

Location: More than 1,000 ethnic Luzu people live in several villages within Muli County in the isolated southern part of Sichuan Province. The area was previously known as Xikang, before it was incorporated into Sichuan in the 1930s. Muli itself has been described as “a rich possession, and all the rivers, especially the Litang, carry gold and produce a considerable revenue.”¹

Identity: The Luzu have been officially classified as part of the Tibetan nationality, even though their language is not related to Tibetan and they have a distinct ethnicity. Several small ethnic groups in Muli were also classified as Tibetan, seemingly on the basis of their adherence to the Tibetan Buddhist religion rather than for ethnolinguistic reasons. One observer notes that “the Xifan [Chrame] of southwestern Sichuan [including the Luzu]... are a member of the Tibetan *minzu* [nationality], but feel that they have little in common with the Tibetans.”²

Language: Although few people have ever heard of the Luzu, one linguist reports that it is similar to the Ersu language and is considered by some to be a dialect of Western Ersu, which belongs to the Qiangic language family.³ Muli County contains several fascinating languages. One linguist says, “Muli... is an amazingly multi-lingual region, where at least the following Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken: Khams Tibetan, Namuyi, Luzu, Nosu, Naxi (both the Western

and Eastern dialects), Shixing, and Pumi (Northern dialect).”⁴

History: The Luzu are one of numerous ethnic groups who speak a Qiangic language. In addition to the Qiang nationality presently recognized in China, smaller groups such as the Ersu, Ergong, Namuyi, Luzu, and Chrame have spread throughout southern Sichuan Province. Muli was a monastery town, presided over by a king until the 1950s. One foreign visitor to Muli commented, “The villagers occupy wooden shanties scattered over the hillsides below the town. They are very poor, and live in constant fear of the lama king and his parasitic satellites.”⁵

Customs: Almost half of the families living in Muli practice either *polyandry* (brothers sharing a wife) or *polygamy* (sisters sharing a husband).⁶ These practices probably started because of the large numbers of men who join the Buddhist monkhood, thus taking a vow of celibacy. To accommodate the needs of the women, nonconventional marriages were adopted.

Religion: All Luzu are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Every aspect of their daily lives is influenced by their beliefs. Pilgrimages to important Buddhist sites are undertaken by all Luzu at some stage of their lives.



Paul Hattaway

Christianity: The Luzu as a people group in China is completely unreached by the gospel. Muli is a desperately needy and vitally strategic area for evangelists and church planters to target with the gospel, for there are several untouched people groups living there. The Luzu will need to be visited by evangelists in order for them to hear the gospel, as shortwave gospel radio broadcasts are unable to penetrate the high mountains.



Population in China:
 1,000 (1998)
 1,040 (2000)
 1,280 (2010)
Location: Sichuan
Religion: Tibetan Buddhism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Luzu

Countries: China
Pronunciation: “Loo-zoo”
Other Names: Lüzū
Population Source:
 1,000 (1998 AMO);
 Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census)
Location: S Sichuan: Muli County
Status:
 Officially included under Tibetan

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic, Ersu
Dialects: 0
Religion:
 Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

