



A GUIDE TO THE
BAI PEOPLE

The Bai people are among the oldest dwellers of the Yunnan Province, located in southwest China. They are primarily rice farmers living in a region from the upper Yangtze River down to the foot of Lake Erh Hai. They make their homes high in the mountains where they are surrounded by beautiful alpine lakes and emerald green valleys. This area is a favorite retreat spot for Chinese tourists because of its temperate climate, beauty, and solitude. The name “Bai” means “white” in Chinese, and was first used to refer to those living near the southwestern border region. The Baimen, or “white men,” were called this because of the white sheepskins they once wore.



The Bai primarily live in the Dali Prefecture of the Yunnan Province



Buddhism, Taoism and ancestral worship



Many Bai are still farmers, but younger Bai often work in the local tourism industry



Estimated 1-2 percent Christian among the Southern Bai only. Central and Northern Bai still unengaged.



Southern Bai, Central Bai and Northern Bai (Southern Bai mainly spoken in Dali area)



2-3 million total (approx. 600,000 Southern Bai)



As a people group, the Bai follow Buddhism, Taoism and ancestral worship. Every village has a spirit tree dedicated to a legendary figure (hero or myth) or Taoist deity. Many of these spiritual figures are accompanied by stories of how they defeated evil or sacrificed themselves for the Bai people.