

Location: More than 12,000 members of the Palyu tribe inhabit the farwestern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region — that section of Guangxi which juts out into Yunnan Province. The Palyu have been reported with vastly differing population figures. This is the result of linguists and anthropologists reporting according to their specific fields of interests. Most Palyu can no longer speak their language; they use the Chinese, Miao, or Yi languages spoken in the area. Linguists have reported figures of only 150, 500, and 800 speakers of Palyu.¹ Foreign travelers are presently not permitted to visit western Guangxi.

Identity: The Palyu have not been included under any nationality in China. They were included in a generic list of *Undetermined Minorities* in the Chinese census. *Palyu* is this group's self-name. The Chinese and neighboring peoples call them *Lai*.

Language: Most scholars describe Palyu as a Mon-Khmer language. One linguist states, "Palyu is clearly Mon-Khmer; many of this group now speak other languages but only 500 speakers remain."² Some older sources, however, classify Palyu as Sino-Tibetan and "similar to Zhuang-Dong."³ There are 11 tones in the Palyu language — which also has two dialects: Xilin and Longlin. Linguists Jerold Edmonson and Kenneth Gregerson have written a recent report on the Palyu language.⁴

History: Although the Palyu are proud of their ethnic identity and are eager to preserve their customs, their language is gradually fading out and the people are fast being assimilated into the Han Chinese culture. According to Paul Benedict, the traditional homeland of the Palyu was in southwest Guizhou and southern Yunnan provinces, where the Palyu have assimilated to the cultures and languages of Yi groups.⁵

Customs: The Palyu home is made of wood and consists of two stories. The lower area is for animals, while the upper level is where the family sleeps.

Religion: The Palyu have never been exposed to Buddhism, which many of the Mon-Khmer groups in western Yunnan have embraced. Instead, they practice animism and ancestor worship, and are careful not to offend the spirits they believe protect their communities.

Christianity: Western Guangxi is one of the most gospel-neglected areas in all of China. There are a few believers in the region but none known among



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the Palyu. Rev. W. H. Oldfield, writing in 1922, said, "From Liuchowfu [Liuzhou] one may travel for twelve days either northward or westward without seeing a Gospel chapel or entering a district in which a witness is being given to the Gospel... the districts surrounding these busy centers contain a large number of mixed tribesmen. These people are shut away from the rest of the province by huge mountain ranges. The greater part of this territory has not even been entered by a Gospel worker. No missionary in our province as yet speaks their language. To reach these people with the Gospel has for years been our hope and aim."⁶



Population in China:
 10,000 (1993)
 12,030 (2000)
 15,510 (2010)
Location: Guangxi
Religion: Animism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Palyu

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Pal-yoo"
Other Names: Lai, Palju, Bolyu
Population Source: 10,000 (1996 B. Grimes – 1993 figure); 500 speakers of Palyu (1991)
Location: *W Guangxi:* Longlin and Xilin counties in the far-western corner of Guangxi; Possibly some in *Yunnan*

Status: Counted in the census as an *Undetermined Minority*

Language: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Palyu

Dialects (2): Longlin, Xilin

Religion: Animism, Ancestor Worship

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: PLY00

Status of Evangelization

