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Location: Approximately 80,000 Xiangtang people live in nine widely scattered counties in southwestern Yunnan Province.¹ About 1,400 Xiangtang also live in the farwestern part of Luchun County in Honghe Prefecture.² Missionary John Kuhn documented the existence of the Xiangtang in 1945. He called them *Hsiangtan*, which is the old way of spelling Xiangtang. Kuhn described them as living in “Mengka and Malipa.”³ The first Western reference to the Xiangtang was by French ethnographer L. Gaide in 1903. Gaide called them the *Siang-Tan He-lou-jen*.⁴

Identity: The Chinese authorities have placed the Xiangtang under the official Yi nationality. Many Xiangtang in Simao have been thoroughly assimilated to Han Chinese culture and language. Only pockets of Xiangtang people living in more remote locations still retain their traditional way of life.

Language: Xiangtang is a part of the Western Yi linguistic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Although many Xiangtang have lost the use of their mother tongue, there may still be large tracts of speakers left in Mengla, Jinghong, and other areas.

History: The Xiangtang are one of the southernmost Yi groups in China; this suggests that they may have been one of the earliest groups to migrate from the Yi homeland in today’s Guizhou Province.

Customs: Since many Xiangtang have been gradually assimilated during the course of the twentieth century, most of their original customs have been lost. In the past, Xiangtang men had to pay a bride-price of five taels of silver to procure a wife. Alternatively, they could agree to work three years for the bride’s family. In a Xiangtang home, guests of high status are seated behind the hearth,

the host is seated on the right, and lower status people sit nearest the door. The main diet of the Xiangtang is maize, buckwheat, bean curd, pancakes, and sour and dried vegetables.

Religion: The Xiangtang in rural areas are a superstitious people. Ancestor worship, mixed with animism, remains the dominant religion among the Xiangtang, although many who live in urban areas have forsaken all religious practices. The Xiangtang living in Honghe are the only speakers of a Western Yi language in that prefecture. “While their language is widely different from the Yuanyang Nisu they live beside, the Xiangtang of Luchun County have been influenced by the Nisu culturally. Both groups worship and revere the dragon, but the Xiangtang also have reverence for the ‘spirit of the ravine’ whom they call to their aid every eighth day of the second lunar month.”⁵

Christianity: The Xiangtang are one of many people groups in Yunnan Province with few or no known believers or Christian churches. It is possible that there are a few assimilated Xiangtang individuals attending Han Chinese churches. There are several thousand believers in the Jinghong and Mengla areas of Xishuangbanna Prefecture, but they are not known to be specifically targeting unreached people groups for evangelism. The Xiangtang have been without a resident missionary or church-planting effort throughout their entire history.



Population in China:
 80,000 (1999)
 82,400 (2000)
 103,400 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Ancestor Worship
Christians: 100

Overview of the Xiangtang

Countries: China
Pronunciation: “Shee-ung-tahn”
Other Names: Hsiangtan, Xiangtan, Siang-Tan He-lou-jen, Xiangtangpo
Population Source: 80,000 (1999 J. Pelkey); Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)
Location: SW Yunnan: Jinggu (20,000), Mengla (19,400), Zhenyuan (13,000), Lincang (7,000), Pu’er (7,000), Jinghong (5,300), Jiangcheng (5,000), Mojiang (2,000), Luchun (1,400)
Status: Officially included under Yi
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Western Yi
Dialects: 0
Religion: Ancestor Worship, Animism, Christianity
Christians: 100
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

