

**Location:** More than 475,000 Lahu inhabit seven counties in the western part of Yunnan Province.<sup>1</sup> Their villages are often situated on mountains at least 1,500 meters (4,920 ft.) above sea level. In addition, significant numbers of Lahu are located in Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos.

**Identity:** The Lahu are one of China's 55 official minority groups. The name *Lahu* reportedly means "to roast tiger meat by fire," although others say the name has no particular meaning. Their skill as hunters has given them their nickname of *Musso*, which is used throughout Southeast Asia. Since 1890, when the Lahu surrendered their rebellion against their Yi and Tai landlords, they have been viewed as cowardly by other minority groups in Yunnan. An old Lahu man said, "Ever since the defeat, the Lahu lost heart and were despised by other groups."<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** Lahu — which has seven tones — has been vividly described as "perhaps the most exquisite form of speech ever devised by the mind of man."<sup>3</sup> Lahu from different locations often struggle to understand each other.<sup>4</sup>

**History:** The Lahu have a long history of war and armed conflict against their oppressors. They rebelled more than 20 times throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The region they occupied west of the Lancang River was branded "a place of constant riot."<sup>5</sup>

**Customs:** Lahu women give birth in the privacy of their own rooms. Three days after the birth they invite old people to a small feast where a name is given to the child. However, if an unexpected visitor should come in the meantime, he or she is given the honor of naming the newborn. When a Lahu dies, three shots are fired into the air to scare away the spirits and to announce the news to the village.

Lahu communities have long been plagued by stealing<sup>6</sup> and rampant alcoholism. "It is common to see a group of Lahu drunk and beating their fists on the roadside and shouting as they are led homeward."<sup>7</sup>

**Religion:** The Lahu believe in a supreme god named *G'ui Sha*. Many Lahu villages have a temple consecrated to this deity. This belief in One Supreme Being played a large part in their mass conversion to Christianity.

**Christianity:** When American Baptist missionary William Young first preached the gospel to the Lahu in northern Burma in 1901, they exclaimed, "We as a people have been waiting for you for centuries...."



Paul Hattaway

We even have meeting houses built in some of our villages in readiness of your coming."<sup>8</sup> Many of the Lahu men wore strings on their wrists. They explained, "We Lahu have worn [strings] like these since time immemorial. They symbolize our bondage to evil spirits. You alone, as the messenger of G'ui Sha, may cut these manacles from our wrists — but only after you have brought the lost book of G'ui Sha to our very hearths!"<sup>9</sup> Lahu tribesmen came all the way from China to hear Young preach. Six thousand Lahu were baptized in 1905 and 1906.<sup>10</sup> Today there are between 35,000<sup>11</sup> and 50,000<sup>12</sup> Lahu Christians in China, "mostly concentrated in Banli, Mujia, Gengma and Menglian."<sup>13</sup>



**Population in China:**  
369,400 (1990)  
476,500 (2000)  
614,700 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** 50,000

## Overview of the Lahu

**Countries:** China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam  
**Pronunciation:** "La-hoo"  
**Other Names:** Lohei, Lahuna, Laku, Kaixien, Namen, Mussuh, Muho, Musso, Moso, Mussar, Lohe, Laho  
**Population Source:**  
411,476 (1990 census);<sup>14</sup>  
304,174 (1982 census);<sup>15</sup>  
125,000 in Myanmar (1993);  
28,000 in Thailand (1993);  
8,702 in Laos (1995 census);  
5,400 in Vietnam (1991)  
**Location:** SW Yunnan: Lancang, Menglian, Gengma, Shuangjiang, Cangyuan, Menghai, and Ximeng counties

**Status:**  
An official minority of China  
**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Lolo, Southern Lolo, Akha, Lahu  
**Literacy:** 17%  
**Dialects (2):**  
Black Lahu, Red/White Lahu  
**Religion:**  
Animism, Buddhism, Christianity  
**Christians:** 50,000  
**Scripture:** Bible 1987; New Testament 1932; Portions 1924  
**Jesus film:** Available  
**Gospel Recordings:** Black Lahu #00085; Red Lahu #00566  
**Christian Broadcasting:**  
Available (FEBC)  
**ROPAL code:** LAH00

