

**Location:** The tiny Xiandao tribe — who numbered only 136 people in 1997<sup>2</sup> — inhabit Munmian Village in western Yunnan Province. Of the 137 Xiandao people, only 47 still live in their village; the rest have traveled to cities to find employment. Even though the Xiandao live directly next to the Myanmar border, there is no evidence of any living outside of China. The Xiandao village is near Pingwyan Township in Yingjiang County in the Dehong Dai Autonomous Prefecture. More than a dozen colorful groups share the multiethnic Dehong Prefecture.

**Identity:** The Xiandao are counted as part of the Achang nationality, but they claim they are not related. The Xiandao language is distinct from the three Achang dialects. The Xiandao may be the group described by one writer as a “Burmese tribe living in the Chinese Shan States... spoken of as *Lao-Mien*, Old Burmese.”<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Xiandao language, called *Zhangta*, consists of four tones. It is part of the Burmish branch of Tibeto-Burman, related to Achang and Jingpo. Some linguists consider Xiandao to be a dialect of Achang, while other researchers have found it to be a distinct language.<sup>3</sup>

**History:** A recent interview with the Xiandao village leader recounts a bizarre history — no doubt a mixture of truth and legend: “A thousand years ago we numbered 400 people and were the richest tribe in the region. Then we had a fierce war with

the De’ang. We lost and fled to the Huoyan Mountains on the Myanmar-China border. Slowly we filtered back into China. Because of the defeat we lost our wealth and have been poor to this day.”<sup>4</sup> They claim that after the war many died of disease. They “grew red lumps on their faces and died.” It is uncertain what disease this is, but the Chinese authorities give regular vaccinations against it.<sup>5</sup> More likely, the Xiandao are the descendants of one of the tribes who fled into China from Myanmar in 1885 to escape assaults by the British military.<sup>6</sup>

**Customs:** The Xiandao live quiet lives cultivating the *haoangong* rice that grows in the area. In recent years almost all Xiandao youth have left their village to find work in the region’s towns and cities. Many have gained employment in the logging industry. Because of their small numbers, the Xiandao have been forced to intermarry with Achang, Dai, Jingpo, and the Han Chinese. The Xiandao share their village with Han Chinese families. All Xiandao can also speak Mandarin.



Dwayne Graybill

**Religion:** Almost the entire Xiandao population are Christians. They were first evangelized by Jingpo believers from a nearby village in the mid-1970s, and embraced the gospel en masse.

**Christianity:** The Xiandao have their own church in their village. The pastor is a Xiandao, even though they use the Jingpo Bible in their services. Of the 47 Xiandao left in Munmian Village, 46 are members of the church. The only one who is not is the village leader, who says that if he were a believer he would not be allowed to represent his people to the Communist government.<sup>7</sup> In 1976 the leader’s wife was one of the first Xiandao to be converted.



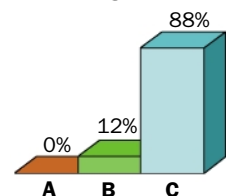
**Population in China:**  
136 (1997)  
148 (2000)  
190 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Christianity  
**Christians:** 130

## Overview of the Xiandao

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** “Shee-ahn-Dow”  
**Other Names:** Zhangta  
**Population Source:**  
136 (1997 D. Graybill);  
Out of a total Achang population of 27,708 (1990 census)  
**Location:** W Yunnan: Munmian Village in Yingjiang County, within Dehong Prefecture

**Status:** Officially included under Achang  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Burmish  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Christianity  
**Christians:** 130  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** XIA00

## 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