

Chaungtha



Population:

147,300 (2000)
165,600 (2010)
186,100 (2020)

Countries: Myanmar

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 200

Overview of the Chaungtha

Other Names:

Population Sources:

121,700 in Myanmar (2001, B Grimes [1983 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Lolo-Burmese, Burmish, Southern

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 97%

Practising Buddhists: 75%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: CCQ

Approximately 150,000 Chaungtha people inhabit central parts of Myanmar in Southeast Asia. The *Ethnologue* gives a 1983 estimate of 121,700 Chaungtha,¹ while Myanmar Faces and Places extrapolated that figure to give a 2002 population of 153,961 Chaungtha people.²

The most recent census held in Myanmar was in 1931, while the country was under British colonial rule. At the time the Chaungtha returned a total of 49,057 people, evenly divided between 24,549 males and 24,508 females.³

The name *Chaungtha* means ‘people of the valley’ or ‘people of the stream’. There is a coastal resort town in Myanmar that is also called Chaungtha, but the names are purely coincidental. The Chaungtha are historically and ethnolinguistically related to the Burmese. Because of this, in recent decades their identity has been eroded as an increasing number of Chaungtha choose to identify themselves as Burmese, hoping to benefit from

being aligned with the majority ruling people in Myanmar. Because of this transition, it is difficult these days to identify and research the Chaungtha. Today, people in the southern part of the Mandalay Division still identify themselves as Chaungtha.

The principal occupation of the Chaungtha is rice cultivation. ‘Some plant rice on mountain terraces, which is the ideal; while others practice “shifting cultivation,” moving from one plot to another. Some of the other important crops grown include maize, cotton, tobacco and opium poppies. The amount of tobacco supplied cannot meet the demands made by the many smokers in the region.’⁴

The central areas of Myanmar are among the most staunchly Buddhist in the nation. Whereas, generally speaking, the mountainous perimeter of Myanmar is occupied by tribal groups who practice animism or Christianity, the heart of the nation where the Chaungtha live is overwhelmingly Buddhist.

One profile of the Chaungtha states, ‘Buddhism was introduced into Myanmar in the fifth century; and today, most of the Chaungtha are Buddhist. However, they have also maintained their traditional

ethnic belief in evil spirits, or *nats*. They believe that these spirits can do almost anything in nature, such as preventing floods and other natural disasters. Unfortunately, the Chaungtha have no Bible or even portion of the Bible in their language, and no missions agencies are working among them. A greater effort must be made to reach them with the Good News.’⁵

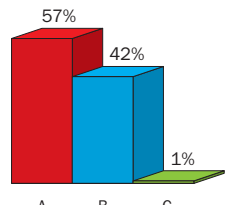


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The reason why the Bible has not yet been translated into Chaungtha is probably because they use the Burmese script—so researchers decided that a separate translation is not warranted. Mission agencies may also have decided that the Chaungtha spoken language is close enough to Burmese not to warrant separate audio and video productions for them. In the future, it is possible that the Chaungtha may cease to exist as a distinct ethnicity, as they are already well on the path to being assimilated by the Burmese.

There are believed to be just a few hundred Chaungtha Christians in Myanmar.

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity