



**Population in China:**

6,500 (1999)  
6,650 (2000)  
8,350 (2010)

**Location:** Yunnan

**Religion:** Polytheism

**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Western Gepo

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** "Geh-po"

**Other Names:**  
Gepo, Baiyiren, Tujia, Luo

**Population Source:**

6,500 (1999 J. Pelkey);  
Out of a total Yi population of  
6,572,173 (1990 census)

**Location:** NW Yunnan: Heqing  
County in northern Dali Prefecture

**Status:**

Officially included under Yi

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan,  
Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo,  
Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi,  
Western Yi

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Polytheism, Animism,  
Ancestor Worship

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

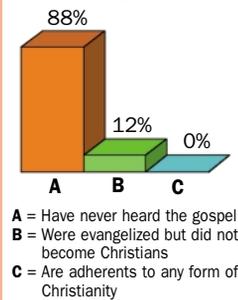
**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** None

**Status of Evangelization**



Jamin Pelkey

**Location:** An estimated 6,500 Western Gepo live in many of the villages within the Liuhe District of Heqing County in the northern part of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture.<sup>1</sup> The Western Gepo are located in the northwestern part of Yunnan Province, not far from the main road between the tourist towns of Dali and Lijiang.

**Identity:** The Western Gepo are one of approximately 120 distinct ethnic groups that have been combined to form the official Yi nationality in China. Although they use the same autonym, *Gepo*, as the Eastern Gepo people farther east in Yunnan Province, the two groups speak widely different languages. Local Chinese people call this group *Baiyiren*, "white-clad people." *Gepo*, in their own language, may mean "white people."

**Language:** The language spoken by this Gepo group is reportedly part of the Western Yi branch of Tibeto-Burman languages. The only other Yi language spoken in Heqing County is Shengzha Nosu, which is a Northern Yi language. The extra title *Western* has been added to avoid confusion between this group and the

Eastern Gepo, who speak an Eastern Yi variety.

**History:** The history of most of the people groups in northern and western Yunnan has been one of conflict, warfare, and bloodshed. Great battles were waged over land, with smaller groups like the Western Gepo invariably losing out to the stronger and more powerful alliances. As a result, many of the Yi groups in Yunnan have become more pacified than their wild counterparts in Sichuan and the adjoining parts of northern Yunnan.

**Customs:** The Chinese themselves were often caught up in fighting between the different Yi groups. One traveler, who journeyed through the mountainous area near

where the Western Gepo live, wrote, "As one travels further north the Lolos [Yi] become more numerous and more aggressive, until the Chinese are veritably besieged in their valley. We heard of nothing but the exploits of these brigands, who fall upon the valley, kill travelers, and pillage the inhabitants. All the villages are fortified, and posts occupied by peasants armed with pikes, tridents, sabers, and sometimes with indifferent flintlocks, are permanently established along the roadside."<sup>2</sup>

**Religion:** Today most Western Gepo lead quiet lives as hardworking agriculturists. They enjoy relatively good relations with their neighbors, even with the Nosu who used to force them to do menial labor.

**Christianity:** The Western Gepo are among the most unreached people groups in northern Yunnan Province. They live in an unevangelized corridor, while many Lisu Christians live farther to the west and the Eastern Lipo and Naluo churches are situated to the east. These believers could potentially be mobilized to take the gospel to the Western Gepo and other unreached peoples in Heqing.