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Location: More than 37,000 members of the Pumi minority inhabit the mountains of northern Yunnan Province. They live in approximately 500 villages, some of which are located 3,200 meters (10,500 ft.) above sea level.¹ In many locations the Pumi live beside members of the Naxi nationality. Despite 2,000 years of history, the Pumi population has remained relatively small because of disease, plague, famine, and assimilation to other tribes.²

Identity: The Pumi are one of China's officially recognized minority groups. In 1960 the government combined various tribes and labeled them *Pumi*. Prior to that, each tribe called themselves by a different name, including *Boukhaj*.³ The Pumi today call themselves a name which means "white men." The 30,000 Chrame people in Sichuan speak a language related to Pumi, but they

have been counted in the Tibetan nationality.

Language: Pumi — which has five dialects — is a member of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Some scholars believe it was originally a Qiangic language.⁴ Today after centuries of interaction, 15% of Pumi vocabulary consists of Chinese loanwords.

History: According to Pumi legends and historical records, the ancestors of the Pumi were a nomadic tribe who roamed areas hundreds of miles farther north of their present location. They were forcibly moved to Yunnan by the Mongolians in the 1300s.⁵

Customs: On the 15th day of the first month of the Pumi calendar, all Pumi, "clad in their holiday best, go camping on mountain slopes and celebrate around bonfires. The holidays are devoted to sacrifices to the 'god of the kitchen'. They

celebrate with wild feasting, horse racing, shooting contests and wrestling."⁶ At the age of 13, Pumi youth are considered adults. When a Pumi dies, a conch is blown three times to beckon villagers. A shaman then holds a *Gei Yangzi Yishi* (Sheep Guide) rite. The Pumi believe a sheep will lead the spirit of the deceased into the land of their ancestors.⁷

Religion: The Pumi live in fear of the spirit world. If offended, the deities can release a deluge of fierce, predatory beasts against their livestock. All Pumi worship Suogunaba, the god of the Mountains. Worship of this powerful spirit is observed on the 5th, 15th, and 25th day of each lunar month. Ancestor worship is also practiced. Food is not eaten until it has been placed on the *guozhuang*, or tripod, to signify an invitation to the ancestors to eat first. Spirits are also believed to dwell in the wooden center post of their homes.

Christianity: Because of their linguistic variety and isolated communities, the Pumi have been largely neglected with the gospel. Prior to 1949, German missionaries reportedly witnessed to the Pumi, but little fruit remains. Although there is no organized church among the Pumi today, visitors report that they are a people "ripe unto harvest." In the early 1990s several Pumi were baptized by a Mosuo believer near Lugu Lake.⁸ A potential breakthrough occurred in 1997 when 30 Pumi people prayed to receive Christ after viewing the *Jesus* film in Mandarin.⁹



Population in China:
 29,657 (1990)
 37,900 (2000)
 48,500 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: 30

Overview of the Pumi

- Countries:** China
- Pronunciation:** "Poo-mee"
- Other Names:** Primi, Primmi, Baju, P'um, Pimi, Prummi, P'rome
- Population Source:**
 29,657 (1990 census);
 24,237 (1982 census);
 14,298 (1964 census)
- Location:** N Yunnan: Lanping, Weixi, Yongsheng, Ninglang, and Lijiang counties; As far north as Lugu Lake
- Status:**
 An official minority of China
- Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Pumi, Southern Pumi
- Literacy:** 39%
- Dialects:** 5
- Religion:** Polytheism, Animism, Shamanism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity
- Christians:** 30
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** PUS00

