

**Location:** Approximately 20,000 Lawu live in the soaring Ailao Mountains of Simao and Yuxi prefectures in southwest China's Yunnan Province. Besides the 12,500 living in the northwestern part of Xinping County, many more Lawu can be found in Zhenyuan and Jingdong counties of Simao Prefecture. The highest concentration of Lawu live on steep slopes in the Shuitang District of Xinping County. More than 60% of the district's total population are Lawu people.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** Although they have been officially classified as part of the generic Yi nationality in China, the Lawu are a distinct ethnolinguistic group. They have never before been listed in any ethnographic survey of China's people groups and, therefore, have never been on any mission lists of China's unreached peoples either.<sup>2</sup> The Lawu are culturally and linguistically different from three other similarly named Yi groups in Yunnan: the Awu, the Lалу, and the Lалу.

**Language:** Although they are located in southwestern Yunnan, the Lawu speak a language belonging to the Western Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family.

**History:** Even though the Yi minority in China is comprised of more than 100



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tribes and subgroups speaking numerous languages and dialects, some of these groups share common historical roots. Many Yi (and some Hani) believe a man named Zzemuyvy (Zhongmuyu in Chinese) was their original ancestor.<sup>3</sup> Zzemuyvy and his six descendants are referred to in Yi manuscripts from as far as Sichuan to southern Yunnan and Guizhou provinces.

**Customs:** Every five days (on days 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 of each month), the Lawu from Shuitang District in Xinping County come down from the mountains to trade with the Tai and Han living in the Gasa River valley.

**Religion:** For countless generations the Lawu have adhered to the superstitions of animism, polytheism, and ancestor worship. Their belief system reveals itself in a number of different ways. One example is *Mi Ga Ha*, which in the Lawu language is the "Dragon Worship Festival." During the second lunar month, a day is chosen for all villagers to gather around a large tree and hold a ceremony to worship the dragon. They believe the dragon is responsible for rainfall and many other natural phenomena. They hope to appease the dragon in order to quell floods and prevent drought. At the same time many other Yi people celebrate the Torch Festival, the Lawu observe a day of worshipping their ancestors.

**Christianity:** There are believed to be a handful of Christians among the isolated Lawu people. They are not considered resistant to the gospel but have simply never heard it. Paul Vial, a French Catholic missionary among the Sani in the late 1800s, held great hopes for all Yi groups becoming Christian, especially because of their belief in Creation and the Universal Flood. He wrote, "Christianity... will make them understand what is beautiful, good, and true, and the [Yi] will no longer think to search elsewhere for that which he will find henceforth in himself."<sup>4</sup>



**Population in China:**  
 19,500 (1999)  
 19,950 (2000)  
 25,100 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Polytheism  
**Christians:** 10

## Overview of the Lawu

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Lah-woo"  
**Other Names:** Lao-wou, Lao-wu  
**Population Source:** 19,500 (1999 J. Pelkey); Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)  
**Location:** *Yunnan:* Xinping County in Yuxi Prefecture (12,500); Zhenyuan County in Simao Prefecture (7,000)  
**Status:** Officially included under Yi

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Western Yi  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity  
**Christians:** 10  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None

