

Location: The 215,000 Western Nasu are a comparatively large ethnic group who spill across into parts of three large prefectures in a widespread geographical area of western Yunnan Province. The Western Nasu are concentrated in the western part of Dali Prefecture, the northern part of Lincang Prefecture, and in Baoshan Prefecture.

Identity: The Western Nasu are part of the official Yi nationality in China. Although many people use the autonym *Nasu*, they speak widely differing languages. Many Western Nasu are in the process of assimilation to Han Chinese culture and language.

Language: Western Nasu is a part of the Western Yi group of languages, as opposed to other speakers in Yunnan who call themselves *Nasu* and whose languages are from the Southern, Eastern, and Central Yi groups.

History: Ethnographic studies over the past few years have attributed the Nasu's leopard dancing to the reign of the fabled Yellow Emperor in the prehistoric period. Dancers at the time disguised themselves as animals during the Banishment of Evil Spirits Festival. "By the Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century – 212 bc) the ritual had evolved as part of the state ceremonial system and was presided over by priest-exorcists who were dressed up as beasts in much the same way as shamans among the Nasu today."¹

Customs: The Western Nasu in some areas practice a ritualistic dance known as *Yugmo-Lhage-She* which means "dancing like a leopard." A team of young girls opens the ritual by beating drums, gongs, and cymbals. "In the cacophony the leopard dancers emerge... stamping the plank roof with their feet all the time, changing tempo and action in syncopated rhythm with the percussion."² When the musicians stop playing, the nearly naked leopard dancers "gnaw and prance at each other in mock fights.... This is a ritual to banish evil spirits out of the door."³

Religion: The polytheistic Western Nasu believe "everything in this world has a soul and that all ghosts are incarnations of human souls. They respect the good and hate the evil. Whenever someone dies a natural death they invite a shaman to pacify the soul of the deceased and send it to the midst of their ancestors, and whenever someone dies in an accident, they invite the shaman to drive his soul out of their way."⁴ The Western Nasu also worship the spirits of certain animals, especially the



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tiger, bear, and ox. They believe spirits are more powerful than men. No effort is spared to placate the deities and ghosts that they believe control their lives.

Christianity: Although some publications report "approximately 200,000 Yi Christians in China,"⁵ most outsiders are unaware that these believers are found mainly among the Eastern Lipo and Eastern Nasu subgroups in northern Yunnan. They speak distinct languages and have acute cultural differences with the Western Nasu. Few Western Nasu have ever heard the name of Jesus Christ.



Population in China:
 200,000 (1997)
 215,300 (2000)
 270,200 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Polytheism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Western Nasu

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Nah-soo"
Other Names: Yunnan Yi, Yi: Yunnan, Shui Nosu, Naso, Nyi, Nasu Puo, Nasu Yi, Yisupuo
Population Source: 200,000 (1997 J. Pelkey); Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)
Location: *W Yunnan:* Baoshan, Dali, and Lincang prefectures
Status: Officially included under Yi

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

Dialects: 0

Religion: Polytheism, Shamanism, Animism, Ancestor Worship

Christians: None

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: None

