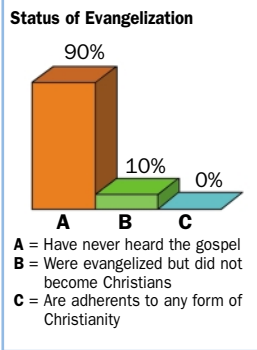




**Population in China:**  
 1,000 (1999)  
 1,020 (2000)  
 1,280 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Ancestor Worship  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Azong

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Ah-zong"  
**Other Names:**  
**Population Source:**  
 1,000 (1999 J. Pelkey);  
 Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)  
**Location:** S Yunnan: Jiangcheng County in Simao Prefecture  
**Status:**  
 Officially included under Yi  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Southern Yi  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:**  
 Ancestor Worship, Animism  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None



**Location:** According to Jamin Pelkey, 1,000 people belonging to the Azong ethnic group live in Jiangcheng County within Simao Prefecture of southern Yunnan Province.<sup>1</sup> Other people groups included in the official Yi nationality who live in Jiangcheng County are the Xiangtang, Yuanyang Nisu, Alu, and Laowu. The area is hilly and lush, with abundant rainfall. Many of the ethnic groups in the region spill over into neighboring Vietnam and Laos.

**Identity:** The Azong are one of 120 different subgroups of the officially recognized Yi nationality in China. One ethnographer, who has researched the Yi, wrote, "If the 'Yi' had a mutual and continuous history, perhaps this would lend some credence to their common classification, yet even here one is hard-pressed to find similarities or continuity. The official stance on the origin of the 'Yi' usually states they were descendants from the Qiang who migrated south from Qinghai and Gansu 2,000 to 3,000 years ago. While this is plausible and even probable in many cases, it does not follow, therefore, that this nationality has remained one homogeneous people group some 2,000 years later.... How long have the 'Yi' been in existence? The answer is clear: 'they never were'.<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Azong language is believed to be a part of the Southern Yi group of languages, although no research has been conducted to confirm this. It is possible they speak a Western Yi language as do the

Xiangtang who also live in Jiangcheng County.

**History:** When Marco Polo passed through the Yi areas of "Caindu" in the late thirteenth century, he recounted some of the unique sexual practices of the people at the time: "I must tell you of a custom that they have in this country regarding their women. No man considers himself wronged if a foreigner, or any other man, dishonor his wife, or daughter, or sister, or any woman of his family, but on the contrary he deems such intercourse a piece of good fortune. And they say that it brings the favor of their gods and idols, and great increase of temporal prosperity."<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** Until recent years, when burial has been gradually phased out in favor of cremation by the central government, the Azong placed silver in the mouths of their dead. The body was buried in a favorable place with the

name of the deceased written on the headstone. The oldest son was required to use the blood from his own finger to write the names of his parents on a wooden tablet, using Yi characters.

**Religion:** These tablets were then kept for three generations and used in ancestral rites, before they were burned. Ancestor worship mixed with animism remain the major religious beliefs among the Azong.

**Christianity:** Although there are about 2,000 Christians among the "Yi" in Jiangcheng County, all of them are believed to be from among the Yuanyang Nisu group. There are no known Christians among the Azong. The languages of the Azong and Yuanyang Nisu are divergent enough to make mutual communication impossible. This has created a barrier to the spread of the gospel between different ethnic groups in this part of the country.



Dwayne Graybill