



Midge Conner

Location: More than 3,000 members of the Wopu ethnic group live in Xingyi County of Guizhou Province and in adjacent areas of Luoping County of Yunnan Province. Although the specific location of the Wopu in Guizhou is uncertain, in Yunnan they are known to inhabit the Dayiben, Jiudaogou, and Jigu villages within the Magai District; and Satuge Village of Agang District in Luoping County.¹ According to the 1990 census, there were a total of 7,337 Yi people in Xingyi County of Guizhou Province. This figure includes the Wopu. There may also be a small number of Wopu living in the western extremity of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Identity: Being one of numerous subgroups of the official Yi nationality in China, the Wopu are commonly called *Da Hei Yi* (Big Black Yi) by their Chinese neighbors. In this

regard they are similar to the *Da Hei Neisu*, although the two groups speak different languages.

Language: Wopu is classified by Chinese sources as part of the Eastern Yi group of the Tibeto-Burman language family.

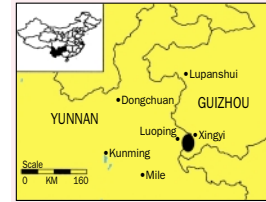
History: The Wopu were formerly slave-owners and landlords. Considered the highest class of Yi people, they inherited the privilege to keep slaves and could demand free labor on their lands by force.

Customs: Like other Yi groups in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces, the Wopu have “emerged from a slavery society in which they were the infamous landlords and slave-owners; and just as the Liangshan Nosu [in Sichuan], this society of ‘Black People’ evidently had structured a multi-tiered class system — four castes to be exact. The top ruling

classes were both termed ‘Black’ while the bottom two were referred to as ‘White’. Although their counterparts in Sichuan emerged from the slave system as late as the 1950s, this people seem to have begun slowly adopting new ways hundreds of years ago.... Although the slaves of this system — the Gepo — seem to have spoken the same language, the ruling castes felt it important to distinguish themselves by using two different dialects.”²

Religion: The religious beliefs of the Wopu appear to be a combination of spirit worship, black magic, and ancestor worship. The center of a Wopu home is the kitchen fire-pit. They believe a “spirit of the kitchen” resides there. They also appease the spirit of the village, house, mountains, rivers, and forest. Some elements of Daoism, which have been absorbed from the Chinese, are also present.

Christianity: Unlike many of their Yi counterparts in northwest Guizhou, most of the Wopu have never received a witness of the gospel. They remain an unreached people group. Having been forced to give up their former identity as slaveholders, the Wopu are facing something of an identity crisis and may be open to the claims of Christ at the present time. Their remote location, distinct language, and small numbers have contributed to a lack of interest in their evangelization. No Scriptures or gospel audio tools are available in any language easily understood by the Wopu.



Population in China:
 3,000 (1999)
 3,070 (2000)
 3,860 (2010)
Location: Guizhou, Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Wopu

Countries: China
Pronunciation: “Woh-poo”
Other Names:
 Da Hei Yi, Big Black Yi
Population Source:
 3,000 (1999 AMO);
 600 in Yunnan (1999 J. Pelkey);
 Out of a total Yi population of
 6,572,173 (1990 census)
Location:
W Guizhou: Xingyi County;
E Yunnan: Luoping County (600)
Status:
 Officially included under Yi
Language: Sino-Tibetan,
 Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo,
 Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Eastern Yi
Dialects: 0
Religion: Polytheism,
 Ancestor Worship, Animism,
 Daoism
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

