

# Puman

Approximately 18,000 Puman people inhabit areas of south-west China. One source says that 'they number in the tens of thousands and can be found today living in Yunnan Province, especially in an area located between Baoshan, the Wuliang Hills and down to Simao, Lancang, Gengma and Zhenkang'.<sup>1</sup>

The Puman have been officially included as part of the Bulang nationality in China, although one linguist notes that the two groups are 'not very closely related'.<sup>2</sup>

The Puman are part of the great Mon-Khmer race of Asia. Over the centuries, the Mon-Khmer splintered into numerous groups that today are spread as far as India's Nicobar Islands and Indonesia. One linguist notes, 'Not all Pumans speak Puman as their native tongue. The Pumans living in the region between Zhenkang and Yunxian no longer speak Puman but have adopted Chinese as their native language.'<sup>3</sup>

The Puman traditionally cast lots every year before a statue of Buddha to determine where they should farm. Puman women adorn themselves with colourful head scarfs, often decorated with pieces of silver in the shape of shells or fish. This has baffled experts, since their region is located far from the coast.<sup>4</sup>

Most Puman are devoted believers in Theravada Buddhism. 'Larger Puman villages have a monastery and a special house for Buddhist images, since their religion is a syncretic mix of traditional animism and Theravada Buddhism.'<sup>5</sup>



Create International

In south-west China various Buddhist groups retain many stories regarding the coming of a Saviour, a blessed one who fits the description of Jesus Christ in many respects. Missionary William Clifton Dodd, who travelled extensively throughout the region in the 1930s, was intrigued to learn of some of the characteristics of this Theravada Buddhist messiah: 'His coming is to be preceded by a

falling away from the practice of religion, morality and righteousness. His forerunner shall level every mountain, exalt every valley, make crooked places straight, and rough places smooth. . . . Only the pure in heart and life shall be able to see him. But those who see are to be delivered from the thralldom of rebirth. He is to be recognized by his pierced hand. And his religion shall be introduced from the south [Christianity came into southern Yunnan from Thailand], by a man with a white face and a long beard [a description that fits both Donald McGilvary and Dr Wilson—the first missionaries to bring the gospel to this part of China].'<sup>6</sup>

Despite their belief in a Saviour, most Puman have yet to hear about Jesus Christ. Few Christians have ever endeavoured to take the gospel to these people locked away in remote mountains and deep forests. Consequently, there has never been a known Christian fellowship among the Puman people, nor has there even been a single known Puman believer.



**Population:**  
16,520 (2000)  
21,300 (2010)  
26,200 (2020)  
**Countries:** China  
**Buddhism:** Theravada  
**Christians:** none known

## Overview of the Puman

**Other Names:** U, P'uman, Wa-la, Phuman

**Population Sources:**  
12,000 in China (1987, D Bradley)

**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Palaungic-Khmuic, Palaungic, Western Palaungic, Angkuic

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 100%

**Practising Buddhists:** 75%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

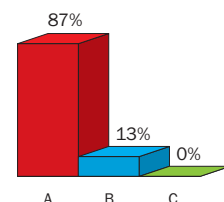
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Blang: Puman

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** UUU

## 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