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**Location:** A 1983 study listed 20,000 speakers of Ersu living along the lower reaches of the Dadu River, in seven different counties of southern Sichuan Province.<sup>1</sup> The area is also home to members of the Khampa, Nosu, and Chrame people groups. The Dadu River originates at Mount Golog on the Sichuan-Qinghai border and runs a total of 1,155 kilometers (713 mi.) before it empties into the Min River.

**Identity:** The Ersu are officially part of the Tibetan nationality, but in the 1980s they asked the government to create a new minority, called the *Xifan*, and to include them under it. The authorities declined. The linguist Sun Hongkai says, "Ersu speakers at different localities have different autonyms: those living at Ganluo, Yuexi and Hanyuan call themselves *Ersu*, *Buerzi*

or *Ersubuerzi*; those living at Shimian use *Lusu*, and those living at Muli, Jiulong and western Mianning *Lisu*. These different autonyms are dialectal variants of the same word, originally meaning 'white people'.<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Ersu language contains three tones and three dialects, all of which reportedly contain "great differences."<sup>3</sup> The Ersu are noted for their use of an ancient pictographic script. This has baffled and amazed scholars who have speculated on how the Ersu came to possess their unique orthography. One scholar suggests, "Ersu is perhaps an indirect descendant of the extinct Xixia language, spoken in a once-powerful empire in the Tibetan-Chinese-Uighur border regions, finally destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century. A large literature in Xixia survives,

in a logographic writing system invented in the 11th century, with thousands of intricate characters inspired by, but graphically independent of Chinese, the decipherment of which is now well-advanced by Japanese and Russian scholars."<sup>4</sup>

**History:** Regardless of where the Ersu may have originated, it is known that they have lived in their present location for many centuries. Qiang nomads once ruled western China as far as today's Inner Mongolia. Gradually their kingdoms broke up and they migrated south and west. The present official Qiang nationality in China only represents a fraction of the original Qiang race. Most were assimilated by larger groups long ago.

**Customs:** Culturally, the Ersu have been swallowed up by the Tibetans. Almost every aspect of their lives reflects their belief in Tibetan Buddhism.

**Religion:** The Ersu believe they will be reincarnated when they die and will come back to the earth as a person in a higher social position if they have lived a virtuous life. They will come back as an animal if they lived a wicked life. This belief results in the Ersu having little motivation to help the afflicted among them, as suffering is considered the consequence of a person's bad karma.

**Christianity:** There has never been a known church or Christian among the Ersu. The Border Mission of the Church of Christ in China and the American Baptists

worked among the related Jiarong people until 1949, reporting 34 converts in 1934.<sup>5</sup> No outreach, however, was ever undertaken to the Ersu.



**Population in China:**  
 20,000 (1983)  
 27,850 (2000)  
 34,350 (2010)  
**Location:** Sichuan  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Ersu

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** "Erh-soo"

**Other Names:** Douxu, Ersu Yi, Tosu, Buerzi, Ersubuerzi, Lisu, Lisu

**Population Source:**  
 20,000 (1983 Sun Hongkai);  
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)

**Location:** S *Sichuan*: Shijian, Yanyuan, Ganluo, Yuexi, Mianning, Muli, and Jiulong counties

**Status:**  
 Officially included under Tibetan

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Ersu

**Dialects (3):** Ersu (Eastern) 13,000, Douxu (Central) 3,000, Lisu (Western) 4,000

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** ERS00

