



Jamin Pelkey

**Location:** According to researcher Jamin Pelkey, 250 people belonging to the Suan ethnic group live in the Wumulong District and/or in the Mengban District of Yongde County. Yongde is situated within the Lincang Prefecture in western Yunnan Province.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** The Suan have been mentioned in a few local Chinese publications. Outside of their immediate area, however, the Suan are completely unknown. The government has officially counted them as part of the Yi nationality. The Suan are usually mentioned along with the Pengzi, who reportedly live in the same area and have the same population as the Suan, yet appear to be two different ethnic groups.

**Language:** Chinese sources state that all Yi languages in Yongde County are part of

the Western Yi group, but no specific research has been conducted into Suan to see how vigorous its use is or to determine its relationship to other Yi varieties.

**History:** Nothing is known about the history of the Suan — where they originated or how they came to evolve into a distinct ethnic group.

**Customs:** Today, most Suan customs have been swallowed up by the pervasive Han culture. In the past, however, the Suan had a proud culture. They shared many of the traits that other Yi groups possess, including funeral rites. Visiting one Yi group in the early 1900s, famous missionary Samuel Pollard wrote, “The custom is that at death an imposing ceremony is held in the home. Then the tablets of wood are placed in the bags

or baskets and left there for three years. In this time the ancestors are supposedly being worshipped in the home. After that time, a goat is killed in sacrifice, the tablets are escorted out. A short log is selected, split in two, the interior scooped out, and the ancestral baskets with tablets placed inside and the halves roped together again. The bound log is left on a hillside or cliff.... The old and new spirits are thought to reside in this trough of wood.”<sup>2</sup>

**Religion:** When the three-year period after the death of a person has expired, the Suan believe bad people will go to hell to be tormented by demons. “The [Devil] has under his orders evil spirits who play all sorts of objectionable tricks; the most notable are those that cause illness in men and animals. The [Suan] therefore use no remedies; the *pimo* [shaman], by various procedures, consults destiny, discovers what evil spirit is incarnated, and chases it out of the body of the sufferer by ritual formula, accompanied by the sacrifice of an animal.”<sup>3</sup>

**Christianity:** Groups that are small in size tend to be lost in the thicket of human souls in China. Although the Suan are a small, precious ethnic group, they have never appeared on any mission list of peoples in China and have never been targeted for church planting. They are an unreached and unevangelized people. Perhaps the best chance for them to hear the gospel has been through Chinese-language gospel radio broadcasts. There are few Christians in Yongde County

who could potentially reach out to them. Until someone does, the Suan will remain untold.



**Population in China:**  
 250 (1999)  
 255 (2000)  
 320 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Ancestor Worship  
**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Suan

**Countries:** China  
**Pronunciation:** “Soo-ahn”

**Other Names:**  
**Population Source:**  
 250 (1999 J. Pelkey);  
 Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)

**Location:** W Yunnan: Wumulong and/or Mengban districts of Yongde County in Lincang Prefecture

**Status:**  
 Officially included under Yi

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

**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Ancestor Worship, Animism, Shamanism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** None

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** None

