


Population in China:

30,000 (1987)

41,300 (2000)

53,300 (2010)

Location: Hainan Island

Religion: Animism

Christians: None Known

Overview of the Meifu Li

Countries: China

Pronunciation: “May-foo Lee”

Other Names: Moifau

Population Source:

30,000 (1987 LAC);

Out of a total Li population of 1,110,900 (1990 census)

Location: Hainan Island:

Cheyi and Dongfang counties

Status: Officially included under Li

Language: Daic, Kadai, Li-Laqua

Dialects: 0

Religion:

Animism, Polytheism, No Religion

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

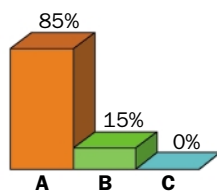
Gospel Recordings:

Li: Dongfang

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: LIC03

Status of Evangelization


A = Have never heard the gospel

B = Were evangelized but did not become Christians

C = Are adherents to any form of Christianity

Location: The 1987 *Language Atlas of China* listed a population of 30,000 speakers of the Meifu Li language. The majority live along the western banks of the Changhua River in parts of the Cheyi and Dongfang counties. In the past the inhabitants of Hainan Island were decimated by disease, especially malignant malaria which wiped out whole villages. Minority

populations grew little over the centuries and, in some areas, even declined. With the introduction of modern medicine, the Li people are experiencing rapid growth. The population of the Meifu Li is expected to rise to more than 41,000 by the year 2000, and 53,000 by 2010.

Identity: The Meifu are one of five different tribes that have been combined to form the official Li nationality in China.

Language: Meifu is a distinct language, not intelligible with other varieties of Li. Most Meifu Li are also able to speak the Ha Li language, which acts as the common language between members of the various Li groups. Speakers of Meifu Li refer to their language as *Moi Fau*, meaning “the Han people below.”¹ Meifu has its own vocabulary, but it is phonetically similar to the Ha and Bendi Li languages.

History: The Li are believed to have once been part of the great Yue race which splintered to become today’s Li, Zhuang, Bouyei, Shui, Dong, and Dai minority groups.² In the sixth century AD, Madame Xian, a political leader of the Yues in

southern China, pledged allegiance to the Sui Dynasty.³ This opened up Hainan Island to Chinese rule for the first time in history. The fact that the Meifu refer to themselves as “the Han people below” suggests that they may have been descended from Chinese migrants over the centuries, who intermingled with the Li and formed their own language.

Customs: In the past the Li lived in simple straw huts designed to withstand the many typhoons that strike the island every year. They dug a pit in the ground, placed bamboo or wood poles over it to form an oblong frame, and covered it with straw. The result was a low-lying structure that resembled an overturned boat.⁴ As part of a Li wedding ceremony, the bride’s family must kiss a

pig and two fowls. The bride’s eldest brother remains her legal guardian after the marriage.⁵

Religion: The Meifu Li traditionally believed in the existence of ghosts and devils, but now only the elderly practice spirit appeasement. The younger generation, having been educated in atheistic schools, rejects all such practices as foolish superstition.

Christianity: There are no known churches or Christians among the Meifu Li. Although many people on Hainan have come to Christ in recent years — the total number of believers has grown to approximately 70,000⁶ — the majority of the converts are among the different Han Chinese language groups in the northern part of the island.



Paul Hattaway