



Population in China:
 6,300 (1999)
 6,450 (2000)
 8,100 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Laowu

Countries: China

Pronunciation: "Laow-woo"

Other Names: Lawu

Population Source:
 6,300 (1999 J. Pelkey);
 Out of a total Yi population of
 6,572,173 (1990 census)

Location: *S Yunnan:* Western part of Jinping County in Honghe Prefecture

Status:
 Officially included under Yi

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

Dialects: 0

Religion: Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

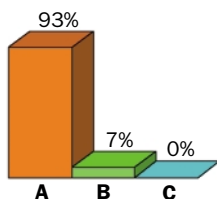
Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: None

Status of Evangelization



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

Location: Six thousand three hundred Laowu people were reported in a 1999 ethnographic study of Yi peoples in Yunnan Province.¹ They live in the western part of Jinping County within the Honghe Yi-Hani Autonomous Prefecture.² Although the Laowu live near China's border with Vietnam, there is no evidence of their existence within Vietnam.

Identity: The Laowu are part of the official Yi nationality in China. Unfortunately, most outsiders view the Yi as one people group. In reality they are a complex collection of ethnolinguistic peoples. Scholars have stated that the Yi consist of "several dozen branches,"³ and that they are "made up of 93 tribes."⁴ The Laowu are not the same ethnolinguistic group as the similarly named *Lawu* (who speak a Western Yi language) or *Luowu* (an Eastern Yi group), even though all three are part of the Yi nationality.

Language: Laowu is a distinct language within the Southern Yi linguistic group. It is partially related to other Southern Yi varieties such as Nisu, Pula, Boka, Xiuba, and Muji. The Laowu do not possess their own orthography. The Chinese script is used for reading and writing.

History: The Laowu in Jinping County seem to have once been distributed over a far wider area than they are today. Many non-Laowu villages in other parts of the county bear the name *Laowuzhai* (Laowu Village).

Customs: Laowu marriages are traditionally arranged

through a matchmaker. A shaman is consulted. If the horoscopes of both parties are agreeable and if the parents on both sides give their consent, the two may become engaged. Before a Laowu wedding can be held, the family of the bride must donate articles such as clothes, blankets, a standing closet, and a trunk. When a Laowu bride leaves her home on the wedding day, she must be singing the "crying song" accompanied by her brothers, uncles, and maid-of-honor. Immediately before the bride and groom cross the threshold of their new home, the groom's sisters or mother takes a gourd filled with oats, wheat, corn, and beans and smashes it at their feet. This represents a wish for a lifetime of prosperity for the new couple.

Religion: After entering the house, the newly wed Laowu couple pay their respects first to heaven and earth, then to their ancestors, and

finally to their parents. After a few more rituals, the couple is considered married. This ritual shows the polytheistic worldview of the Laowu. They believe a complex hierarchy of spirits guide and control their lives. They also consider it important to worship their ancestors.

Christianity: There is no Christian presence among the Laowu people in China. Little is known about the history of Christian missionary work in Jinping County prior to 1949. The area was a political hotbed, influenced by the restrictive French control of nearby Vietnam and Laos. In recent years thousands of Hmong and Lu Mien people in Jinping have come to Christ as a result of gospel radio broadcasts in their languages. These new believers, though they speak completely different languages from the Laowu, represent the best chance of the Laowu hearing the gospel.



Jamin Pelkey