

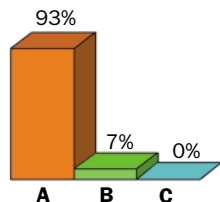


Population in China:
 8,400 (1999)
 8,610 (2000)
 10,800 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Ancestor Worship
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Asahei

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Ah-sa-hay"
Other Names: Asahei Aza, Azar, Asaheipo, Pula
Population Source:
 8,400 (1999 J. Peikay);
 Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)
Location: *Yunnan:* North central Kaiyuan County in Honghe Prefecture
Status:
 Officially included under Yi
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Southeastern Yi
Dialects: 0
Religion: Ancestor Worship, Animism, No Religion
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

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

Location: A total of 8,400 Asahei people live in the north central part of Kaiyuan County in China's Yunnan Province. They inhabit the Jiufang and Hongshiyuan villages of Lebaidao District and Chongmen Village of Mazheshao District.

Identity: The Asahei are not granted status as a minority group in China. They are one of five tribes the Chinese collectively call Aza, although the name is not used by any of the five groups themselves.¹ The Aza, in turn, have been combined with approximately 120 different ethnolinguistic groups to form the large Yi nationality. Many of the groups within the Yi do not acknowledge kinship, and the linguistic diversity among many groups is so great that they are often forced to speak Chinese in order to communicate. One source from the early 1900s even divided the Yi into 485 clans! — "with each clan occupying a distinct territory."²

Language: The Asahei language has yet to be studied in any detail, but it is a unique dialect within the Southeastern Yi group of languages. Since some Asahei children are no longer taught to speak their native tongue, the language may soon become extinct.

History: Although today the Asahei and other Yi appear to live in relative peace and harmony with other groups, in the past they were known as an incredibly violent people. One observer remarked how "Clan feuds seem to have been endemic.... They are

caused by arguments over women, insults... murder, theft (especially of slaves or horses), and defaulting on a debt; but, as elsewhere, the reasons for most feuds were long forgotten, and each clan had traditional enemies. Battles or war could be averted if the offenders paid an indemnity in silver or horses, or, if the offending clan were poor and no loss of life was involved, the wrong-doer might go on horseback (wearing a silk dress with a mirror in his hair and raw beef in his mouth) to apologize and to offer wine and beef to the offended party."³

Customs: Today many customs and ceremonies among the Asahei are becoming extinct. Until recently they played traditional bamboo musical instruments and carried pouches which contained charms such as boar's teeth, tiger claws, bear claws, and prayers written by the shaman to guide their

lives and bring good luck and prosperity.

Religion: Ancestor worship is the predominant religion among the Asahei today. Many Asahei under the age of 40 are nonreligious and participate in the rituals of their parents only with reluctance.

Christianity: There has never been a single known Christian church among the Asahei. French Catholic missionary Paul Vial, who worked among the related Axi and Sani peoples, found that he was accepted because the Yi believed they were also of Caucasian descent. Vial wrote, "The Lolo is convinced that we belong to the same race as him; and this conviction draws him all the closer to us, as he hates the Chinese race. 'Since we are of the same race, it is natural,' he says, 'that we be of the same religion.' And so he hopes to live in the safety of the protective shadow of our influence."⁴



Dwayne Graybill