

Location: Approximately 20,000 Pula people live in China's southern Yunnan Province.¹ They live in Honghe, Yuanyang, Gejiu, Shiping, and Jianshui counties in the Honghe Yi-Hani Autonomous Prefecture; and in Yuanjiang County of Yuxi Prefecture.² In northwest Vietnam the Pula are better known as the *Phula* minority group. They numbered 6,424 people in the 1989 Vietnam census.

Identity: The Pula have been largely ignored in the complex ethnic patchwork of southern China.³ The Chinese authorities have included them as part of the Yi nationality. In 1903 the Pula were described as being only about 4½ feet tall.⁴

Language: Little research has been conducted into the Pula language, but it is known to be part of the Southern Yi linguistic branch. The Pula were a tribal group on whom the Yi imposed their language.⁵

History: In China, the Pula are believed to have been among the first inhabitants of the areas where they now live. The Pula are believed to have migrated to Vietnam very long ago. Vietnamese writer Le Quy Don, famous for his book written in the mid-1700s, *Kien Van Tieu Luc* (Things Seen and Heard), described the Pula who at that time were already settled in northern Vietnam.

Customs: Traditional dress varies significantly among Pula in different areas along the Honghe River, a fact reflected in the headdress of different

regions: "Pula women of southern Gejiu County wear multi-colored embroidered headpieces which stand up straight from their foreheads; Pula women in Yuanjiang County of Yuxi Prefecture often wear elaborate 'yarn bundle' headdresses, and married women of Honghe County plait their hair on the tops of their heads and wrap their heads with green turbans."⁶ There are numerous social rules and superstitions among the Pula in Yuanjiang County. For example, if a child's upper tooth falls out the parents take the tooth and put it under the bed. On the other hand, if a lower tooth falls out, the tooth is placed on the roof. Only in this way, it is thought, can one be sure a new tooth will grow in its place. The Pula consider it impolite to ride a horse into another village. No one is allowed to sit in the doorway of a home for fear that the god of Wealth will be blocked from taking up residence there. Inside a Pula home, people are forbidden to sit on the rice-husking mortar, which they believe can bring a curse of famine on the family.

Religion: The Pula believe that a god named Mumi created the heavens and earth, humans, and all spirits. "On the first 'rabbit' day after the Chinese New Year, the Pula worship the sky; on the first 'ox' day they worship the earth and the village god; and on the



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first 'tiger' day they call all the spirits to their aid in the new year. The Pula hold many ceremonies which... sacrifice a pig. After the sacrifice a feast is held beneath the sacred tree of the village."⁷ In every Pula home the most sacred room is a central bay which contains the ancestral altar. Next to the altar is a tiny "spirit door" about 10 inches wide.

Christianity: There are just a few known Christians among the Pula in China, while only one or two families are known to have found Christ among this unreached group in northern Vietnam. Pula gospel recordings were first produced in 1999.



Population in China:
19,800 (1999)
20,300 (2000)
25,450 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Ancestor Worship
Christians: 20

Overview of the Pula

Countries: China, Vietnam
Pronunciation: "Poo-lah"
Other Names: Phula, Bo Kho Pa, Mu Di Pa, Pulapo, Puwa, Pu, Puzu
Population Source:
19,800 (1999 J. Pelkey);
Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census);
6,424 in Vietnam (1989 census)
Location: S Yunnan: Honghe (7,000), Yuanyang (3,800), Gejiu (2,200), Shiping (1,200), and Jianshui (500) counties in Honghe Prefecture; Yuanjiang (5,300) County in Yuxi Prefecture; Also in Vietnam

Status: Officially included under Yi
Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Southern Yi
Dialects: 0
Religion: Ancestor Worship, Animism, Polytheism, Christianity
Christians: 20
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: Yi: Pula Yuanyang
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

