



Paul Hattaway

Location: A widespread, isolated area of southwest Sichuan Province is home to approximately 39,000 Chrame people. Most are located in and around Muli County, described as “a rich possession. The rivers, especially the Litang, carry gold and produce a considerable revenue.”¹ Scattered Chrame communities are found as far west as the Yarlung (Dadu) River at Shimian, 200 kilometers (123 mi.) from Muli and as far north as Wenchuan County.² In addition, a small number of Chrame live in the Yongning District of Ninglang County in northern Yunnan Province. The Chrame king once “held sway over a territory of 9,000 square miles — an area slightly larger than Massachusetts.”³

Identity: Chrame is the self-name of this group.⁴ In the past, they were commonly

known as *Xifan*, a derogatory Chinese name meaning “barbarians of the west” — a name not only applied to this group but sometimes also used for all Tibetans.⁵ The Chrame “are a member of the Tibetan *minzu* [nationality], but feel they have little in common with the Tibetans.”⁶

Language: The Chrame language — which has three tones and five dialects — has been labeled by Chinese scholars as a northern variety of Pumi. There is 60% lexical similarity between Chrame and Southern Pumi. When explorer Joseph Rock visited the Chrame in 1924, he noted “the king’s knowledge of Tibetan was poor.”⁷

History: Muli was formerly a Buddhist monastery town resided over by a king until the 1950s. “The rulers of Muli are said to be of

Manchu origin. They were given the sovereignty of the kingdom in perpetuity in recognition of valorous services rendered to Yungcheng, the famous Manchu emperor, who ascended the throne in 1723.”⁸ In the past the Chrame were often attacked by Nosu raiders from the east. The Chrame king ruled with “absolute spiritual and temporal sway”⁹ over his subjects. “The villagers occupy wooden shanties scattered over the hillsides below the town. They are very poor, and live in constant fear of the lama king and his parasitic satellites.”¹⁰

Customs: A 1981 survey of 131 households in Muli found 52% of the marriages engaged in monogamy, 32% practiced *polyandry* (brothers sharing a wife), and 16% practiced *polygamy* (sisters sharing a husband).¹¹ The king of Muli was fond of feeding visitors “dried legs of mutton and yak cheese... propelled by squirming maggots the size of a man’s thumb.” Rock’s group gave theirs to the beggars, who “fought for it like tigers.”¹²

Religion: All Chrame adhere to Tibetan Buddhism. It forms a major part of their ethnic and cultural identity. The Chrame inwardly long for the restoration of their kingdom and their former prestige among the other peoples of the area.

Christianity: The Chrame are one of the most unreached people groups in China. There has never been a single known Chrame church or Christian believer. The Baptist missionaries Dan and Lucy Carr planned to work in Muli in the late

1940s, but they were evacuated from China before they had the opportunity to move there.



Population in China:
 30,000 (1987)
 39,000 (2000)
 48,100 (2010)
Location: Sichuan, Yunnan
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Chrame

Countries: China
Pronunciation: “Krah-mee”
Other Names: Hsifan, Xifan, Pumi; Northern
Population Source: 30,000 (1987 LAC); Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)
Location: SW Sichuan: Muli, Yanyuan; and Jiulong counties; Scattered as far north as Wenchuan County; N Yunnan: Ninglang County
Status: Officially included under Tibetan
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Pumi, Northern Pumi
Dialects: 5
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: HSI00 (Xifan); CMY00 (Chrame)

