Labapo 腊拔泼

Location: Six thousand four hundred Labapo people were counted in a 1999 study of Honghe Prefecture.[1] They inhabit more than 20 villages in the Baige and Dazhuang districts of Kaiyuan County in southern Yunnan Province. The Labapo live in the same district as the 9,400 Daizhan, who are a related people group.

Identity: The Labapo have been combined with four other tribes in Kaiyuan County into a group called *Aza*.[2] None of the five groups calls itself by that name. The Aza, in turn, have been officially included by the Chinese authorities under the large Yi nationality which contains 120 distinct ethnolinguistic groups. The Labapo (Laba Tribe) are not the same as the Laba, a large group in Guizhou Province who have recently been classified as Miao.

Language: Labapo is a part of the Southeastern Yi language family. The use of their mother tongue has become seriously endangered under pressure from Yunnanese Chinese.

History: The Labapo know little of their history, except that they originated farther to the north of their present location and migrated across the mountains at least 300 years ago.

Customs: The Labapo still retain some of their customs and festivals. At various times of the lunar calendar, all Labapo gather for celebrations and festivities that last two and a half days; during this period they eat communal meals. Every family invites relatives from other villages to be their guests. The feasting is always accompanied by copious amounts of alcohol, singing, and revelry. It gives the Labapo a chance to unwind and also affords young people the opportunity to find a spouse.

Religion: The Labapo worship their ancestors. They also live in fear of the spirit world. Many Yi groups share a legend about a great flood that inundated the ancient world. Today, their ancestral tablets are still made of *pieris* wood (the same wood that the ark was constructed of, according to Yi legend). The Labapo believe in three main types of ghosts: spirits of accidental or unclean deaths, invisible demons, and *slota* (unusual phenomena which cause disasters). Twice a year a pig and a chicken are sacrificed at a worship stone near the sacred village tree which they believe houses a protective dragon.[3]

Christianity: There has never been a Christian church among the Labapo. They remain a completely unreached people. Whoever first takes the gospel to the Labapo will need to respect their customs and beliefs without compromising the essence of the gospel. Despite being almost 350 years old, the following Catholic declaration dating from 1659 contains sound advice for foreign missionaries that still applies today: "Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressures to bear on the peoples, to change their manners, customs and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. What could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain or Italy, or some other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them, but only the faith, which does not despise or destroy the manners and customs of any people, always supposing they are not evil, but rather wishes to see them preserved unharmed."[4]

Dwayne Graybill

Overview of the Labapo

Countries: China

Pronunciation: "Lah-ba-po"

Other Names:
Laba Aza, Azar, Laba, Pula

Population Source:
6,400 (1999 J. Pelkey);
Out of a total Yi population of 6,572,173 (1990 census)

Location: *Yunnan:* Baige and Dazhuang districts of Kaiyuan County in Honghe Prefecture

Status:
Officially included under Yi

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

Dialects: 0

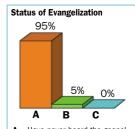**Religion:** Ancestor Worship, Animism, Polytheism, No Religion

Christians: None known

Scripture: None

Jesus **film:** None

Gospel Recordings: None

Christian Broadcasting: None

ROPAL code: None

Population in China:
6,400 (1999)
6,560 (2000)
8,200 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Ancestor Worship
Christians: None Known

Status of Evangelization
95%
5%
0%
A   B   C

A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Were evangelized but did not become Christians
C = Are adherents to any form of Christianity