

Unreached Peoples: China's Minority Groups

#3 the Bai

by Paul Hattaway

The Bai people, a minority group in China, are in need of the gospel and Christian witness, and faithful missionary labor and church planting are necessary to reach them.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Topics: "Cultural Evangelism", "Missional Outreach"

Description

This sermon delves into the cultural heritage and spiritual practices of the Bai people in northern Yunnan, China, exploring their traditions, struggles, and the need for Christ's salvation. It highlights the unique customs, festivals, and beliefs of the Bai community, their historical roots, and the challenges they face in preserving their culture amidst modernization and spiritual uncertainties.

Transcript

A dozen centuries ago, a colourful people group called the Bai ruled their own large kingdom until they were conquered by Kubla Khan in the Chinese Empire. The Bai people have kept many of their cultural traditions alive in northern Yunnan. Some of the most unique ethnic music in China may be lost when these Naxi men die.

The rare customs of the Naxi people are hidden away in remote areas of the Yangtze River Valley. All of the people groups profiled in this video are found in the northern region of Yunnan province. This high mountain country is home to the Bai, the Naxi, the Mosu, the Pumi, and the Lisu, as well as a few other people groups.

Bordering Tibet, this region is marked by the high peaks of the Hongduan Mountains, an extension of the Himalayas. Three famous rivers cut their trails through these mountains, the Salween, the Mekong, and the Yangtze, or Golden Sand River. The gateway to northern Yunnan is the metropolitan city of Kunming, an urban centre that many minority peoples pass through daily.

A four-days drive to the west of Kunming is the city of Dali. In ancient times, it was the hub of Buddhist activity. Later, a strategic communist stronghold, and for centuries, the cultural centre of the Bai people, a minority group of over one and a half million people.

Like many in China, the Bai are hard-working agriculturalists. They are also artistically gifted craftsmen. The city named Dali is the word for marble, one of the wares for which the Bai are known.

The rooftops of Dali boast the architectural skills of these people. Their homes are often two storeys, trimmed with ornate carved and painted designs. Traditionally, Bai women dress in bright colours.

Unmarried women wear bands of red thread in their hair, while married women wear their hair in a bun, covered by a scarf. Many minority people groups preserve their cultural history through festivals. The third month fair, or spring festival, is a yearly highlight for the Bai people.

Vendor stalls line the crowded road from the town of Dali to the fairground, ready for a melee of trade and entertainment of all kinds. Behind the revelry of the day, the historical roots of this festival reveal the beliefs of this people group. According to the Bai legend, a fierce dragon once terrorized this area of China, until a Buddhist saint claimed a safe region of land for the Bai people, by magically spreading out his robe.

But are the Bai today safe from demons that terrorize? The Bai people practice Buddhism, but also worship their ancestors and honor strange goddesses and deities. By God's grace, a small percentage of the Bai came to Christ earlier this century, through faithful missionary labor. Yet without Bai pastors and Bai scriptures, the vast majority of this group is beyond the reach of the church.

The Bai have tried to preserve a rich culture for their children, but the innocence of youth, sheltered by cultural identity, may be lost in the modernization of this city. The fortresses of Buddhism are a false hope. The children must learn to run to the strong tower of Jesus Christ.

Will they even hear his name in their own lifetime?

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/kZvRulGCdQI.mp4>

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