



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** Between 1,500 and 2,000 speakers of the Manyak language live in the isolated and thinly populated mountains of southern Sichuan Province. Their exact location is unknown, but they are part of the larger Ersu group which is dispersed throughout Shijin, Yanyuan, Ganluo, Yuexi, Mianning, Muli, and Jiulong counties in southern Sichuan.

**Identity:** Speakers of Manyak have been officially included under the Tibetan nationality in China. The Manyak are not the same as the Minyak, who are also sometimes called *Minya* or *Muya*. The Minyak live farther north than the Manyak. When Joseph Rock traveled to Muli in the 1920s, he stated, "One of the least known spots in the world is this independent lama kingdom of Muli....

Almost nothing has been written about the kingdom and its people, who are known to the Chinese as *Hsifan*, or Western Barbarians. The Europeans who have passed through during the last 100 years can be counted on the fingers of one hand."<sup>1</sup>

**Language:** Although few people have ever heard of this tribe, the Manyak language was first described by B. H. Hodgson in 1874.<sup>2</sup> Manyak is part of the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman. Linguist Jackson Sun has identified Manyak as an Ersu language.

**History:** The history of the Manyak has been tied to the former Kingdom of Muli, which dominated the lives of its inhabitants until the Communists dethroned the king in the early 1950s. Manyak men were forcibly

enlisted in the king's armies to ward off raids by the Nosu, who launched regular attacks from their home base in the Daliangshan mountains.

**Customs:** The Manyak lead incredibly difficult lives. Their attempts to cultivate crops often fail due to the steep slopes. Joseph Rock commented, "The kingdom is so mountainous that it is impossible to cultivate the soil except along the Litang River and in the narrow valleys of its tributaries descending from the mighty ranges."<sup>3</sup> Because of poor nutrition and hygiene, many Manyak die before their 40th birthday.

**Religion:** All Manyak belong to the Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism. "Their cloaks are always red, but the distinguishing mark of the sect is the yellow ceremonial hat. It is usual for two or three out of every five male members of a family to become lamas. When there are three brothers in a family, two become lamas, and the third often marries several wives to carry on the family."<sup>4</sup> The Manyak also practice spirit worship and sacrifice. They live in constant fear of powerful demons and deities they believe have the power to cause affliction and bring epidemics if they are not appeased by the people.

**Christianity:** The Manyak are among the neediest unreached people groups in all of China. The great majority have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. They are without a witness and spiritually blinded by the powerful influence of Tibetan Buddhism. With no

Bible, gospel radio, *Jesus* film, or audio recordings in a language they can understand, the Manyak have little chance of hearing the gospel.



**Population in China:**  
 1,800 (1998)  
 1,880 (2000)  
 2,320 (2010)  
**Location:** Sichuan  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Manyak

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** "Mahn-yahk"  
**Other Names:**  
**Population Source:**  
 1,800 (1998 AMO);  
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)  
**Location:**  
*S Sichuan*; Probably in Muli County  
**Status:**  
 Officially included under Tibetan  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Ersu  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:**  
 Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** YMY00

