



**Population in China:**  
 12,000 (1999)  
 12,300 (2000)  
 15,400 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Polytheism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Gese

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** "Geh-seh"

**Other Names:**  
 Gesu, Bai Yi, White Yi

**Population Source:**  
 12,000 (1999 J. Pelkey);  
 Out of a total Yi population of  
 6,572,173 (1990 census)

**Location:** Yunnan: Lufeng County in Chuxiong Prefecture

**Status:**  
 Officially included under Yi

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

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Polytheism, Animism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

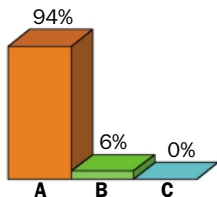
**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:**  
 Yi: Gese Gaofeng #04977

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** None

### Status of Evangelization



**A** = Have never heard the gospel  
**B** = Were evangelized but did not become Christians  
**C** = Are adherents to any form of Christianity

**Location:** More than 12,000 people belonging to the Gese tribe live in an isolated part of southwest China. They mainly live in the villages of eastern Tuo'an District and in the villages in the southern part of the Gaofeng District in Lufeng County.

**Identity:** The Gese (pronounced "Geh-Seh") are one of the dozens of tribes which the Chinese authorities combined to form the official Yi nationality. Jamin Pelkey notes, "Though no Chinese sources firmly attest to this people group's existence, this people refer to themselves as Gese in their own language and think of themselves as different from Naisu."<sup>1</sup> The Gese are not the same as the Gesu or the Gepo — two other Yi tribes in Yunnan Province.

**Language:** The Gese language is a part of the Eastern Yi group — a collection of loosely affiliated varieties that includes tribes located in Guizhou Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Gese have great difficulty communicating with the members of other Yi groups in Chuxiong Prefecture, many of whom speak languages from the Central Yi and Western Yi language families. Gese may be most closely related to Naisu.

**History:** A rich oral history recounts the Gese's victory over a terrible plague that struck the people in their region. Their stories may well refer to the Black Plague that decimated Yunnan Province between 1812 and 1903. It is estimated to have reduced

the population from eight million to three million.

**Customs:** Gese women are easily identifiable by their habit of wearing long earrings and black turbans. On the 13th day of the third lunar month the Gese celebrate the Flower Festival. They worship the Medicine King, who they believe saved their race from the plague in the past. According to their folklore, people everywhere were dying. The first sign of impending death was to lose feeling in their arms and legs. The Gese say numerous bodies were being carried out of their villages daily. The people who carried the corpses out also died because of contact with the bodies. The Medicine King set out to find a cure for the plague. He tasted 99 herbs from 99 mountains and drank 99 gulps of water from 99 springs, but none of them provided a cure. Finally he climbed the "Third Month Mountain" in the Gese area and tasted the herbs and

drank the water. Immediately, feeling returned to his limbs. He ran down the mountain and told the people, who were also healed when they ate and drank from the mountain.

**Religion:** The respect the Gese have for the memory of the Medicine King borders on worship. They also appease locality spirits, such as the spirit of the soil, the spirit of the water, and the spirit of the forests.

**Christianity:** There are no known Christians among the Gese people. Few mission agencies have ever heard of this hidden people who go about their lives in the remote mountains of Lufeng County. The area where the Gese live has historically been devoid of gospel witness, although in recent years it has been rumored that some A-Hmao evangelists have reached out to people there. In 1998 gospel recordings were produced in the Gese language for the first time.



Dwayne Graybill