



Population:
 2,140 (2000)
 2,670 (2010)
 3,290 (2020)
Countries: China
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: none known

Overview of the Lemo

Other Names: Laimo, Lu-k'ou

Population Sources:

2,000 in China (1997, D Graybill)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Chinese

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 60%

Practising Buddhists: 35%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

More than 2,000 people who use the ethnic name Lemo live in the small town of Lemo, 78 kilometres (48 mi.) from Liuku Township in western Yunnan Province, China. The Lemo live along the Nujiang River, near the mountainous China-Myanmar border and close to communities of Lisu and Nu people.

The Lemo appear to be an ethnic group who developed as the result of intermarriage between the Tai Mao and Lisu. Francis Ward, writing in 1913, described them as racially mixed people who spoke

Chinese.¹ Today, the Lemo still view themselves as different from surrounding communities, and they still wear their own spectacular ethnic dress. The Chinese authorities have not given minority status to the Lemo but have included them as part of the Lisu nationality.

Being a mix of Lisu and Tai Mao (who speak two completely unrelated languages from two different linguistic families), the Lemo decided to speak Chinese among themselves. Today some Lemo men speak Lisu, but it has been relearned to enable them to trade with the Lisu, who are the largest ethnic group in north-west Yunnan. There are few or no traces of the Tai Mao language remaining among the Lemo.

The Lemo say they were once great hunters who fed their families by killing wild game in the mountains. Hunting parties often travelled away for weeks at a time into northern Myanmar. These days most Lemo

are agriculturists, although the men still possess bows and arrows and swords. Since the government's inclusion of the Lemo under the Lisu minority—a classification the Lemo strongly disagree with—their identity as a distinct people group has gradually eroded. Neighbouring people,

who are forced to believe that China has only 55 minority nationalities, now call them *Lisu*. This has resulted in some comical situations. When several researchers visited the Lemo in 1997, they asked at the home of a Bai man, who said he had never heard of the Lemo. They then knocked on the door of another home about 20 feet away. The family who lived there excitedly said that they were Lemo, and all the people in that particular village were Lemo except the Bai home they first visited!²



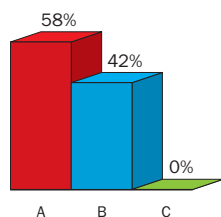
Dwayne Graybill

In the 1950s, the Lemo were the focus of a government crop project. With irrigation and the use of 72 tons of manure per hectare, grain output dramatically increased from 100 kilograms (220 lb.) to 1.25 tons (2,750 lb.) per capita.³

Most Lemo people, especially the elderly, are Theravada Buddhists. They are superstitious people who believe in ghost-like deities and the existence of good and evil spirits. If someone dies from an accident it is considered a bad omen. Nine grains of rice (seven for women) are placed in the mouth of the deceased to appease the spirit of death.

Although the Lemo live in a strong Christian area with thousands of Lisu, Nu and Han Chinese believers, there are no known Christians among the Lemo. The Lemo's strong belief in Buddhism and their isolated cultural mindset have prevented them from accepting the gospel from their neighbours.

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
 B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
 C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity