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**Location:** In 1986 a total of 426 Ayizi people lived in Shilin County (formerly known as Lunan County) in Yunnan Province. The village with the largest concentration of Ayizi is Aimalongcun Village in Beidacun District. Some Ayizi people also live in other villages of Beidacun and Banqiao districts.<sup>1</sup> Shilin County, home of the famous Stone Forest, is also the center of the Sani people, a different Yi subgroup.

**Identity:** The Ayizi have been officially counted as part of the Yi nationality in China. Although they were a distinct ethnic group with a proud history until about 50 years ago, today many of the Ayizi have been culturally and linguistically assimilated by the Han Chinese. Within one or two generations the Ayizi may cease to exist as a distinct people. One writer

explains, “Paradoxically, what the Chinese before 1950 could not accomplish by force, they are now accomplishing as a by-product of a quite different goal, all the while encouraging respect for minority differences: the Yi minorities are becoming ever more assimilated into national political, economic, social, and cultural institutions. The Yi, formerly known as ‘iron peas’ because they could not be assimilated, are joining the stew.”<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Ayizi, who are also known as the Ge, speak a little-studied language that is on the verge of extinction. It is only spoken by a handful of elderly speakers. It is uncertain which branch of the Yi group the Ayizi language belongs to. Shilin County contains both

Eastern Yi and Southeastern Yi varieties.

**History:** Little is known about the origins of the Ayizi, although it is believed they are fairly recent arrivals in the Shilin area — perhaps only about 200 years ago.

**Customs:** The traditional dress formerly worn by Ayizi women has also been lost. Today the Ayizi celebrate Han Chinese festivals. Perhaps the only minority festival they still observe is the Torch Festival which is held in the Stone Forest every year.

**Religion:** Spirit worship and ancestor worship is practiced by most elderly Ayizi, while the younger generation are nonreligious and consider their parents’ beliefs to be foolish superstition.

**Christianity:** There are no known Christians among the Ayizi today, although there was extensive Catholic missionary work in the area prior to 1949. The gospel has not always been gladly received by the Yi in China. In 1910, writing of a related group, Samuel Pollard stated, “We met a Yi in the path. He was most unfriendly towards us. He said, ‘We hate Pollard, because he has come into our midst and has destroyed the efficacy of our idols’. Two years ago in this village the Yi landlord oppressed the Miao dreadfully for becoming Christian. They were fined 103 taels of silver, their rents were increased, some were tied up by their hair and others by their hands under their knees — then he beat them and shouted, ‘Call on your

Jesus to save you? What can Jesus do for you? What can the teacher do for you?’ And here they are still believing; we had a crowded house at night with some of the children standing on my bed. Eleven of them were baptized.”<sup>3</sup>



**Population in China:**  
 426 (1986)  
 580 (2000)  
 720 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Ayizi

- Countries:** China
- Pronunciation:** “Ah-ye-zee”
- Other Names:** Ge
- Population Source:** 426 (1999 J. Pelkey – 1986 figure); Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)
- Location:** Yunnan: Shilin County
- Status:** Officially included under Yi
- Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Unclassified
- Dialects:** 0
- Religion:** Animism, Ancestor Worship, No Religion
- Christians:** None known
- Scripture:** None
- Jesus film:** None
- Gospel Recordings:** None
- Christian Broadcasting:** None
- ROPAL code:** None

