

# Palaung, Shwe



## Population:

187,000 (2000)  
209,900 (2010)  
235,800 (2020)

**Countries:** Myanmar, China

**Buddhism:** Theravada

**Christians:** 500

## Overview of the Shwe Palaung

**Other Names:** De'ang Shwe, Golden Palaung, Shwe, Ta-ang, Samlon Ta-ang

**Population Sources:** 148,000 in Myanmar (2000, B Grimes [1982 figure])

5,970 in China (2000, P Hattaway)

**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Palaungic-Khmuic, Palaungic, Eastern Palaungic, Palaung

**Dialects:** 15

**Professing Buddhists:** 96%

**Practising Buddhists:** 65%

**Christians:** 0.2%

**Scripture:** none

**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Palaung

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** SWE

Approximately 200,000 Shwe Palaung people inhabit areas of northern Shan State in northern Myanmar (formerly Burma). The main geographical centre of the Shwe Palaung in Myanmar is the town of Namshan, home to about 15,000 people.<sup>1</sup> An additional 6,000 Shwe Palaung live in Zhenkang and Baoshan counties in the western part of China's Yunnan Province, where they are part of the officially recognized De'ang minority. The Shwe Palaung are also known as the 'Golden Palaung' due to the style of the women's dress.

Many Palaung people believe that they were once brothers with the Karen, even though today the Palaung speak a Mon-Khmer language and the Karen speak a completely unrelated Tibeto-Burman language. The Palaung tell a story about how the two brothers were separated: 'The two tribes went out hunting with the intent

of sharing their food with each other. The Karen caught an elephant, and a huge feast was held for all to enjoy as much meat as they could eat. The Palaung, however, could only manage to catch a porcupine. They skinned it and cooked the small amount of meat for the Karen to eat. The Karen didn't mind, as they thought the Palaung had only been able to catch a small animal. But when they finished their meal, they saw the large pile of needles and claimed the Palaung had only given them a small portion of their meat. The two groups have been separated ever since that time, but even

today many Palaung long to be reconciled with their Karen brothers. Some Palaung homes in Myanmar have an opening on one side, signifying that the Karen are welcome to return to live with them.<sup>2</sup>

Although almost all Palaung in Myanmar are Buddhists, they are influenced by two schools of Buddhism—the Shan form and the Burmese form. Although each belongs to the Theravada sect, there are subtle differences in practice and style. Before Buddhism entered the region hundreds of years ago, the Palaung were spirit-worshippers and every village had its own shaman, or spirit-priest. Little has changed today, except that now the leading Buddhist monk usually adopts that role in the life of the community. 'Illness is attributed to the actions of evil spirits and the services of a diviner / medical practitioner serve to identify and counteract the proper spirit. . . Ordinary people make a variety of offerings to placate them.'<sup>3</sup>

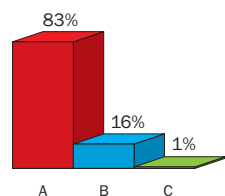
Although only a very small number of Palaung are Christians, one

missionary report of a trip to Myanmar in 2003 gave encouraging signs that God is quietly working among Palaung people. The report said, 'We found individuals and pockets of Palaung who were believers in several areas. Some live in conditions as described in Hebrews 11:38. Some of their children have died from malaria, which is rampant near rivers and brooks. They hardly have enough to survive. . . Their faces lit up when we came and they were very glad to have people come to help share the Good News with their friends, who are still in fear of hell and demonic forces, which they believe live inside trees and rocks.'<sup>4</sup>



Myanmar Faces and Places

## 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