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Location: The Bouyei are the tenth largest of China's minorities, numbering approximately three million people. In Vietnam, 38,000 members of the *Gay* minority and 1,420 in the *Bo Y* minority speak the same language as the Bouyei in China.¹ The Bouyei inhabit the rolling hills in the southern part of Guizhou Province.² Bouyei villages are often located near streams and rivers.

Identity: It appears that the official division between the Bouyei and Zhuang in China is defined by provincial borders. The Northern Tai-speaking groups in Guangxi are labeled *Zhuang*, and those in Guizhou, *Bouyei*.³ Until one generation ago, the Bouyei were more commonly known as the *Chungchia*, a name meaning "people in the middle."⁴ A 1945 study of the Bouyei revealed they were "divided into five distinct tribes."⁵ An early missionary described the Bouyei in very

unflattering terms: "Crafty, lying, and dishonest... every Bouyei is [reputed to be] a thief, and from what we know of them we should not deny the charge."⁶

Language: Bouyei — which has eight tones — is a Northern Tai language, similar (and in some places identical) to Northern Zhuang. There are three Bouyei dialects in China, although as many as 40 dialects have been incorrectly reported in the past.⁷ In 1995 the Chinese government decided to discontinue education in the Bouyei language, and now all schooling is conducted in Chinese.⁸ Only 12% of the Bouyei have attended high school — one of the lowest rates among the 55 official minorities in China.⁹

History: The Bouyei are one of the ancient peoples of Guizhou, having inhabited the province for more than 2,000 years. Thousands of Bouyei were burned at the

stake during the Nanlang Rebellion in 1797. The horrific persecution forced many Bouyei to flee into Vietnam.

Customs: When a Bouyei woman is in the process of giving birth, a tree branch is placed across the door to prevent intruders from entering. An altar to the spirits is erected to ensure the delivery goes smoothly. After the birth, the placenta is buried under the bed.¹⁰

Religion: The Bouyei are polytheists. They also practice an ancient form of exorcism called *nuo*. "A family will hire a shaman... to cast out demons of illness or bad fortune. Ceremonies include climbing knife ladders, walking on fire or glass, and other activities to demonstrate the power of the spirits."¹¹

Christianity: Catholic missionaries have worked among the Bouyei for 200 years. Many were martyred for their witness. The CIM missionary J. F. Braumton arrived in Guiyang in 1877. A mission station was opened in Dushan in 1895, but "the time of the missionaries was entirely given up to work among the Chinese."¹² A recent estimate places the number of Bouyei Christians at 24,000,¹³ but missionaries among the Bouyei claim there to be no more than 5,000.¹⁴ In 1985 there were nine Catholic churches in the Qianxinan Prefecture.¹⁵ Recently, several mission agencies have commenced church-planting efforts among the Bouyei, but few converts have been won so far.



Population in China:
 2,545,059 (1990)
 3,176,200 (2000)
 3,963,900 (2010)
Location:
 Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: 5,000

Overview of the Bouyei

Countries: China, Vietnam
Pronunciation: "Boo-ye" ¹⁶
Other Names: Buyi, Pu-i, Po-ai, Pui, Puyi, Bo-i, Buzhong, Buman, Buyayi, Chung-chia, Zhongjia, Bui, Buyui, Pu-Jui, Pujai, Puyoi, Shuihu, Quinjiang, Dioi, Kui, Kuei
Population Source:
 2,545,059 (1990 census);
 2,122,389 (1982 census);
 1,348,055 (1964 census);
 1,420 in Vietnam (1991)
Location: S & SW Guizhou:
 On the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau: Qiannan and Qianxinan Bouyei-Miao prefectures;
E Yunnan: Luoping, Fuyuan, and Shizhong counties;
S Sichuan: Ningnan and Huidong counties
Status:
 An official minority of China
Language: Daic, Tai, Northern Tai
Dialects (3):
 Qiannan, Qianzhong, Qianxi
Literacy: 46%
Religion: Polytheism, Animism, Buddhism, Christianity
Christians: 5,000
Scripture: Portions 1904¹⁶
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings:
 Bouyei: Guizhou #04832
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: PCC00

