



**Population in China:**  
 500 (1998)  
 515 (2000)  
 600 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Malimasa

**Countries:** China

**Pronunciation:** "Ma-lee-ma-sa"

**Other Names:**

**Population Source:**

500 (1998 AMO);  
 100 families (1998 J. Matisoff);  
 Out of a total Naxi population of  
 278,009 (1990 census)

**Location:** *NW Yunnan:* Weixi  
 County in the Degen Tibetan  
 Autonomous Prefecture

**Status:**

Officially included under Naxi

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

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:**

Tibetan Buddhism, Polytheism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** None



Dwayne Graybill

**Location:** Approximately 100 Malimasa families inhabit an area near the town of Weixi, in the northwest of Yunnan Province.<sup>1</sup> Weixi, five hours by road from the city of Zhongdian, is at the juncture where the Tibetan and Chinese worlds meet. Joseph Rock, an intrepid explorer and botanist, described Weixi in the 1920s as "a forlorn place of about 400 houses.... The town boasts a wall of mud with a few dilapidated gates."<sup>2</sup> The Malimasa people live in extremely remote communities. Severe snowfall often cuts their villages off from the outside world for weeks at a time during the winter months.

**Identity:** The other people in the Weixi region say they have viewed the Malimasa as a separate people group for at least one hundred years. The Chinese authorities, however, have included the Malimasa under the official Naxi nationality.

**Language:** The Malimasa language is part of the Eastern Naxi language branch, which is related to Mosuo. The people themselves say their vocabulary is comprised of 30% Tibetan words and 30% Bai words.<sup>3</sup> Despite their small number, the Malimasa have their own "syllabary script."<sup>4</sup>

**History:** The history of the Malimasa is shrouded in uncertainty, but their language

suggests that they were once part of the Mosuo people who are today concentrated a considerable distance northeast of Weixi, on the Yunnan-Sichuan border. The Malimasa are still a purely matriarchal and matrilineal society, with women in complete control of all finances, possessions, and decision-making.

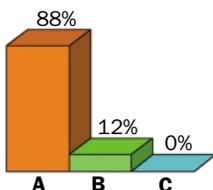
**Customs:** The Malimasa wear their own traditional dress, distinct from all other groups in the area. Women wear a large turban wrapped around their heads. Sickness and disease have long plagued people in this part of China. When Rock visited Weixi 70 years ago, he

reported, "Nowhere have I seen goiter so prevalent as here. The people carried regular pouches in their throats, like certain monkeys when they fill up with peanuts."<sup>5</sup>

**Religion:** The Malimasa are 100% Tibetan Buddhist. There are a number of Tibetan, Lisu, and Naxi Christians in the Weixi area, but they have had little impact on the staunch belief system of the Malimasa.

**Christianity:** Catholic missionaries from the Grand St. Bernard Order commenced work at Latsa Pass near Weixi in 1931.<sup>6</sup> Several Protestant families also lived in Weixi prior to 1949. The great missionary statesman Hudson Taylor, writing of China's needs in general, stated, "The harvest here is indeed great, and the laborers are few and imperfectly fitted for such a work. And yet grace can make a few feeble instruments the means of accomplishing great things — things greater even than we can conceive."<sup>7</sup> Taylor's passionate desire was that national believers would be given the leadership of their own churches and have control over their own affairs. He wrote, "I look upon foreign missionaries as the scaffolding around a rising building. The sooner it can be dispensed with, the better; or rather, the sooner it can be transferred to other places, to serve the same temporary use, the better."<sup>8</sup>

### 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