

Location: More than 53,000 Muji people live high in the mountains of several counties within southern Yunnan Province. The largest concentrations of Muji live in Gejiu and Mengzi counties, followed by Hekou, Pingbian, and Jinping counties. The Muji also used to live in the Xiaolila and Dalila villages of Tonghongdian District in Huaning County, but today the people in these villages have lost their original ethnicity and languages: they consider themselves Han Chinese.

Identity: The Muji were first listed in a 1903 survey of the tribes of western China.¹ Today, even though they consider themselves a distinct people group with their own traditional dress and language, the Chinese government includes the Muji as part of the large, diverse Yi nationality.

Language: In many locations the Muji who live near urban centers have lost the use of their language; only elderly people still speak it. In the mountains, however, even small children are able to speak Muji and cannot understand any Chinese. The Muji language is 70% similar to the Pula language and shares about 50% similarity with the Puwa language.² The Muji language is part of the Southern Yi language group.

History: Over the last 200 years the Muji have been pushed deep into the mountains by Han Chinese and settlers from other minority groups. Those who chose to stay in the plains were soon assimilated. Because their

villages are located high in the mountains, often on rocky soil, the staple food of the Muji is maize.

Customs: Although Muji women north of the Honghe River wear an intricately decorated headdress which covers their entire head, their counterparts south of the river prefer to wear theirs differently. The southern Muji women have a peculiar custom of braiding their long hair into one thick braid and wrapping the braid around their foreheads. A decorative headdress is then worked into the braid producing a lovely, natural crown.

Religion: When a baby is born to a Muji couple, the child is thought to need a godfather and godmother. When the child turns six or seven years old, a suitable relative or friend is chosen who will provide protection and safety through life and into the afterlife. "A ceremony is held for which the parents prepare chicken and whisky and take the child to the home of his or her selected godfather and godmother. The godparents bestow a surname on the child, and then give the child symbolic jewelry and clothing. The ceremony comes to



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an end when the 'spirit rope' is fastened around the child's wrist. The spirit rope is thought to ensure the safe passage of the child's soul through life and into death."³

Christianity: Although Miao churches exist in some of the areas inhabited by the Muji, there is very little contact and no linguistic similarity between the Miao and the Muji. There is at least one known Muji Christian, an elderly lady who said she believes in Christ because only he could heal her of her ailments.⁴ There may be a small number of Muji attending the one church situated in Gejiu City; otherwise there are no other known Christians among the unreached Muji people group. Muji gospel recordings were first produced in 1999.



Population in China:
 52,050 (1999)
 53,300 (2000)
 66,900 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: 20

Overview of the Muji

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Moo-jee"
Other Names: M Ji, Mujipo, Puzu
Population Source: 52,050 (1999 J. Pelkey); Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)
Location: S Yunnan: Gejiu (21,700), Mengzi (15,000), Jinping (12,700), Pingbian (2,150), and Hekou (500) counties; The Muji used to live in Huaning County but may have become extinct there.
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, Christianity
Christians: 20
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: Yi: Muji
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

