

**Population in China:**

27,500 (1999)

28,200 (2000)

35,400 (2010)

**Location:** Yunnan**Religion:** Animism**Christians:** 300

## Overview of the Samei

**Countries:** China**Pronunciation:** "Sah-may"**Other Names:** Soumi, Sani, Sanipo, Sameizu, Samin**Population Source:**

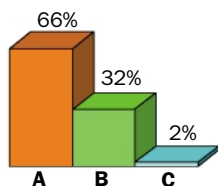
27,500 (1999 J. Pelkey); Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)

**Location:** Yunnan: Guandu (26,000) and Yiliang (1,500) counties**Status:**

Officially included under Yi

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi, Eastern Yi**Dialects:** 0**Religion:** Animism, Polytheism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity, No Religion**Christians:** 300**Scripture:** None**Jesus film:** None**Gospel Recordings:** Yi: Sami**Christian Broadcasting:** None**ROPAL code:** SMH00

### 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



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** Approximately 28,000 members of the Samei tribe live just southeast of Kunming City in Yunnan Province, especially in the Ala and Dabanqiao districts of Guandu County. There are 13 Samei villages in the Dabanqiao District.<sup>1</sup> Most publications do not list a specific population for the Samei, simply mentioning they are "small,"<sup>2</sup> and there are "not many people."<sup>3</sup>

**Identity:** The Samei, who are part of the official Yi nationality in China, actually call themselves *Sani*. This, however, "does not mean they are the same people group as the famous Sani of the Stone Forest. The two should not be confused.... The Han Chinese have referred to this people as Samei for so long that the name has become fixed — even among anthropologists and linguists — to the point that their designation as anything else would probably be more confusing than helpful."<sup>4</sup>

**Language:** Jamin Pelkey explains how the Sani of the Stone Forest and the Samei "insist that they are different peoples. For one thing, the former has been classified as a 'Southeastern Yi' variety and the latter has been classified as an 'Eastern Yi' variety."<sup>5</sup> While many Samei adults know Chinese, most Samei children do not know Mandarin and can only speak their own language.<sup>6</sup>

**History:** For centuries the Samei have celebrated the annual Torch Festival. The Samei say that "long ago there was a brave Samei warrior king whose head, if cut off in battle, would grow back beneath the starlit sky at night. His wife leaked out the secret of his immortality, however, and he was finally killed in a battle.... The Samei went out to look for his soul with lit torches, and carry on the tradition every 24th day of the sixth lunar month."<sup>7</sup>

**Customs:** The Samei possess their own

colorful dress. "A hat worn by young women of the Samei tribe on the outskirts of Kunming resembles the comb of a cock.... There are not many people in this tribe, but these hats are still worn by young women and are unique."<sup>8</sup>

**Religion:** Most Samei are animists. They believe their lives are controlled by the spirit world around them. Ancestor worship is also practiced, especially by older Samei. Many of the younger generation consider themselves nonreligious.

**Christianity:** The Samei have a long Christian history. Australian missionary Arthur Nicholls first pioneered work in the area in 1906. Nicholls received this glowing tribute from fellow missionary Samuel Clarke: "He may be reckoned among the heroes who are establishing the kingdom of heaven upon earth.... Loved and trusted by multitudes, despised and hated by many... like a man who has been touching the very bedrock of humanity, Arthur Nicholls goes on his way little thinking what a hero he is, and counting himself repaid over and over again because the people love him."<sup>9</sup> The Eastern Lipo of Wuding and Luquan counties have taken the gospel to the Samei in recent decades. "Because of their witness, there are believers among the neighboring tribes... including the Samei."<sup>10</sup>