

Yi People

Yi people belong to an ethnic group also known as Nuosuo or Lolo people. They are located in Southwest China, part of Vietnam and Thailand. They have been recognized as the seventh largest ethnic minority group in China. Total population counted around nine million people (Li, 2003).



Yi People in traditional dress <https://zi.media/@yidianzixun/post/bR81Hb>



Settlement location of Yi people [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/18627/CH](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/18627/CH)

Yi Script

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History of the script

The history of the script can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty around (around 1485). However, a hypothesis by Liu Zhi, a Chinese scholar, could put the Yi script back much earlier in time, to around 8000-10000 years ago (1991). This would make it the oldest script in the world.

Old Yi Script

- 8000-10000 characters
- Varied by regional use
- Documented in religion books
- Logographic

(Zhu, 2017)

Standardized Yi Script

- 819 characters
- Created by Chinese government on 1975
- Syllabographic

(Zhu, 2017)

la<sup>34</sup>  
'hand'

ta<sup>33</sup>  
'to hold (with both hands)'

zi<sup>21</sup>  
'water'

bx<sup>33</sup>  
'flow, noise made by flowing water'

pha<sup>33</sup>  
'half'

ʔu<sup>33</sup>  
'ridge/head'

ti<sup>34</sup>  
'certain'

tshu<sup>55</sup>  
'accompany'

1. Imagery development in Yi script. Use compound characters to represent abstract meaning.

sa<sup>33</sup>  
'snake', 'yellow';  
'hereditary (son)'

na<sup>33</sup>  
'eye'

so<sup>34</sup>  
'fir'

mi<sup>21</sup>  
'sky'

thx<sup>21</sup>  
'ground';  
'speak'

1. “snake”, “yellow”, “son” is using the same character, and sound.
2. “eye”, “fir”, “sky” are words represent meaning by its form.
3. “ground”, “speak” are characters borrowed from Chinese characters.

(ancientscript.com)

Development of Yi Script

EARLY FORM → OLD YI → STANDARDIZED

ndo[ndo<sup>33</sup>]

Word for “drinking”: It represents a human using a bowl to get water from river (A, 2001).

nga[ŋA<sup>33</sup>]

Word for “me”: a human uses a finger to point at himself – or herself (A, 2001).

sse[zu<sup>33</sup>]

Word for “child”: a woman has a kid on her back (A, 2001).

chop[t ‘so<sup>21</sup>’]

Word for “follow”: one figure walks in front, and another one follows right behind (A, 2001).

Why did I choose the Yi script?

I was born and raised in Yunan province, China, which is one of the Yi settlement areas. Since my younger age, I have had the chance to celebrate Yi’s Torch Festival with local Yi people.



<https://m.k366.com/rili/36764.html> (Torch Festival)

Religion: Bimoism (Shaman)

“Bi” means “to recite or chant a scripture or to perform ritual”, “mo” means “a person with knowledge or accomplishment” (Ayi, 2001). In Yi society, Bimo (shaman-priests) fulfill people’s need for spiritual, physical, and social well-being. They perform in the way of rituals for good fortune, health matters, daily life, and funeral rites (Kafaef, 2001)



Bimo Priest  
[http://lsfvls666.com/html/nroiect\\_list/node\\_02/201401](http://lsfvls666.com/html/nroiect_list/node_02/201401)