

## **1. Description**

**1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:** *The Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture [Predominantly Yunnan province in China], (alt names: Baihuo, Bai Man, Baini, Baizi, Baizu, Bo, Bozi, Cuo, Labbu, Leme, Minchia, Minjia, Minkia, Nama, Sou, Pai) Central Bai, Sino-Tibetan/Tibeto-Burman/Bai [1,2]*

**1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):** *BCA [1]*

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** *(Yunnan - 21° 09' to 29° 15' N/097° 32' to 106° 12' E) [2]*

**1.4 Brief history:** *The Bai is the 14th largest minority group in The People's Republic of China. There is some debate in which phylum Bai belongs in. Most scholars say that Bai is in Tibetan-Burman in a unique branch while others classify it as a branch of Yi. Those that left the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, such as the Hunan Bai in the early 1300s, do not speak Central Bai anymore. 92% of the language is cognate with Chinese as per a 536 item wordlist created in 1983. After the Yi, the Bai are the second largest minority group in China. [1,2,3] The culture is named after the Chinese word for "white", perhaps hinting at the cultural associations with the color. There is no written language, so they often use Chinese characters. Now, though, many Bai people speak Chinese. Back in 221 B.C., the Qin armies under a unified China captured the Bai (then known as the Bo) and use them as slaves. [8]*

**1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:**

**1.6 Ecology (natural environment):** *84% area is mountainous region, 10% area is plateau and hilly land and 6% area is basin and valley. The average altitude is 2,000 meters above the sea level. The highest point is 6,740 meters and the lowest is 76.4 meters above the sea level. [4] Many rivers, most important being Lancang, Nuijiang, and Jinsha. There is also Lake Erhai and Mt. Diancang. [5]*

**1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:** *1,598,052 (1990) [2]*

## **2. Economy**

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):** *Rice, millet, broomcorn, and winter wheat. [5]*

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:** *Beans. [5] Fish. [7] Pigs. [8] Pork is the main meat. They will eat ham, sausage, banger, smoked pig liver, and smoked pig intestines. [6]*

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:**

**2.4 Food storage:**

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** *Men and women both work in the fields and generally perform the same activities. The only division is that men perform the heavy plowing. Women, regardless of their marital status, were responsible for marketing and, as a culture, were known for their strength and ability to carry heavy objects across long distances. [8]*

**2.6 Land tenure:** *Prior to 1949, 10% of the Bai population owned 60-80% of the land. 90% held only 20-40% and 70% of those people were peasants or hired laborers. After 1949, land became state property and began following Chinese agricultural policy. From 1979 onwards, the emphasis has been on individual and family labor. [8] Two crops a year from the area around Lake Erhai. Ditch digging for irrigation. Cangshan Water-Conservancy Project bringing water to tens of thousands of hectares of land. [5]*

**2.7 Ceramics:** *Lacquerwood and wooden furniture is famous from the area. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, all Chinese palace carpenters were Bai. [8]*

**2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:**

**2.9 Food taboos:** *No documented food taboos. [6]*

**2.10 Canoes/watercraft?**

## **3. Anthropometry**

**3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):**

**3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):**

## **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

**4.1 Age at menarche (f):**

**4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):**

**4.3 Completed family size (m and f):** *The nuclear family was one of the most important kinship systems for the bai. [10]*

**4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):**

**4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):** *Children were betrothed at infancy and wed in their late teens. [8]*

**4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:** *Rate of divorce varies heavily and depends on locality. If a village was influenced heavily by the Chinese, divorce was extremely difficult but in other areas, widows may remarry. [8]*

**4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:** *Very small polygamous population. [5] Only a small population of wealthy landowners could afford to be polygynous. [8]*

**4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:** *After an agreement to a marriage, a woman must give the groom a rice cake (baba), as well as thick fish soup for all guests of the marriage as well as a large flour cake for the family in mid-autumn festival after the wedding. If the marriage is based off of love, the groom's family must have a wedding tent up before the marriage. [7] Bride-price and dowry depends on class and locality of the two families.[8]*

**4.9 Inheritance patterns:** *Only men can inherit family property. [5] Primogeniture is not practiced; inheritance is divided among all sons, adopted, and through marriage, although eligible sons must have the same last name either naturally or legally changed. [8]*

**4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:** *Sons live apart from their parents after their marriage. [7]*

**4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:**

- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):** *Not allowed to marry into the same surname or clan. However, marriage outside of ethnic groups is acceptable. [7] Both paternal and maternal cousins were allowed to marry. [8]*
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?**
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)**
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?**
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape:** *Rape extremely severely punished. [8]*
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin):** *Both cross-cousins and parallel cousins are valid spouses. [8]*
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?**
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring**
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?**
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females**
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades**
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)**
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?** *Parents live with their unmarried children. Big landlord families may have 4 generations. [5]*
- 4.24 Joking relationships?**
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations:** *Patrilineal descent was most likely imposed by the Chinese.[8]*
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules** *Matches between cousins perfectly acceptable. However, matches between couples of the same surname or clan prohibited. [5]*
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?** *Both families are responsible for different aspects of the marriage. After the bride pays appropriate bridewealth or gifts to the groom's family, the groom organizes banquet tables. The ceremonial aspect actually starts the eve of their wedding day where the groom's family sets up a tent and hosts Chinese Opera performances with food for guests. After the ceremony, the couple toasts to all of the guests by table to the sound of a Suona Horn. It is typical for the groom to carry the bride on his back whenever they reach a crossing while the ceremony commences. He will walk in the shape of an "8". As the ceremony is wrapping up, the groom sends the God of Happiness to his parents-in-laws' home while the bride visits. She will then return to sleep in her new home so long as it is close enough. [7]*
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?**
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)** *Not allowed to marry into the same surname or clan. However, marriage outside of ethnic groups is acceptable. [7]*
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?** *Marriages arranged by parents. Cousin marriages may be arranged. In modern times, marriages are no longer arranged. [5]*
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries whom:** *Generational conflict occurs if grown children resist their prearranged partner. In order to solve the conflict while retaining honor, the couple would elope and be chased by the male relatives of the bride, who would purposely not catch them. Once they escaped, the parents would negotiate, usually peacefully. [8]*

### Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:**
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:**
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:**
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):** *The Chinese Cultural Revolution greatly affected the Bai, overhauling their religious beliefs entirely. However, the Bai tried to keep the influences of its traditional stories, dances and song styles. [9]*
- 4.18 Cannibalism?**

### 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:** *Roughly five family units per small village. A ju is comprised of three or four villages. [8]*
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):**
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):** *Kings, nobles, commoners and slaves. Prior to 1949, stratification existed between landless peasants, peasants, artisans, wealthy peasants in the city, merchants, and landlords. During a revolutionary period, poorer classes were glorified and wealthier ones were attacked. Following 1979 reforms, stratification of socioeconomic classes has returned. [8]*
- 5.4 Post marital residence:** *Either neolocal or patrilocal depending on how many sons a family has. Elderly parents live with the youngest son. [8]*
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):** *There exists a taboo over fireplaces. They are sacred and people may not walk over it or spit on it. It is also taboo to sit on the threshold of a house. Women should avoid walking over the tools that men use. And people in mourning are not allowed to enter other people's houses. [6]*
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):** *Relatively gender egalitarian. Elders are highly respected. [8]*
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:**

- 5.8 Village and house organization:** *Two story mud-brick houses with u-shaped structures surrounding a courtyard. They have tiled, bamboo, or wood roofs and the houses generally form small villages. Families often either live on the second floor and use the first as a stable or they live on the first floor and use the second for storage. [8]*
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):** *None noted. [8]*
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?**
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:** *A magistrate heading the civil-service of countries collects taxes and administers justice. The "family guarantee" system has sections called "ju" composed of three or four villages each with five family units. [8]*
- 5.12 Trade:** *Carting excursions over the mountains to Burma and Tibet. Prior to 1949, Bai imported marble, pig bristles, leather goods, minerals, and herbal medicines. Recent trade includes the Third Month Market [Guanyin Festival] and the Fish Pool Fair. At this fair, the Bai trade carved wooden furniture, silver jewelry, marble, and embroidery. [8]*
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?** *Only wealthier men are allowed to have multiple wives. [8]*

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR:** *As Bai religion revolves around abstract heavenly spirits, there is less explicit time devoted to religion. However, every village will hold a ceremony and sacrifice for the feast day of the local gods at least once a year. [10]*
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):** *Specialists include trained and dancing and singing, semiprofessional Buddhist masters, and formal Buddhist monks and nuns. Sickness thought to be a result of offending a tutelary spirit or possession by a malevolent one. Shamans or specialists used medicinal herbs, songs, and chants. Some worked as doctors and exorcists in return for food and money as payment. [8]*
- 6.2 Stimulants:**
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):**
- 6.4 Other rituals:** *Females worship publically at temple fairs while men worship private ancestors at home. [8]*
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):** *Worship "communal god".*
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):** *Singing and dancing are extremely important to Bai religious ceremonies and festivals. Dramas in Buddhist temples.*
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**
- 6.8 Missionary effect:** *Christian missionaries regarded with suspicion. Sometimes, they were ostracized. [8]*
- 6.9 RCR revival:** *There was a period of time where temples were burnt, but later the Chinese government became more lenient on different religious beliefs. Now many temples have been rebuilt and Daoist associations have been revived. Most religious practice is relegated to older generations, however. [8]*
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:** *Worship of ancestors protect the living by linking the living to dead spirits. Elements of Buddhism involve beliefs of an afterlife and reincarnation. The Bai also possessed a heavy belief in poltergeists. Bodies traditionally cremated. Now the government sanctions cremation, though earlier Chinese influence brought along burying in elaborate marble tombs. [8]*
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?** *Note noted. [10]*
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?**
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion:** *Traditionally, belief in abstract heavenly and neutral spirits. [8] Generally Buddhist beliefs. Earlier, animist traditions. Daoism and Confucian beliefs later merged into Bai's Buddhism because of frequent interaction with the Chinese. [3]*

## **7. Adornment**

- 7.1 Body paint:**
- 7.2 Piercings:**
- 7.3 Haircut:** *An unmarried girl always combs her hair into a pigtail tied by a red string. [6]*
- 7.4 Scarification:**
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):** *The camellia flower is very important to Bai adornment. Like their namesake, they love the color white, believing it represents dignity and high social status. Red scarves are also worn over the girls' head and has a special name "the flower in the wind and the moon on a snowy night. [6]*
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:** *Bright, well-matched in colors, delicate and fine in embroideries, and plain and simple in style. The Bai also wove "Tonghua" cloth. Camellia flowers are generally used to adorn clothes. Sometimes in lieu of flowers, they will wear a red scarf on their shoulders with a white outer upper garment to resemble blooming camellias. [6]*
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment:** *Men generally wear white outer upper garments and trousers. White is culturally associated with dignity and high social status. Women generally wear more colorful clothes, but white retains its good meaning. An unmarried girl always combs her hair into one pigtail, tied with a red string at its end, and then coils it over her head. She also likes to wear an apron with embroideries. In general, girls enjoy dressing up like beautiful camellia flowers. [6]*
- 7.8 Missionary effect:** *Christians did approach the Bai in the twentieth century, but they were generally regarded with suspicion and ultimately were not very successful. [10]*
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:** *The Bai are also famous for their tie-dyes, which they use for clothing, furniture etc.*

## **8. Kinship systems**

- 8.1 Sibling classification system:**

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:** *None noted.* [10]

**8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):** *Patrilineal descent most likely from Chinese influence. The village is much more important to the culture than the lineage. Members of the same village worship the same ancestor who is said to have founded the village, similarly to a clan.* [8]

**9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

- *Architecture is known for having three wings and one main wall.* [3] *Generally known for having superb skill in architecture.* [5]
- *"Third Month Fair" in March or April based on lunar calendar is the biggest and most extravagant festival.* [3]
- *"Torch Festival" 25th of the sixth month to bring crops and good luck and health.* [3]
- *"Guanyin Festival" celebrates visit from the Goddess of Mercy to the Cangshan Mt. in the seventh century.* [3]
- *Area is well-known for Yunnan Marble, which is pure white with veins of red, light blue, green, and milky yellow.* [5]
- *The seventh day of the New Year is women's day and on that day, women do not cook, carry water, or do other housework. Instead, they relax, play, and enjoy themselves. The ninth day of the New Year is men's day and on this day, men relax and rest. In Yuanlong County, on the 15th of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, people are not allowed to visit others' homes.* [6]
- *"Three Courses of Tea" - first is bitter, second is sweet, third is most memorable.* [7]
- *Girls and boys play and work together.* [8]
- *Since 1949, elementary education is mandatory for all children, but before that it was simply recommended, with educated boys outnumbering girls.* [8]

**Numbered references**

1. Central Bai Ethnologue Report [[http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bca](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bca)]
2. Bai Dialect Survey [<http://www.sil.org/silesr/2007/silesr2007-012.pdf>]
3. Bai People and Culture [<http://www.linden-centre.com/Bai%20People.html>]
4. People & Culture of Yunnan [<http://www.china-hotels.ws/yunnan/people.htm>]
5. The Bai Ethnic Group [<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/EthnicGroups/136895.htm>]
6. Bai Minority, Chinese Culture [<http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/nationality/bai.htm>]
7. Wedding Ceremony of the Bai Culture [<http://traditions.cultural-china.com/en/115Traditions4067.html>]
8. Bai Facts, Information, Pictures [<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Bai.aspx>]
9. Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture by Edward Lawrence Davis
10. Bai [<http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Bai.html>]