also able to speak the regional Tai Lu language, which serves as the *lingua franca* throughout the region. The Han Tai speak Tai Lu to outsiders but continue to speak their own language in their villages. The Christian ministry *Gospel Recordings* recently produced three different cassettes in the Han Tai, Huayao Tai, and Shui Tai languages.

**History:** Over many generations, the Tai race slowly began to separate and form distinctive traditions and languages. They "eventually evolved into two groups: the lowland farmers or *Shui Tai* and the mountain nomads, or *Han Tai*."<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** In contrast to the dominant Tai Lu, whose homes are built on stilts, the Han Tai build their homes flat on the ground, often in a long row of houses containing several families. The Han Tai celebrate the annual Songkran Festival. People splash water over each other, believing it cleanses the sins of the past year. A Tai legend tells about a powerful fire-breathing demon who was defeated by Yidanhan, a beautiful Tai maiden. "One night she made a special feast for the demon and got him drunk.... He told her that if someone was able to pull a hair from his head and wrap it around his neck, his head would fall off and he would die. Yidanhan did this, but the demon's head rolled away and set everything on fire. The Tai splashed water on the demon's head to quench the fire, and to wash the blood from Yidanhan's clothes."<sup>4</sup>

**Religion:** During the Cultural Revolution the Han Tai Buddhists suffered much persecution. Cadres even dug up the skeleton of a revered Buddhist abbot and used his bones as fertilizer, in a bizarre bid to

provoke the people and destroy their religion.<sup>5</sup> Pa Ya Shanmudi, the legendary Tai folk hero, laid down several commandments to ensure the survival of his people. One of these instructs each village to build a shrine, called a *zaixin*, as the symbolic heart of the community. "It serves as a ritual center.... To destroy it or obstruct access to it would be the height of sacrilege."<sup>6</sup>

**Christianity:** A small number of Han Tai Christians who live in the Mengyuan area were won to Christ by an evangelist in recent years. In the 1960s many of the Tai church leaders in Xishuangbanna were killed by the fanatical Red Guards.



Dwayne Graybill



**Population in China:**  
 50,000 (1996)  
 55,500 (2000)  
 70,700 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Buddhism  
**Christians:** 200

## Overview of the Han Tai

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Hahn-Tie"  
**Other Names:** Dai, Dry Land Dai, Mountain Dai, Han Dai  
**Population Source:** 50,000 (1996 AMO); Out of a total Dai population of 1,025,128 (1990 census)  
**Location:** SW Yunnan: Xishuangbanna Prefecture: Mengyuan County and surrounding area

**Status:** Officially included under Dai  
**Language:** Daic, Tai, Southwestern Tai, East Central, Northwest  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Theravada Buddhism, Animism, Christianity  
**Christians:** 200  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** Han Dai #04794  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None

