



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** More than 15,000 Lopi people live in small communities scattered throughout northern Yunnan and southern Sichuan. Anthropologist Stevan Harrell is the only scholar known to have researched the Lopi. He estimates between 2,000 and 3,000 Lopi live in Futian and Pingjiang districts, near Panzhuhua in southern Sichuan Province.<sup>1</sup> The large and polluted town of Panzhuhua is an “iron, steel, vanadium and titanium mining complex built since 1965.”<sup>2</sup>

**Identity:** The Chinese authorities have counted the Lopi as part of the huge Yi nationality who, in 1945, were found to be a collection of 93 different tribes.<sup>3</sup> This classification, however, has angered the Lopi who “do not even agree that they are Yi; they think of the Yi as mountain

barbarians and have no wish to be associated with them; they are both puzzled and bitter that they have not won recognition as a separate *minzu* [nationality].”<sup>4</sup> According to Harrell, the Han neighbors of the Lopi are aware of their claim of separate status, but “it is not much of an issue for them.”<sup>5</sup> The future of the Lopi as a distinct people is endangered. Harrell notes, “Their system of kinship terminology like their dress, their religion, and their language, is now identical with that of the Han; only their sense of self-identity and their official classification as members of a minority distinguish them from their Han neighbors.”<sup>6</sup> *Lopi* is the self-name of this group. The Chinese call them *Shuitian*, meaning “Watery fields people.”

**Language:** It may already be too late to save the Lopi

language from extinction. The Lopi used to speak a Yi language, but now “only a few older people still remember even basic vocabulary, and we could find no informants who knew kinship terms beyond those for primary relations.”<sup>7</sup>

**History:** The Panzhuhua area is a crossroads for many tribes and people groups. There are at least five kinds of Yi in the region, including the Eastern Lipo, Bai Yi, Nosu, and Michi who migrated from Guizhou. These groups are described as “all very different from each other.”<sup>8</sup>

**Customs:** The Chinese name for the Lopi, (Watery Fields People) indicates their occupation. They are primarily engaged in cultivating rice which they grow in irrigated fields. There are few distinct customs left among the Lopi, who have been gradually assimilated by the Han Chinese in much the same way as “stomach juices will treat a steak.”<sup>9</sup>

**Religion:** Most Lopi are nonreligious, although a few minor traces of animistic practices remain among the elderly Lopi in the mountains.

**Christianity:** Although there are few known Christians among the Lopi today, the area around Panzhuhua has a rich missions history. The Catholic Paris Foreign Missionary Society commenced work in the region as early as 1790. In 1802 Monseigneur de Philomeile reported that “the Lolos [Yi] wish to become Christians in groups.” In five or six days he counted as many as 500

potential converts.<sup>10</sup> In 1809 Monsieur Hamel baptized 74 adults in Huili, northeast of the Lopi area.<sup>11</sup> The neighboring Eastern Lipo group has many Christians.

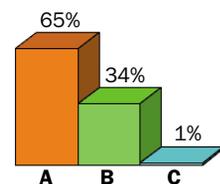


**Population in China:**  
 10,000 (1990)  
 15,060 (2000)  
 18,900 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan, Sichuan  
**Religion:** No Religion  
**Christians:** 50

## Overview of the Lopi

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** “Lo-pee”  
**Other Names:** Shuitian, Tu  
**Population Source:**  
 10,000 (1990 AMO);  
 Out of a total Yi population of  
 6,572,173 (1990 census)  
**Location:** *N Yunnan:* Huaping,  
 Dayao, and Yongsheng counties;  
*S Sichuan:* Futian and Pingjiang  
 districts  
**Status:**  
 Officially included under Yi  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan,  
 Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo,  
 Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Central Yi  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** No Religion, Animism,  
 Ancestor Worship  
**Christians:** 50  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** None

## 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