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World-Class Natural Landscapes

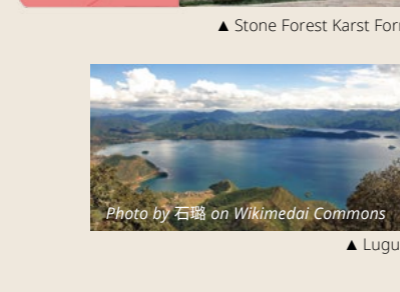
Yunnan sits atop China's southwestern plateau, its terrain sloping dramatically from the northwest highlands down to the southeast lowlands. The elevation range is staggering—from the glacier-capped peaks of the Meili Snow Mountains, soaring above 6,000 meters, down to the tropical rainforests of Xishuangbanna at just 500 meters. This extreme vertical range inspired the local saying: "Four seasons on one mountain, different weather every ten miles."

Beyond its mountains, Yunnan is home to a constellation of world-class landscapes: the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces, the Stone Forest karst formations, and a chain of highland lakes including Lugu Lake, Erhai Lake, and Dian Lake.

▼ Xishuangbanna



Photo by Phoenix Han on Unsplash



▲ Honghe Hani Rice Terraces

The Stone Forest karst is a UNESCO-recognized World Natural Heritage Site!

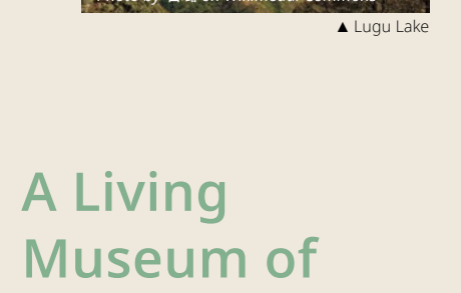


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▲ Stone Forest Karst Formations

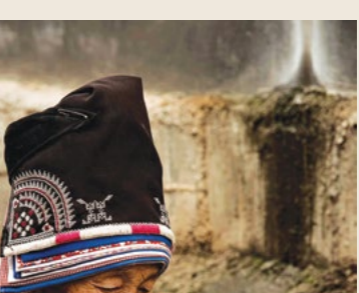


Photo by 石璐 on Wikimedia Commons

▲ Lugu Lake

A Living Museum of Ethnic Cultures



Photo by Rod Waddington on Flickr

▲ Bai

◀ Yi



Photo by Linda De Volder on Flickr



Yunnan is often called China's living museum of ethnic minorities — and for good reason. Of China's 56 recognized ethnic groups, 25 have made Yunnan their ancestral home, a concentration unmatched anywhere else in the country. Among the most prominent are the Yi, Bai, Dai, Hani, Naxi, Hui, Jingpo, and Tibetan peoples, making Yunnan a remarkably rich field for the study of anthropology, linguistics, and religious diversity.

► Dai



► Tibetan



Photo by Luca Galuzzi on Wikimedia Commons

Where Borders Blur

Yunnan, which borders Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam, carries a distinctly transregional character. Its location gives rise to a unique borderland texture in its culture, economy, and ethnic composition.

Many of Yunnan's 25 ethnic minorities extend well beyond China's borders, with significant populations living across Southeast Asia:

Dai Thailand, Laos

Jingpo Kachin people of Myanmar

Hani Vietnam, Laos

Yao Vietnam, Laos, Thailand



Photo by Takeaway on Wikimedia Commons

Water Splashing Festival

These groups have largely preserved their own languages, dress, and religious traditions, remaining far less assimilated into Han Chinese culture than their counterparts in China's interior. Inter marriage, seasonal movement, and shared celebrations knit communities across national lines. The Dai Water Splashing Festival, for instance, is observed simultaneously in Yunnan, Thailand, and Laos.

Life Across the Line

Residents from Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos cross daily into China to trade, pick up odd jobs, visit relatives, seek medical care, or attend school. Meanwhile, Yunnanese cross the other way. Most buy and sell jade, timber, and agricultural goods, or run guesthouses and small factories in Myanmar and Laos. For the people who live here, the national boundary is less a hard line than an invisible, shifting threshold they have always moved through freely.

Photo by Chantal Lim on Unsplash

Roll Call

Ethnic Classification



A Zhuang girl in traditional Zhuang dress

Yunnan is a land of mountains, rivers, and many peoples. China officially recognizes 55 ethnic minority groups*, 25 of which are found in Yunnan. In the 1950s, as part of efforts to promote ethnic equality, the government first sought to determine which ethnic groups existed within its borders. Beginning in 1953, it launched a nationwide “ethnic classification” campaign. Yunnan, where many groups lived in close intermingling, naturally became the starting point.

Government delegations were sent into villages, where they interviewed residents, explained policies, and met with local leaders to collect information on each group. Thousands of scholars and students also took part, compiling ethnic reports from the perspectives of ethnology, history, and linguistics. When the central government opened applications for ethnic classification, more than two hundred groups in Yunnan alone applied, hoping to gain legal recognition and equal rights.

Not every applicant was granted its own designation. Some were classified under other ethnic groups, while others were not included on the official list. In addition to language and history, criteria such as population size and administrative convenience were also taken into account. For the peoples of Yunnan, recognition—or the lack of it—affects not only identity but also access to education, resources, and ethnic policies. To this day, some groups are still awaiting official classification, underscoring the complexity of ethnic identity.

*Referring to ethnic groups other than the Han Chinese, with relatively smaller populations.

Heavenly Father, in Yunnan, twenty-five ethnic minority groups are scattered across valleys and villages. Every face is loved by You, and none has been forgotten. We ask that You would bless them with peace and abundance in their autonomous regions. Grant wisdom and humility to those in authority, that those still awaiting official recognition may not only receive equal access to resources and opportunity, but also be able to preserve and carry forward their cultural heritage. Father, whatever earthly identity they bear, we thank You for the identity You have given that the world cannot take away—that of Your children. May the peoples of Yunnan have the chance to hear the Gospel and find their way home to You. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Saturday | **May 2**

Come Home, Dear Ones

Volunteer Reunion Work



Photo by Carlos Fernandez on Unsplash

When a Bouyei man named Huang Defeng began posting videos on Douyin (TikTok) introducing his native Bouyei language, he had no way of knowing the channel would one day carry the weight of something far greater than cultural curiosity.

One day, a woman named Li Xinmei stumbled across one of his clips and had a sudden, startling realization: the language her mother had spoken her entire life — the one no one around her had ever understood — sounded remarkably like Bouyei. With Huang's help, she pieced together what had happened: thirty-five years earlier, her mother, whose birth name was "De Liang," had been trafficked to Henan Province. In the end, she was reunited with her Bouyei family across a thousand miles. Since then, Huang has gone on to help many other families, enabling numerous members of Yunnan's ethnic minorities to return to their loved ones.

Huang Defeng is one of 26,000 volunteers participating in the "Toutiao Xunren" (Headlines Search for Missing Persons) initiative — a public-interest project launched in 2016 by the Chinese news platform Today's Headlines. Using geolocation data to target its outreach, the program deploys text, short video, livestream, and documentary formats to help reunite separated families. To date, it has helped more than 24,000 people find their way home, making it China's largest missing-persons platform of its kind.

Huang once said, "May there be no trafficking under heaven, and love among all people." This sentiment reflects the deepest longing and hope of countless families still waiting for their loved ones to return.

Heavenly Father, so many families in China have been torn apart. Hear the cries of those who are lost, and tenderly wipe away their tears. We ask especially for Your comfort to rest upon those who have suffered trafficking and abduction. May Your justice shine forth, may they return safely to their loved ones, and may their lives be restored. Thank You for raising up initiatives like "Toutiao Xunren," and for calling Huang Defeng and so many volunteers into this work. May their example move others to pay attention to the realities of trafficking and family separation. Raise up more trained professionals with compassionate hearts to walk with these families as they heal. And give those in government the wisdom to craft policies that make life safer for all. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Undercurrents Across the Border

Frontier Smuggling



Yunnan borders Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam, serving as China's gateway to Southeast Asia, and cross-border smuggling along these frontiers is nothing new. With multi-ethnic communities living across borders, difficult mountain transport, and limited official trade ports, border residents have gradually developed a form of border trade*. When policy shifts or port closures disrupt formal channels, some of this trade moves underground, sustaining everyday livelihoods while forming a subtle complement to official regulation.

Yet not all smuggled goods are everyday necessities. High-value items such as crocodile skins, precious timber, and narcotics are also trafficked. These not only harm ecosystems and biodiversity, but also contribute to drug proliferation and worsening public security. Yunnan has been particularly affected: the emergence of so-called "drug villages," and more than 4,000 drug smuggling cases uncovered in 2023 alone, both point to the scale of the border black market and the severity of the challenge.

In recent years, China and its neighboring countries have strengthened cross-border law enforcement cooperation to combat profit-driven smuggling and intensify counter-narcotics efforts. Beyond strengthening the rule of law, however, border stability also depends on long-term strategies and regional development—expanding diverse economic opportunities and employment, so that smuggling is no longer the only option for Yunnan's residents.

*Referring to small-scale informal trade conducted by local residents in areas designated by the Chinese government.

Heavenly Father, Yunnan is closely connected to its neighboring countries, with constant movement and trade across its borders. We ask that You would bless this land, and that these cross-border connections would become a source of good for the people who live there. Bless Yunnan and its neighboring countries as they develop wise policies for these border regions. May there be real opportunities for work and livelihood, so that people are not forced to turn to smuggling to make a living. Give wisdom to those in authority, that they may find effective ways to reduce smuggling and the flow of drugs, protect the environment, and bring greater stability to society. We especially lift up the drug problem in Yunnan. Raise up people who can walk alongside those struggling with addiction, helping them break free, regain their health, rebuild their lives, and find true freedom and hope. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Education in Transition

The Challenge of Rural Schooling



With its many ethnic minorities and diverse languages, expanding education in Yunnan has been a challenge. In the 1980s, the government introduced a dual-track system using both mother tongues and Mandarin. But as the province with the largest number of nationally designated poverty counties, Yunnan has faced limits in both its education system and its teaching workforce.

By 2010, official evaluations found that students generally lacked proficiency in both languages, which could affect their prospects for further education and employment. As a result, instruction gradually shifted toward Mandarin as the primary medium, in hopes of improving learning outcomes.

Due to disparities in rural education and uneven distribution of resources, the government has long implemented programs to send teachers to underserved areas. In the past two years alone, about 13,000 teachers were expected to be assigned to Yunnan. In the past, most of these teachers served for only one year, and the high turnover affected both students' learning and their relationships with teachers. To address this, starting in 2025 the government began offering each teacher about \$2,700 USD in transportation and insurance subsidies, along with improved benefits, to encourage longer service.

The government has also expanded pathways to higher education in Yunnan, including adding more master's and doctoral programs, increasing vocational and technical colleges, and establishing the Southwest United Graduate School in partnership with Peking University and Tsinghua University. At the same time, subsidies for basic education now reach more than nine million students, while school meal programs and kindergarten access have been expanded—efforts aimed at narrowing the gap between urban and rural education.

Heavenly Father, we pray that education in Yunnan would reach every child. May it broaden their horizons, awaken their potential and creativity, and shape them to be a blessing to their people and their communities. May Your Spirit guide the teachers and organizations serving in rural areas. Through their teaching and their care, may they become examples in the lives of the children they serve. Raise up teachers who are both well-suited and willing to stay long term, bringing stability to education in these communities. Give wisdom to those who shape education policy and research, that they would design approaches that reflect each child's language and culture. As children grow and pursue new opportunities, may they also remain rooted in their own cultural identity. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Fight to Stay Green

Ecological Conservation



Photo by flemming christiansen from hammer, Denmark on Wikimedia Commons

Black-headed gulls

Yunnan is known as the “Kingdom of Animals and Plants” and the “Home of All Living Things,” ranking first in China for biodiversity. Its ecosystems span the Huangshan forests and edible roses of Anning, the wild fungi and Baer’s pochards of Jinning, the red-soil highlands of Dongchuan, and the black-headed gulls of the Western Hills. Wetlands and nature reserves across the province further enrich this diversity. Together, they form a remarkably varied ecosystem.

However, human-driven environmental damage continues to occur. In 2018, a mining and energy company in Qujing was ordered to shut down after years of discharging wastewater and emissions that severely polluted the air and waterways. It was later exposed by the media for continuing to operate at night, allowing waste containing lead, zinc, and cadmium to seep into the groundwater. For five years, local residents had to rely on bottled water. By 2020, seven of Yunnan’s nine highland lakes failed to meet national water quality standards. In some areas, rapid growth in tourism has placed pressure on the natural environment, making it difficult to balance ecological protection with local livelihoods and increasing the challenges of governance.

To address these challenges and prevent officials from profiting from ecological restoration projects, Yunnan has in recent years implemented environmental protection regulations. These include designating ecological red-line zones, introducing the River and Lake Chief System*, adopting smart monitoring technologies, and bringing in third-party oversight and public participation. The aim is to strengthen governance and improve transparency. As its green transition progresses, Yunnan is exploring ways to pursue both ecological protection and economic development.

*A governance system under China’s “ecological civilization” framework, in which Party and government officials at different levels serve as “river chiefs” or “lake chiefs,” responsible for coordinating the protection and management of specific waterways.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Yunnan’s rich land and its many plants and animals—each one a work of Your careful and wonderful creation. May the peoples of Yunnan, surrounded by this beauty, come to see Your glory and Your love. Have mercy on those affected by air and water pollution. Heal them in body and spirit, and raise up experts and scholars to help bring restoration, so that both people and the land may be renewed. We pray that those in heavy industry and energy would grow in their responsibility to care for the environment. Through sound laws and proper oversight, help them handle waste in ways that are right and sustainable. Watch over the work of environmental protection. Fill the leaders of Yunnan with Your wisdom and justice, so that their policies may care for both people’s livelihoods and the land. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Quiet Loneliness of Growing Up

Left-Behind Children



Photo by Alex Gruber on Unsplash

Since the start of economic reform in the 1980s, China's rapid growth has driven a surge in demand for labor. According to the seventh national census, by 2020 the country's floating population had reached 360 million, including 250 million rural-to-urban migrants. As large numbers of rural workers moved to cities, many left their children behind in their home villages, where they were cared for by grandparents or relatives. These are known as "left-behind children." By 2023, Yunnan Province had 334,000 registered children in this group.

Studies have found that, compared with other children, left-behind children—often lacking parental care and adequate social support—are more likely to experience depression, social anxiety, and other mental health problems. The younger a child is when left behind, the greater the impact on their social development. In some cases, a lack of supervision has left children vulnerable to sexual abuse. In 2014, a primary school teacher in Yunnan was charged with molesting multiple girls, most of whom were left-behind children.

To improve conditions for left-behind children, the Yunnan provincial government has introduced mental health seminars, built a database of left-behind children, and expanded support services. However, uneven resource distribution means that protection and care in remote areas remain a challenge. Ensuring the well-being of these children will require not only policy support, but also sustained attention and commitment from society as a whole.

Heavenly Father, may Your mercy rest on the left-behind children of Yunnan. Heal their lonely and wounded hearts, and may they find comfort and strength in You. We pray for those who care for them. Many parents are busy trying to make a living and cannot always attend to their children's needs. Please give them strength and patience, and grant wisdom in communication across generations, so that families may become places where people listen to and accept one another. We pray that more non-governmental organizations and community support systems would grow in rural areas, helping to protect children's safety and support their mental well-being. May the government continue to provide counseling resources and parenting education, and strengthen supervision and accountability, so that children are protected from harm. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Homelands Under Water

Reservoir Resettlement



Songhua Dam Reservoir, northern suburbs of Kunming, Yunnan Province

Yunnan's highland terrain, with its many rivers and lakes, gives it a natural advantage for developing hydropower. Since the 1980s, to meet growing energy demand and support economic development, the province has built 59 reservoirs and hydropower stations, significantly increasing its power supply. These projects have also led to large-scale displacement. Vast areas of land have been submerged, and many local residents have been relocated. By 2023, the cumulative number of reservoir-displaced residents in Yunnan had reached 838,200, with an average of 24,300 more relocated each year.

The government has promoted a "relocate first, build second" policy, pairing resettlement with financial compensation, purpose-built villages, and vocational training to help displaced families rebuild. But rebuilding a life is slow work. Many families still grapple with the loss of familiar land, the unraveling of community ties, limited farmable acreage at their new locations, and the higher cost of living that comes with being somewhere new. To improve outcomes, 2024 saw the relocation of 3,100 people, an investment of 7.75 billion yuan, and vocational training for 42,800 people — alongside efforts to speed up the disbursement of subsidies.

Going forward, the government will strengthen policies and follow-up support to help relocated residents stabilize their lives and adapt to new environments and communities, while ensuring that hydropower development and residents' well-being are both taken into account, moving toward more sustainable development.

Heavenly Father, remember the hundreds of thousands of families displaced by reservoir projects in Yunnan. Comfort them in the sorrow of leaving their homes and the anxiety of adjusting to new surroundings. Watch over them as they gradually build new routines and relationships. We pray for the communities receiving them. May people be willing to welcome one another, support one another, and become good neighbors, facing the challenges of this new life together. Bless the policies for compensation, resettlement, and job training, so that the growing number of displaced residents may regain stable livelihoods and not fall into hardship or be pushed to the margins. May the energy provided by these reservoirs support Yunnan's development, and allow people to live in peace and stability. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Friday | **May 8**

Tea, Fortune, and Collapse

The Bulang People



Photo by Stefan Perneborg on Flickr

According to the 2020 census, the Bulang people number approximately 120,000, with communities spread across Yunnan in China, as well as Myanmar and Thailand.

The Bulang, regarded as one of the earliest tea-cultivating peoples in China, have traditionally relied on ancient tea trees for their livelihood.* In the 1950s, the Yunnan government promoted the modernization of the tea industry, encouraging farmers to plant higher-yielding new cultivars. Some Bulang communities opened new tea fields, and their ancient tea groves gradually fell into disuse; others chose to preserve them. At the time, newly cultivated tea sold at high prices, while tea from ancient trees fetched less than one RMB per kilogram.

In 2007, an oversupply of new cultivars led to a collapse in prices, and the market turned back to ancient-tree tea. Prices, depending on tree age and brand, rose sharply—reaching from several thousand to several million RMB per kilogram. This wave of market change lifted some and left others behind. Those who had preserved their ancient trees became wealthy almost overnight, while those who had switched to new cultivars faced difficulties. Some responded by making donations, building temples, and inviting monks to chant sutras, hoping to offset past actions and seek a better outcome.

*Defined as trees over 100 years old.

Heavenly Father, thank You for watching over the Bulang people. Thank You for providing tea trees and for the work of their hands, through which they meet their daily needs. We ask that You would continue to care for their livelihoods. Grant wisdom and compassion to the government in Yunnan, that they may put in place policies that support stable livelihoods, open up economic opportunities beyond tea, and provide greater support for families in poverty. Gracious Lord, may Your true peace come to the Bulang people. Reveal Yourself to them and draw their hearts to know You, that they may build their lives on the firm foundation of the Rock, and stand strong with steadfast hearts. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Saturday | **May 9**

The Grain Goddess and the Buddha

The De'ang People



Photo by Jialiang Gao on Wikimedia Commons

The De'ang, the Bulang, and the Wa all trace their lineage to the ancient Pu people. Today, approximately 20,000 De'ang live in Yunnan, while a far larger population of around 600,000 — known there as the Palaung — reside across the border in Myanmar.

Traditionally, the De'ang have sustained themselves through the cultivation of rice, corn, and sugarcane. Agriculture has long been central to their lives, and they worship the Grain Goddess, praying for good harvests. Over time, influenced by the neighboring Dai, the De'ang adopted Theravada Buddhism. Boys were often sent to monasteries to study Buddhist scriptures, returning to lay life after several years. In the early period after its introduction, different sects—including the Run, Baizhuang, Duolei, and Zuodi — held mutual rivalries, and relations were at times tense. But over time, attitudes grew more tolerant, and today different sects within the same village live together peacefully.

Economically, the De'ang have gradually developed industries with distinctive ethnic characteristics. For example, the craft of making sour tea* has been listed as a national intangible cultural heritage. Some community members are actively seeking skills training, hoping to carry on this tradition and support the development of the De'ang economy.

*Made from fresh large-leaf tea, processed through heating, rolling, anaerobic fermentation, and pounding, resulting in a sour and astringent flavor with a lingering sweetness.

Heavenly Father, You have provided fertile land for the De'ang people, sustaining them through the produce of their fields so that they have lived for generations in Yunnan and Myanmar. In their worship of the Grain Goddess and their devotion to Buddhism, we see a deep longing in their hearts for protection and comfort. May You, the true and living God, reveal Yourself to the De'ang people, leading them to know and worship You, and to receive true peace and new life. Bless the distinctive industries of the De'ang people. May they provide employment, support local economic development, and help preserve and pass on their unique culture and wisdom. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dancing and Ox Bones

The Wa People



Photo by Evangelos Petratos on Wikimedia Commons

The Wa have long lived along the China–Myanmar border. About 420,000 live in southwestern Yunnan, with around 600,000 more in Myanmar and smaller communities in Thailand. The Wa are known for their singing and dancing, with a strong artistic tradition. One young man who had left his village to work for a performing arts company later returned home and founded a Wa dance troupe. With government support in training and funding, he recruited more than 20 community members, providing them with a livelihood while also helping to carry on Wa cultural traditions.

Local governments have also promoted Wa culture as a resource for tourism development. One example is the Longmoye Holy Land, located deep in the forests of Ximeng County in Pu'er. Covered with white buffalo bones, it has become a popular tourist site, attracting many visitors.

“Longmoye” is a transliteration of a Wa term meaning “sacred ground,” believed to be a place where the gods gather. The Wa regard the water buffalo as a symbol of blessing and good fortune. Strong, black buffalo are offered in sacrifice, and their bones are presented at the Longmoye in prayers for safety and well-being. Over time, these offerings have gradually accumulated, forming the striking and solemn altar seen today.

Heavenly Father, each water buffalo the Wa people have offered, and each bone placed at the Longmoye, reflects their deep desire for peace. May You, in Your mercy, allow them to experience the peace that comes through Jesus Christ. Through the Lord's sacrifice, may the Wa people be called children of God, and may their lives rest on Him, the unshakable foundation. We ask that You would raise up more people among the Wa, filled with wisdom and creativity, to find ways to preserve their culture well. Watch over the Wa dance troupes and the tourism connected to their culture. May these provide a stable source of income, and help others come to understand Wa culture more deeply. May those in positions of influence respond to the needs of Wa communities and support their development, and truly care for their well-being. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Guardians of Mountain and River

The Dai People



Photo on Wikimedia Commons

The Dai comprise some thirty distinct subgroups. More than 1.32 million live within China, primarily in Yunnan, while others are spread across Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, India, and Vietnam.

For the Dai, life is closely connected to the natural world. Traditionally, they follow an animist belief system and show deep respect for the environment. They believe that forests nurture water sources, water sustains the land, and the land supports human life—making the forest the foundation of existence. As a result, they avoid excessive logging and treat all living things with care. The Dai also believe that gods and ancestors dwell in sacred mountains, and that the plants and animals of the forest are their companions. To harm them without cause is to invite punishment. This respect for nature has become an important force in protecting Yunnan’s ecological environment.

In recent years, the government has begun to place greater emphasis on Dai traditional knowledge. In Xishuangbanna—often referred to as a “biodiversity gene bank”—two national and two prefecture-level nature reserves have been established, covering 22 percent of the region. In cooperation with Laos to the south, a cross-border conservation area of 190,000 hectares has been created, and more than twenty ecological and environmental protection measures have been implemented. These efforts aim to balance development and conservation, while continuing the Dai tradition of respecting nature and caring for forests.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving the Dai people a heart that honors and respects the natural world. They value their relationship with the mountains, forests, water, and land. May Your children learn from their example and join together in caring for creation as faithful stewards. Your Word says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” May the Dai people, as they observe the growth of all living things, come to see You, the Lord over all life, and understand that the richness of nature is from You—You who make everything beautiful in its time. May their hearts turn to You and worship You. We pray that the government would continue to work with the Dai people to protect the environment, finding a balance between use and preservation, and practicing wisdom in sustainable development. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Walking Out of the Cave

The Zhuang People



Photo by G41rn8 on Wikimedia Commons

The Zhuang are one of China's largest ethnic groups, with a total population of about 26 million. Nearly 20 million live in China, mainly in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, with around 1.2 million more in Wenshan Prefecture in eastern Yunnan. Some Zhuang subgroups in China are classified as the Buyi, while in Vietnam they are known as the Tay and the San Chay. The ancestors of the Zhuang have lived in what is now Guangxi and Yunnan since the Qin Dynasty. Over time, they were referred to by different written names before the current name "Zhuang" (壯) was adopted.

Moism is an important traditional belief of the Zhuang people. Its sacred text, The Buluotuo Scriptures, records the formation of heaven, earth, the sun and moon, the origins of humanity, and the way of life of the Zhuang's earliest ancestors, all attributed to the supreme deity, Buluotuo. Buluotuo is said to have led the ancient people out of caves and taught them to build raised wooden dwellings,* symbolizing their emergence from darkness and their learning to build with their own hands.

That spirit of walking out of the cave lives on today in Wenshan. Responding to government-led green industry initiatives, Zhuang communities are moving beyond traditional subsistence farming and toward modern, diversified agriculture. One Zhuang woman established a farmers' cooperative, bringing together Zhuang, Miao, and Yi community members to develop specialty crops and blueberry cultivation, building new livelihoods on the same land.

*The earliest form of the Zhuang's distinctive stilt-house architecture.

Heavenly Father, from ancient times to today, no matter what names people have used for the Zhuang, You have always known them, for they are made by Your hand and loved by You. In their traditional beliefs, the Zhuang seek to understand the Creator and the origin of life. We ask that You would reveal Yourself to them, so that those who seek may find, and those who knock may have the door opened to them, and their lives be renewed and changed. Thank You for raising up wise leaders among the Zhuang, helping to develop modern agriculture and cooperatives. Please continue to strengthen their hands and provide the resources they need, so that as they build their communities, they may also experience true peace and lasting satisfaction in You. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Keeping Our Story Alive

The Bouyei People



The Bouyei and the Zhuang are often regarded as sharing a common origin. Before the Tang Dynasty, both were classified as “Southwestern People,” and later developed into distinct cultures. Today, the Bouyei population in China is about 3.5 million, mainly in Guizhou, with a smaller population in Yunnan.

In Hekou County, Yunnan, there is a museum dedicated to Bouyei culture. Its founder, Luo Hongqing, is now 83 years old. After retiring, Luo began visiting Bouyei villages, speaking with elders to collect oral traditions such as legends, songs, lyrics, and proverbs. He also used photography to capture traditional dress, musical instruments, woodworking tools, and everyday objects. He later organized these materials and established the museum, hoping to pass on cultural memory to the next generation. He also founded a Bouyei Studies Association, actively encouraging young people to carry forward intangible cultural heritage, and led community members on field research in Yunnan and Guizhou. These efforts led to the designation of thirteen Bouyei villages as cultural preservation zones.

The Bouyei have a rich cultural tradition, with many elements recognized as national intangible cultural heritage. Traditional women’s clothing, for example, involves techniques such as batik,* tie-dye,** sewing, and embroidery. Common motifs include osmanthus, rice, magpies, and butterflies—drawn from everyday life and symbolizing abundance and a deep reverence for nature.

*A resist-dyeing technique in which hot wax is applied to fabric before dyeing, leaving the waxed areas undyed.

Heavenly Father, You have blessed the Bouyei people across generations and given them creativity, shaping a rich and vibrant culture. May Your truth speak to their hearts. In their reverence for nature, may they come to see and long for You, the source of life and the Creator of all things, and turn to worship You. May their culture one day become a means of praising Your glory. Thank You for raising up Luo Hongqing for the Bouyei people. His work has helped preserve their traditions and encouraged others to carry them on. Please remember his labor. We also pray for the next generation of the Bouyei. May they be inspired to carry their culture forward, using their skills, creativity, and wisdom to keep it alive. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Thursday | **May 14**

Hidden Beneath the Wings

The Sui People



Photo on Wikimedia Commons

The Sui number nearly 500,000 in China, living mainly in Guizhou, with only around 1,000 in Yunnan. According to tradition, in ancient times there were nine suns in the sky. A mother, carrying her child in search of water, was nearly overcome by the heat when a large butterfly flew down and spread its wings to shield them from the sun. Since then, Sui women have embroidered butterfly motifs onto traditional baby carriers, preserving this story through their craft and passing it on from one generation to the next.

The Sui speak their own language and have a unique pictographic writing system known as Shuishu ("Water Script"), which predates China's oracle bone script. It was included in China's first list of national intangible cultural heritage in 2006. Shuishu has traditionally been used for divination and could be read only by specialists known as "Shuishu Masters." Today, few Sui are able to read it. As older generations pass away and younger people leave for work, both the spoken language and the script are gradually being lost. In response, Yang Shengzhao, who grew up speaking Sui, has devoted himself to research and preservation efforts. The government has also promoted Shuishu education and applied for World Heritage recognition, in hopes of sustaining this cultural tradition.

In Yunnan, Gugan Township is the only officially recognized Sui village. In recent years, the area has developed specialty crops, including bamboo shoots, watermelon, and passion fruit. It has also combined Sui culture and natural scenery to promote agritourism, helping to support local economic development.

Heavenly Father, the Sui story of a butterfly shielding a mother and child reminds us of Your Word: "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights." May the Sui people truly experience the protection, abundance, and joy that come from You. May Shuishu and the Sui language be preserved through research, education, and heritage efforts, so that this precious culture may continue. Bless the land of the Sui people. Prosper the agriculture and tourism of Gugan Township, so that living conditions may improve and more people may come to see the beauty and value of Sui culture. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Wise Ones of the Yi

The Yi People



Photo by Brücke-Osteuropa on Wikimedia Commons

The Yi are China's seventh-largest ethnic minority, with a population of nearly ten million spread across Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou. Beyond China, Yi communities are found in Vietnam—where they are known as the Phù Lá and Lô Lô—as well as in smaller numbers in Laos. Over time, the Yi have developed a belief system closely connected to nature, their ancestors, and the cosmos. This system is known as Bimoism.

The word “bimo” roughly means “an elder who chants scripture.” A bimo serves as both a priest and a cultural guardian, presiding over ceremonies for heaven and earth, ancestors, and occasions such as marriages and funerals. He is knowledgeable in the Yi script and its classical texts, and is also versed in medicine, astronomy, the calendar, history, and philosophy. In Yi society, the bimo is regarded as the most knowledgeable person in the community; as a proverb puts it, “The knowledge of a bimo cannot be counted.” More than a ritual leader, the bimo is seen as a bridge between humans and the divine, and holds a highly respected position.

Through chanting sacred texts, observing celestial signs, and practicing divination, the bimo passes down language, writing, medicine, ethics, and cultural memory from one generation to the next. Bimoism is therefore more than a religion; it is an integrated system that encompasses Yi culture, knowledge, and worldview. For the Yi people, it provides a way to understand the order of heaven and earth and the meaning of life, helping them live in harmony with nature, remember their ancestors, and sustain their cultural identity in modern society.

Heavenly Father, thank You for watching over the Yi people. We pray that families in Vietnam, Laos, and across the provinces of China would experience the peace, joy, and provision that come from You. The Yi people honor the bimo and seek to connect with the divine through him. We ask that You would send Your Spirit to open their hearts, so that they may come to know the love and salvation found in the cross, and be reconciled to You through Jesus Christ, the one Mediator. Please watch over the preservation of Yi literature and wisdom. May they be faithfully passed down, and may future generations and those in authority find wise and creative ways to preserve these traditions, so that more people may come to appreciate the richness of Yi culture. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Decline of the Bai Language

The Bai People



Photo by Rod Waddington from Kergunyah, Australia on Wikimedia Commons

The Bai number more than two million people, with about 80 percent living in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture in west-central Yunnan, and the rest in Guizhou, Hunan, Guangdong, and other provinces. Traditionally, the Bai worship the Benzhu, local tutelary deities who watch over villages and regions, bringing prosperity and health. Ancestors, historical figures, mythological heroes, and even animals may be venerated as Benzhu. According to a 1990 survey, there were nearly a thousand Benzhu temples in Dali alone, giving rise to the saying, “No village is complete without its Benzhu,” reflecting how deeply this belief is rooted in daily life. Some Bai also practice Buddhism, Catholicism, or Christianity.

The Bai once had a writing system modeled on Chinese characters, but their historical records were destroyed at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming. Since then, the script has largely been lost, with only oral transmission remaining. As young people move to cities, and with limited opportunities for Bai language education, the language has gradually declined. Schools, focused on exam preparation, leave little room for teaching Bai language or culture. Traditional performing arts, mythology, and other forms of cultural transmission are also at risk of being lost.

In recent years, the growth of tourism has brought economic benefits and renewed interest among the Bai in their own culture. At the same time, commercialization may reduce traditions to surface-level performances, weakening their deeper meaning. Looking ahead, combining tourism with education and language revitalization, and encouraging the Bai to take an active role in cultural transmission, may help revitalize traditions from within and sustain their vitality.

Heavenly Father, through the Bai people's Benzhu faith, we see their desire for protection. May You answer their cry and shelter them under the shadow of Your wings, guarding them as the apple of Your eye. May Your Spirit move in their hearts, stirring a hunger for truth and leading them to seek You. May the government, with respect and compassion, value the wisdom within Bai tradition and include it in education, so that the next generation has more opportunity to learn their own culture. Bless the development of tourism among the Bai. May it become not only a source of income, but also an opportunity to pass on their culture. Through their participation and creativity, may others come to understand the richness of Bai culture, and may society grow in diversity and inclusion. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Sunday | **May 17**

The War God From a Dream

The Naxi People



Naxi women in their traditional dress

Lijiang, nestled at the intersection of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet, is the ancestral homeland of the Naxi people, with additional communities living across Sichuan and Tibet.

The Naxi traditionally follow the Dongba religion, a polytheistic belief system. Its priests, known as Dongba, are all male and inherit their role through family lineage or apprenticeship. They carry Naxi cultural knowledge and are regarded as wise figures. The faith includes the worship of ancestors, spirits, and nature. One of its most important deities is Sanduo. According to legend, the Naxi once worshipped a sacred stone. In times of war, a warrior would appear—his face white as snow, his eyes like lightning—fighting on their behalf before disappearing. Later, this figure appeared in a dream to a Naxi leader, identified himself as Sanduo, and has since been honored as a protective deity and god of war.

Dongba belief emphasizes respect for nature and living in accordance with its rhythms, shaping the Naxi way of life. In 1998, the government established the Lashihai Wetland Provincial Nature Reserve on this basis, to protect the plateau wetlands, bird species, and their habitats. With the rise of tourism such as birdwatching and horseback riding, the area once faced overdevelopment. The government has since returned to an ecology-first approach, promoting industrial transition, combining rose cultivation with agritourism, and introducing ecological monitoring systems to track water quality, air quality, and forest coverage. These efforts aim to support sustainable and balanced development.

Heavenly Father, all protection and help come from You. May the Naxi people turn to You and come to know You as the one true God. The story of Sanduo reminds us of Your messenger, whose face is like lightning and whose clothes are white as snow. May You build a bridge from Naxi tradition to the Gospel, so that they may come to understand the message of creation, Christ, and redemption. We thank You for giving the Naxi people a heart that respects and cares for nature, and for sustaining them as they have cared for the land across generations. In this time of climate change, may they continue to walk in humility and reverence, and be faithful stewards of the land. Bless the Naxi people in all that they do. May they experience Your protection and provision, and may their lives reflect the character of Christ. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

A Treasure in the Terraces

The Hani People



Approximately 1.73 million Hani live in China, with 98 percent in southwestern Yunnan. Smaller communities are found in Shandong, Jiangsu, Hunan, Sichuan, and Guangdong. The Hani are also a cross-border people, with populations in Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

For the Hani, the terraced fields are an integral part of life. In Yunnan, the most well-known example is the Red River Hani Rice Terraces. The terraces rise in layers along the mountainsides, their flooded fields reflecting the sky. They reflect a way of living in harmony with nature. The Hani practice organic cultivation of diverse rice varieties to support ecological stability; they protect forest resources, including sacred trees and watershed forests; and they strictly limit the use of pesticides and excessive fertilizers.

However, as rice farming has become less profitable in the modern economy, many young Hani have moved away, creating challenges for the transmission of their culture. In recent years, Bao Jigang of Sun Yat-sen University has promoted the “Azheke Project,” supporting Azheke Village in developing sustainable tourism**. The project encourages Hani families to maintain their traditional homes and way of life, while allowing visitors to experience daily life in the village. Seventy percent of tourism revenue goes directly to residents, with the remainder reinvested in the community.

*Forests located upstream that help conserve water sources and regulate water quality and flow.

**Tourism designed to minimize negative environmental, social, and economic impacts while promoting the wellbeing of local communities.

Heavenly Father, as the Hani people stand among the mountains and see the beauty around them, may Your Spirit plant the seeds of the Gospel in their hearts, leading them to know and seek You, the Creator of heaven and earth. Please remember the Hani people’s care for their land and their protection of the Red River Terraces. In this, we see faithful stewardship—a model for others to follow. Thank You for raising up scholars to support the Hani in both culture and livelihood. May the Azheke Project continue to grow, helping preserve their culture and allowing more people to see its value. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Heavenly Dance at the Border

The Jingpo People



Photo by EricOng77 on Wikimedia Commons

Every year, on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, visitors from across China travel to Dehong Prefecture in Yunnan to witness the Jingpo people's most important annual celebration—the Munao Zongge Festival. The name means “gathering to sing and dance together.” Tens of thousands dance in unison, creating a striking spectacle that has been described as a “dance of heaven.” The festival was originally held to celebrate victories, convene tribal councils, commemorate the dead, mark the completion of new homes, and pray for a good harvest. In 2006, it was included in China's first list of national intangible cultural heritage.

Traditionally, the Jingpo follow an animist belief system. They believe that after death a person becomes a spirit, and that all things in nature—the sun, the moon, the mountains—have their own spirits. These spirits are regarded as powerful and worthy of respect, able to bring either blessing or harm. Communication with them is carried out through a Dongsas, a shaman who serves as an intermediary between the human and spirit worlds. Animist belief is closely woven into Jingpo life and helps bind communities together. Each autumn, villages celebrate the New Rice Festival. Before the festivities begin, the finest grain of the season is prepared, and the Dongsas performs rituals to the spirits, asking for blessing on livestock and the coming harvest. Only then do villagers gather to eat, drink, and give thanks.

Heavenly Father, may Your hand guide the Jingpo people each day. May their lives and hearts be filled with Your presence and abundance. For generations, the Jingpo have honored the spirits of the departed and the natural world, expressing respect for life through rituals and festivals such as the Munao Zongge. May Your Spirit work in their hearts, turning that reverence toward You, the Creator who loves them, so that they may receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be reconciled to You. Bless the Munao Zongge Festival. May it be not only a time of celebration, but also a way to show the richness of Jingpo culture, so that others may come to understand and appreciate it. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Wednesday | **May 20**

Where the Soul Finds Its Way Home

The Achang People



“Do you remember the road your ancestors walked? Do you know the history of the Achang people? Do you know the Lord of Heaven and the Mother of Earth, who created the sky and the land?” These words come from Zhepama and Zhemima, the epic of the Achang people in Yunnan. It tells the story of the Lord of Heaven, Zhepama, and the Mother of Earth, Zhemima, who created the world, brought forth humanity, repaired the heavens, and drove out demons. The Achang believe this epic was passed down directly from the Lord of Heaven to ritual specialists known as Huopao, and has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next ever since. To honor the gift of creation, the Achang gather each March to celebrate the Aluwoluo Festival, with lion dances, elephant dances, and the traditional Woluo dance.

But Zhepama and Zhemima is more than the centerpiece of a festival—it also reflects the Achang understanding of life and death. They believe a person has three souls. After death, one is sent to the burial ground, one is kept in the home, and the third returns to the ancestral homeland—the place of the Lord of Heaven, Zhepama. At funerals, some Huopao recite: “The road by the sea is the road of the Lisu; the road of writing and ink is the road of the Han; the road of the bow and crossbow is the road of the Jingpo. Do not take these roads. Follow the road of the Achang ancestors, and you will reach the place of the ancestral spirits.”

The Achang are a small ethnic group of about 43,000 people, living mainly in the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in western Yunnan. A smaller community lives across the border in Myanmar, where they are known as the Maingtha. Most follow Theravada Buddhism, though elements of animist belief remain.

Heavenly Father, thank You for leading us to pray for the Achang people, whom You love. The Lord of Heaven, the Mother of Earth, the Huopao, and the ancestors are central to their identity. You see their search for where the soul belongs—a deep longing for eternity and for home. Lord, You have prepared the true home for every Achang person through Jesus Christ. Through His cross and resurrection, we can return to the Father. We also thank You for the growth the Achang people have experienced through government support. As living conditions improve—with better infrastructure and schools—we pray that their hearts would also know true freedom and fullness. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Drum That Became an Ark

The Jino People



Photo by Taco Witte on Wikimedia Commons

The Jino are the fifty-sixth ethnic group officially recognized by the Chinese government. They live mainly in Jinghong City in southwestern Yunnan, with a population of about 26,000. The Jino trace their origins to a brother and sister, Mahei and Maniu. According to legend, when a great flood covered the earth, the creator goddess Amoyaobei* placed them inside a cowhide drum to save them. The drum floated for seven days and seven nights. When they emerged, they could find no other survivors. They became husband and wife, and their descendants formed the Jino people. Their children called Mahei both "father" and "uncle." From this story, the Jino are known as "the people who emerged from the drum" and "the people who honor the maternal uncle."

Within the nature reserves of Jinghong City are valuable areas of tropical rainforest. In recent years, with support from private enterprises, Jino community members have begun leading rainforest tours, which have become a highlight of local ecotourism. Each group is limited to ten visitors and guided by trained specialists along the forest's edge to observe plants and wildlife. The core zone remains strictly off-limits to protect the ecosystem.

In education, although primary school enrollment has reached 100 percent, challenges remain for the Jino. Scholars note that, in addition to high teacher turnover, many children grow up only speaking Jino at home as their parents often have limited Mandarin proficiency. This makes learning Chinese more difficult, and even more so English. More investment in bilingual teachers and resources is needed to help reduce language and resource gaps.

*"Amo" means "mother," "yao" means "earth," and "bei" means "to create."

Heavenly Father, though the Jino people are few, You have not forgotten them. In their stories, we see their reverence for Amoyaobei, the creator goddess. May this memory become a starting point that leads them to know You, the true Creator of heaven and earth and of all life. May Your Spirit touch their hearts and stir in them a desire to seek the Gospel. Remember the Jino people's care for the natural world. May rainforest tours not only provide for their livelihood, but also help others learn to care for creation. May the government continue to promote fair access to education, and raise up Christian teachers to serve in Jino villages, walking with children in love and patience. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Children of the Gourd

The Lahu People



Photo by Steve Jurvetson on Wikimedia Commons

The Lahu number approximately 800,000 people, with nearly 500,000 living in Yunnan and the rest spread across Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.

The Lahu proverb “Open the calabash, and humankind emerges” comes from their creation epic, Mupamipa—meaning “the making of heaven and earth.” The Lahu believe that the universe and all living things were created by an all-knowing and all-powerful God, Esha. According to legend, Esha planted a golden gourd seed. When it ripened, the first ancestors, Zhadi and Nadi, were born from it, and from them the Lahu people descended. The gourd is therefore seen as a symbol of their ancestors and a sign of blessing.

It is also the central symbol of the Calabash Festival, known in Lahu as “Apeng Alonni,” the most important festival of the Lahu people. Each year, on the fifteenth day of the tenth lunar month, communities place a gourd at the center of the celebration ground to represent their ancestors, and gather to sing and dance in gratitude and reverence.

Today, Lahu song and dance have moved beyond the mountains. Community members have established performing arts companies, touring traditional performances to promote their culture and support their livelihoods. They have also developed specialty industries such as organic tea, free-range chicken, black wood-ear mushrooms, and shiitake, building their own path of development.

Heavenly Father, may You make Yourself known to the Lahu people, that they may understand You are the One who formed humanity from the dust, breathed life into us, and prepared an eternal purpose for our lives. May Lahu culture be faithfully preserved through touring performances and recognition as intangible cultural heritage, and continue to grow with vitality. We also pray for stable economic development, so that people no longer need to worry about their daily needs. As life becomes more secure, may Your Spirit lead them to seek deeper meaning, and to see that true fulfillment is found in Your love, so that they may turn to You in worship. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Days by the Nu River

The Nu People



Photo by 瑞丽江的河水 on Wikimedia Commons

Laomudeng Village: a quintessential Nu village located in Pihe Nu Township, Fugong County, Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

Nujiang Prefecture in northwestern Yunnan borders Myanmar to the west. Three major rivers—the Nu, the Lancang, and the Jinsha—run in parallel through the region, forming a striking landscape. For thousands of years, the Nu River Canyon has been home to the Nu and Lisu peoples. Today, about 36,000 Nu people live there.

Living in deep mountain gorges, the Nu have developed a deep respect for nature and believe that all things have spirit. Some also practice Tibetan Buddhism. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholic and Protestant missionaries entered the Nujiang region from Myanmar, bringing the Gospel.

As part of China's poverty alleviation efforts, Nujiang Prefecture has been designated a key support area, drawing increased government attention and resources. In recent years, Nu youth and public servants have begun sharing daily life in their communities on social media, increasing the visibility of Nu culture and creating opportunities for local ecotourism.

The government has also developed the Nu's traditional Fairy Festival into a tourism event, with food stalls, markets, and cultural performances, allowing visitors to experience both the heritage and present-day life of the Nu people. According to legend, a fairy named Arong invented the zip line and brought fresh mountain spring water to the Nu. Each year, on the fifteenth day of the third lunar month, community members go to Fairy Cave—where Arong is believed to have turned into stone—to offer prayers for a good harvest and peace.

Heavenly Father, You created heaven and earth and shaped the mountains and rivers of Nujiang. You placed the Nu people in this canyon, where they experience Your provision and care. May the beauty of creation lead them to recognize You as the Creator of all things. Thank You that through images, written accounts, and news media, we are able to learn about the lives of the Nu people. Give us hearts that see them with appreciation and respect, as people You love. Bless the development of ecotourism and local festivals. As people enjoy the beauty of nature and culture, may the environment be protected, and may the Nu people receive real benefit. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Four Ways of Writing

The Lisu People



Photo by EricOng77 on Wikimedia Commons

The Lisu are spread across Myanmar, Thailand, and India, with approximately 760,000 living in the Nu River Canyon in Yunnan.

The Lisu have a rich oral literary tradition. Works such as Genesis* and Legends of the Hengduan Mountains have been passed down through generations in spoken word and song. Over time, four writing systems developed: Old Lisu Script, Fraser Script, Wang Renbo Script, and New Lisu Script. Today, Old Lisu Script and New Lisu Script are the most widely used.

Old Lisu Script was created by a Sara Ba Thaw, a preacher from Myanmar of Karen descent. It was later refined by James Fraser, a British missionary, and remains his most significant contribution to the Lisu people. Based on Latin letters and their variations, he designed a writing system that was easy to read, write, and remember, and it was widely accepted among the Lisu. By 1919, Old Lisu Script was in widespread use across northwestern Yunnan and northern Myanmar, enabling the Lisu to record their culture and knowledge in writing and supporting the development of education.

In 1964, the government introduced a new Lisu writing system based on the Latin alphabet in Lisu areas, as part of efforts to standardize minority scripts. It has been in use ever since.

*Not to be confused with the book of Genesis in the Hebrew and Christian Bible. The Lisu's Genesis is an ancient oral epic that depicts their understanding of the origins of the universe.

Heavenly Father, give the Lisu people attentive hearts and curious eyes. As they live among the mountains and valleys, may they reflect on the wonders of heaven and earth and come to know You as the Creator of all things. Thank You for giving them the ability to adapt and learn, so that through oral tradition, knotted cords, and written language, they have been able to preserve their history and cultural memory. Thank You for raising up people in different times to develop writing systems for the Lisu. May these scripts help carry their understanding of life and the world, so that future generations can learn, pass on, and renew their heritage. As they read Your Word, may their lives be nourished and renewed, and may they receive the hope of eternal life. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Monday | **May 25**

Weaving a Rainbow at the World's Edge

The Dulong People



Photo by Claire Iiy on Wikimedia Commons

With only about 7,300 people in China, the Dulong are one of the smallest of the country's 56 recognized ethnic groups. They live in the Dulong River Valley in northwestern Yunnan, where steep mountains on both sides have long made transportation difficult. In the past, crossing rivers depended on zip lines, which were both dangerous and inconvenient. The Dulong would sometimes joke, "It's easier to leave the country than to leave the province." In 2014, the Dulong River Highway opened, improving winter isolation that had previously cut the valley off from the outside world. By 2018, the government announced that the Dulong people had been lifted out of poverty.

Any account of the Dulong would be incomplete without the Dulong blanket, known for its bright, rainbow-striped patterns. In the past, a single blanket served as clothing by day and bedding by night. In 2015, a charity exhibition titled "naze naze" (meaning "slowly") was held in Shanghai, co-organized by the Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation (BCAF) and the United Nations Development Programme, with the aim of preserving this traditional craft and supporting local livelihoods. The exhibition also highlighted the work of Dulong women. As the number of women who still know the weaving technique has declined—with the youngest now nearly thirty—BCAF has encouraged more women and young people to learn the craft and continue the tradition.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the opportunity to learn about the Dulong people. Though small in number, they are precious to You. May they come to experience Your presence and return to You. Thank You for the organizations that have recognized the beauty and value of Dulong weaving, and for the exhibitions and cultural preservation efforts that help sustain this tradition. May their work lead to greater understanding and respect for Dulong culture. As transportation improves, may daily life become more convenient, and may weaving and cultural industries bring greater economic stability. May the mountains, rivers, and natural environment of the Dulong homeland be protected, so that development and daily life remain in balance. Bless the Dulong people with peace and joy, in both tradition and change. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Gazing Northward Toward a Lost Homeland

The Khatso People



Photo by Francesc Balagué on Flickr

In Yuxi City in Yunnan lives a distinct Mongol community known as the Khatso. How did they come to settle in China's southwestern borderlands? Their history can be traced back to the Yuan Dynasty. In 1254, Kublai Khan led a southern campaign and established military outposts in Yunnan. In 1381, the Ming Dynasty defeated the Yuan forces in the region. The Mongol cavalry stationed there were unable to return to the northern steppes. To survive, they adopted new names, intermarried with the Yi people, and gradually became part of local society.

More than seven hundred years have passed. The once horse-mounted warriors became settled farmers and fishermen of the plateau. Their dress, language, and diet have long since diverged from those of the northern grasslands. Yet they have continued to take pride in being descendants of Genghis Khan, and still carry a sense of connection to the distant steppe.

In terms of belief, they retain elements of animism while also venerating deities such as Guanyin and Guan Yu. The most representative site is the Temple of the Three Saints, where Genghis Khan, his descendant Möngke Khan, and Kublai Khan are enshrined, along with a stone stele recording the history of their migration. Each year, during the Ancestor Remembrance Festival in the sixth lunar month, community members gather at the temple to honor their ancestors, remember the hardships of settling in Yunnan, and remind future generations of their origins.

Heavenly Father, You understand the fear and displacement the Khatso people have carried through generations—forced to leave their homeland and make a life in a new place. We ask for Your healing to come to the Khatso people. May Your loving hand bring comfort to the wounds of the past, and help them see that You have been with them through every hardship. May Your Spirit guide this people, who value identity and belonging, to know the eternal home You have prepared for them, and to find true rest in You. Raise up people in different areas of society who understand the Khatso's culture and are sensitive to their deep attachment to identity and homeland. Give them wisdom and creativity to walk alongside the Khatso as they wrestle with the loss of their cultural roots. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Songs of the Plateau

The Pumi People



Photo by Lisa on Flickr

Rongbaxinna's (茸芭莘那) grandfather had a beautiful singing voice. When she was young, he would sing Pumi folk songs to her by the fire, and through those songs, Pumi culture took root in her heart. As she grew older, she pursued a career in singing, bringing Pumi culture to the stage. It was only after her grandfather passed away that she came to realize how much cultural knowledge was held by the elders. If not preserved in time, it could easily be lost. Since then, she has devoted herself to promoting cultural preservation among ethnic minorities, giving herself fully to the work.

The Pumi believe that failing to honor the spirits properly can bring illness or natural disaster. According to their traditions, the gods of heaven once sent soldiers to guard the human world. Over time, these soldiers became mountain deities who continue to watch over the Pumi. Each year, on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, these mountain deities are said to gather for a contest. The winner brings a good harvest, while the loser signals hardship. On that morning, community members rise early to climb the mountains and burn incense, sending the deities off and praying for a favorable outcome. This tradition gave rise to the festival known as the Mountain Pilgrimage Festival.

The Pumi number about 45,000 people, living mainly in Sichuan and in the Nujiang Lisu and Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures of northwestern Yunnan, often alongside other ethnic groups.

Heavenly Father, the Pumi people live in a mountainous environment and know well the power of nature. Because of this, they faithfully honor the spirits. May You, the Creator of all things, reveal Yourself to them, so that they may know that You are the Lord of "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them." Thank You for the unique and precious culture You have given the Pumi people, and for raising up Rongbaxinna to serve in its preservation. May her work encourage more people to take part in passing on their culture. Raise up helpers with wisdom and creativity, equipped with different skills, to work together for the preservation of Pumi culture. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Always Moving

The Miao People



Photo by Tianjin24 on Wikimedia Commons

The battle between Chi You and the Yellow Emperor may be little more than a brief entry in Han Chinese historical records. But for the Miao people, Chi You is far more. To them he was a leader honored despite defeat, a symbol of dignity that endures. Miao people will say with pride, “Chi You is the ancestor of the Miao.”

According to tradition, after their defeat, the Miao began a long migration lasting centuries, moving from the Yellow River basin through Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, and eventually dispersing across the world. Along the way, their books were lost, and their written language disappeared. For much of their history, they have lived on the margins of mainstream society.

But this is only one chapter in a long history of migration. Scholars identify at least five major waves of Miao movement, earning them the name “the Jews of the East.” A folk saying captures it simply: “The crow has no tree to call its own; the Miao have no land to call home.”

This history of migration has shaped a distinctive social pattern: village boundaries are fluid, landholdings overlap, ritual responsibilities rotate among households, and there is no fixed chief or central authority. Even after the state encouraged settlement, many have continued to leave home for work, extending this long-standing pattern of migration.

Heavenly Father, the Miao people have experienced many migrations throughout their history, yet Your grace and love have never left them. You are their refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. We ask that Your Spirit touch the hearts of the Miao people, that they may come to know You as the one true God, and find in You a firm and lasting refuge, receiving the peace and fullness that come from You. Thank You for the wisdom and resilience You have given them, enabling them to live in harmony with the natural world and to adapt through changing circumstances while preserving their culture. May Your steadfast love surround the Miao people at all times. Let every future journey no longer be one of wandering, but a path that leads them closer to You, where their hearts may find rest and hope. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Cultural Code Within the Sacred Texts

The Yao People



Photo by UserVberger on Wikimedia Commons

The Yao are found across Guangxi, Hunan, and Guangdong, with another 220,000 living in Yunnan. They are made up of many subgroups. Among them, the branch in Yunnan is known as the Landian Yao (meaning “blue indigo”), named for their skill in cultivating indigo and their preference for deep blue-dyed clothing. Most Landian Yao migrated into Yunnan during the Ming and Qing dynasties, with smaller communities also found in Vietnam and Laos.

Daoist influence is woven through Yao life, and is especially evident in the boys’ coming-of-age ceremony known as Duojie. During the rite, a master instructs boys aged thirteen to fourteen in Daoist precepts, along with their people’s history, community codes, and moral values. Throughout the ceremony, the initiates step away from social life and entertainment, focusing instead on self-discipline and cultivation. Their diet is kept simple. The aim is to shape their character and sense of responsibility, preparing them to carry on their cultural heritage.

The Yao’s faith and accumulated wisdom are recorded in a body of sacred texts, the most representative of which is the Yao Scripture. These texts incorporate Daoist elements, including deities such as Taishang Laojun (The Supreme Venerable Sovereign) and the Celestial Masters. They also cover history, mythology, ritual, and cosmology, offering a glimpse into the Yao spiritual world. Tragically, war and the upheavals of history have scattered a large portion of these texts abroad, and those that remain within China have suffered damage. The hope is that international scholarly collaboration might one day restore life to this irreplaceable cultural memory.

Heavenly Father, thank You for creating the Yao people and for the rich cultural traditions they have developed among the mountains. Through the Duojie ceremony, we see their deep commitment to passing on their heritage and their hopes for the next generation. May You guide the young among the Yao, that in speech, conduct, love, and purity, they may be examples to others. May each person play a part in preserving and carrying forward the wisdom and culture handed down by their ancestors. We also ask that You lead scholars and cultural preservationists in China and abroad to work together, so that valuable texts such as the Yao Scriptures may be carefully preserved, and more people may come to know the richness of Yao culture. And may the Yao also have access to Your Word and come to know the salvation that only comes through Jesus Christ, and it is in His name we pray, Amen.

Yunnan Province, China

Saturday | **May 30**

A Force That Builds Society

The Manchu People



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For many people, their impression of the Manchu comes from period dramas. Many Chinese historical dramas are set in the Qing Dynasty, including well-known series such as *My Fair Princess* and *Empresses in the Palace*. As China's sixth-largest ethnic group, the Manchu are descended from the Jurchen, who established the Jin Dynasty and made their home in the northeast. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu gradually dispersed, with some settling as far away as Yunnan. Today, many work in fields such as engineering, public administration, culture, and healthcare.

According to the 2020 census, about 20,000 Manchu people live in Yunnan, most of them in Kunming. The street now known as Ru'an Street was once called "Banner Street," a residential area for the Manchu. The architecture there blends elements of traditional Manchu courtyard homes from Benxi in the northeast with the siheyuan* style found in Kunming. It preserves the structured layout typical of northern Chinese design while adapting to Yunnan's climate and way of life.

The Banjin Festival is one of the most important celebrations of the Manchu people, held each year on December 3. It traces back to 1635, when Emperor Hong Taiji issued a decree in Shenyang renaming the people "Manchu," marking a new beginning and a sense of shared identity. In the Manchu language, banjin means "auspicious" and "full of vitality," and the day is regarded as the birth of the Manchu people. Across China, Manchu communities dress in traditional clothing and celebrate with song and dance, continuing a cultural memory passed down through generations.

*A siheyuan is a traditional Chinese courtyard home with buildings enclosing a central space on four sides.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving the Manchu people the gift of life in all its fullness. Lord, as they gather in celebration, singing and dancing together, may Your joy fill their hearts. We pray that they would be like the one described in Jeremiah: "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him," receiving from You an unfailing abundance of blessing. May Your grace and wisdom be with the Manchu people each day, so that in fields such as engineering, public service, culture, and healthcare, they may steward their resources with wisdom, and respond to the needs of society with love and integrity, becoming a blessing to others. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

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