



Dwayne Graybill

Location: Approximately 100,000 members of the Lami tribe inhabit seven different counties in Yunnan Province. One of the largest Lami villages is Habo in Yuanyang County which is described as “a small hamlet with about two hundred Lami households living in high and spacious houses. Built with solid mud bricks and straw on a stone foundation half-way up the mountain, the houses resemble each other in style. Their white-washed walls present a neat appearance.”¹ The Lami are also located in northern Vietnam where they are one of the official subgroups of the Hani minority.

Identity: Approximately 13,000 Lami in Pu'er County have been officially classified under the Hani nationality.² The majority of Lami, however, have been officially included as part of the Yi nationality. The name Lami may mean “dirty” or

“lowly.” Some Hani may identify themselves as Lami so they can be treated as a separate group.

Language: The Lami language is part of the Western Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Many Lami adults are also able to speak and write Chinese. Because the authorities do not encourage the use of Lami, all schooling is done in Mandarin.

History: In the distant past the Lami were a part of a large group of Tibeto-Burman peoples, including today’s Akha, Hani, and Yi. Research indicates the formation of today’s distinct Hani groups started in the thirteenth century, probably as a result of Genghis Khan’s conquest of Yunnan.³

Customs: The Long Dragon Banquet is a Lami festival held on the third and fourth

days of the 12th lunar month every year. Tables, dishes, trays, and wine cups are placed in a pattern to resemble the scales of a dragon. Each household is required to prepare “a table of fifteen to twenty dishes of delicacies comprising of food they grudge eating at ordinary times, that is, birds, beasts and aquatic produce. No ingredients such as carrots or cabbage are to be used.”⁴

Religion: The Lami keep strictly to the customs handed down from their ancestors. Angmatu, their principal festival, is considered the best time for them to worship their deity and ask for blessings. “The god of Strength is the deity they worship, the god they believe can dispel disasters and sweep away all evils and monsters, and endow them with auspiciousness, fortune, longevity and bumper harvests.”⁵ Festival leaders among the Lami are selected after they have been approved by the deities. Chickens are slaughtered and their liver patterns studied to determine who should take up the sacred posts. During the festival, the leaders must sleep on one side of their body and abstain from sexual intercourse and from eating meat. For one month prior to the festival they must separate themselves from all people, including their own families.⁶

Christianity: There are a few thousand known Lami Christians, due to the witness of large Christian communities among the nearby Kado and Biyo. The Lami zealously guard their traditions and refuse to

allow outside influences into their culture. The introverted nature of the Lami has kept most from seeing their need of God.



Population in China:
 80,000 (1990)
 100,400 (2000)
 126,000 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: 2,000

Overview of the Lami

- Countries:** China, Vietnam
- Pronunciation:** “La-mee”
- Other Names:** Liumi, Ban
- Population Source:** 80,000 (1990 AMO); Also in Vietnam
- Location:** Yunnan: Yuanyang County in southern Honghe Prefecture; and Jingdong, Jinggu, Pu'er, Mojiang, Yunxiang, and Fengqing counties
- Status:** Officially included under both Hani and Yi
- Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Western Yi
- Dialects:** 0
- Religion:** Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity
- Christians:** 2,000
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** None

