

Danau



Population:

102,500 (2000)
115,200 (2010)
129,500 (2020)

Countries: Myanmar
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 500

Overview of the Danau

Other Names: Danu, Danaw

Population Sources: 100,000 in Myanmar (1998, R Diran)

Language: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Palaungic, Eastern Palaungic, Danau

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 95%

Practising Buddhists: 60%

Christians: 0.5%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: DNU

According to author and researcher Richard Diran, '100,000 or more' Danau people live in central areas of Shan State and the northern part of Kayah State in Myanmar.¹ One of the main centres for the Danau seems to be the town of Pindaya, located about 50 kilometres (32 mi.) north of Kalaw and Taunggyi. The *Ethnologue*, on the other hand, gives a figure of just 10,000 Danau in Myanmar,² which has in turn been used by Christian organizations.³

This lower figure is incorrect. The Danau cover a large geographical area. Furthermore, the most recent census taken in Myanmar / Burma—the 1931 census conducted by the British—listed 77,941 Danau people.⁴ The name Danau is derived from *donake*, meaning 'brave archers'. One account says: 'In the 16th century the Danau were King Alaung-

paya's archers and on returning from wars in Thailand settled in the Pindaya area.'⁵

Pindaya is home to the famous Pindaya limestone caves, overlooking the picturesque Boutaloke Lake. 'Inside the cavern there are more than 8,000 Buddha images—made from alabaster, teak, marble, brick, lacquer and cement—which have been put there over the centuries and arranged in such a way as to form a labyrinth throughout the various cave chambers.'⁶

The Danau speak their own language, which is part of the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic family. It is related to the Palaung Pale and Riang languages spoken in the same area.

An estimated 95 per cent of Danau people adhere to Theravada Buddhism, mixed

with spirit worship and occult practices. Mission Outreach, a New Zealand-based Christian organization, has mentioned the Danau people in one of their newsletters. They asked, 'Who are the Danau? . . . They are fishermen and cotton growers. They embrace Buddhism and practice witchcraft and black magic. Geographical restrictions coupled with Myanmar's military rule make access to this group quite difficult.'⁷

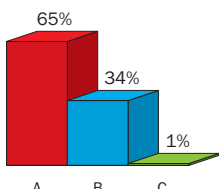
Only about 500 Danau people are believers in Jesus Christ, although some encouraging growth has taken place in recent years. Mission Outreach explained how a 23-year-old Lahu pastor named Ahbarel 'longed to reach the 50 or more Danau families in a neighbouring village. He felt that pastoring a Lahu church and reaching the Danau at the same time was much too



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difficult.'⁸ After attending a training course in March 1998, Ahbarel excitedly reported, 'The Lord brought us to the Nong Cho area where some Danau live. Now, we have established a Danau church there with 10 members.'⁹ In one of his visits to another area in the Shan State, Ahbarel led a Danau man to the Lord. His name was Soe Aung. 'I enjoyed doing many worldly things,' Soe Aung confessed. 'I habitually drank alcohol and chewed betel nut. When I heard about Jesus, I realized how dirty and sinful I was. I was so happy when I learned that there was someone who can forgive my sins and make me clean. His name is Jesus. That day I received Jesus as my Savior. Today I have the assurance that God will not leave me even when I face difficulties. Before God and man, I declare that I have given my life to Jesus.'¹⁰

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