



Midge Conner

**Location:** More than 6,000 members of the Derung nationality live in some of the most isolated terrain in all of China. Ninety percent of the Derung live in the extreme northwestern part of Yunnan Province, along the Dulong River basin in Gongshan County. The Derung region is “highly mountainous and rainfall is abundant. Virgin forests cover the mountain slopes, and wild animals abound.”<sup>1</sup> Twenty-one Derung live in Zayu County, Tibet. In addition, the Derung are also found in northern Myanmar.

**Identity:** The Derung are the fifth smallest of China’s 55 official minority groups. Their self-name is *Turung* which the Chinese have transliterated as *Derung*. A visitor in the 1920s described them as “a primitive, harmless jungle people who live in trees like monkeys.”<sup>2</sup> The Derung and Nu claim they were once brothers who were separated and forced to live

on different sides of the river.

**Language:** In addition to the ethnic Derung, 5,500 people belonging to the Nu nationality speak Derung as their mother tongue.<sup>3</sup> Derung is one dialect of the larger Rawang group in Myanmar, which contains an astonishing 75 to 100 dialects.<sup>4</sup> Four dialects are reportedly spoken in China.<sup>5</sup> Few Derung are able to speak Chinese. Because they did not have a script, the Derung formerly kept records by carving notches on wood or by tying knots.

**History:** Before 1949 there were 15 patriarchal clans called *nile* among the Derung. Each *nile* consisted of several family communes. Each commune possessed its own territory which was marked off by boundaries such as streams and mountain ridges. Each clan was further divided into *ke-eng* — villages where people lived in common long houses. The members of

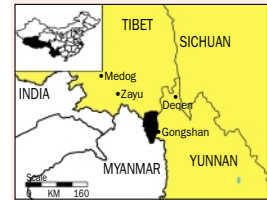
each *ke-eng* regarded themselves as descended from the same ancestor. The Derung gained notoriety for defeating a British military expedition in 1913.

**Customs:** The Derung are one of the most remote groups in China. There are no roads to their villages, many of which are only accessible by several days’ walk over treacherous trails.<sup>6</sup> The Derung wear their hair down to their eyebrows in the front. Until recently, Derung girls tattooed their faces at the onset of puberty with designs according to their respective clans. The dead are buried in hollow logs, except when death is the result of a major disease. Then the corpse is cremated and the ashes disposed of in the river.<sup>7</sup>

**Religion:** In the past, each Derung clan had its own shaman who directed warfare and healed the sick. Modern health clinics have put the shamans out of business.

**Christianity:** The first missionary among the Derung was a French Catholic priest in 1907. In 1935 the Morse family came to the Derung area. People from four villages accepted Christ and six churches were built.<sup>8</sup> Through the work of the Morse family, almost the entire Rawang tribe in Myanmar was converted.<sup>9</sup> Today the number of believers among the Derung in China is uncertain. One source states, “Some estimate that there are as many as 5,000 Derung Christians in China (85.97%) while 25% Christian (about 1,450) is estimated by one

Western worker close to the situation.”<sup>10</sup>



**Population in China:**

5,316 (1990)  
6,850 (2000)  
8,840 (2010)

**Location:** Yunnan, Tibet

**Religion:** Animism

**Christians:** 1,450

## Overview of the Derung

**Countries:** Myanmar, China

**Pronunciation:** “Deh-rohng”

**Other Names:** Drung, Trung, Tulung, Turung, Dulong, Khanung, Kjutzu, Ch’utzu

**Population Source:**  
5,816 (1990 census);<sup>11</sup>  
4,682 (1982 census);  
3,090 (1964 census);  
Also in Myanmar

**Location:** NW Yunnan: 90% live in the Derung River valley, in the Gongshan Derung-Nu County; SE Tibet: Zawa in Zayu County

**Status:**  
An official minority of China

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Nungish

**Literacy:** 38%

**Dialects (4):** Melam, Metu, Tamalu, Tukiumu

**Religion:** Animism, Christianity, Polytheism, Shamanism

**Christians:** 1,450

**Scripture:** Rawang Bible 1986; New Testament 1974; Portions 1952

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** DUU00

