



Nat Coffee

**Location:** Approximately 180,000 Asho people are scattered over a widespread area of the Ayeyarwady Delta in south-central Myanmar. The greatest concentrations are found in the Ayeyarwady, Magway, and Bago Regions, while a southern dialect group lives in the Thandwe District of Rakhine State, where they were resettled in the wake of the Burmese invasion of Rakhine in 1785.<sup>1</sup> Almost 5,000 Asho also live across the border in the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup>

**Identity:** The Asho are recognized as a divergent Chin group in several ways. They have unique customs, and whereas the Chin are known as a mountain-dwelling people, the Asho are mostly plain-dwellers. When the British first took over Rakhine in 1825 they named this tribe "Khyang," but their self-name is Asho. It is telling that, because of their proximity to the Burmese and Rakhine, most Asho people are Buddhists, whereas almost all of the other 60 Chin tribes in Myanmar

have converted to Christianity.

**Language:** Two distinct dialects exist among the Asho in Myanmar, with the Hill Asho dialect centered on Mindo Township in the Magway Region, while further south in Rakhine State the Plains Asho dialect is spoken. Although Asho is still used extensively by the people, all are bilingual in Burmese, with some excelling to the extent that they now hold important positions in the Myanmar government.

**History:** The Asho claim their forefathers first settled in the area west of the confluence of the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin Rivers. Asho tradition says: "They moved east across the Ayeyarwady during the time of the Pagan Kingdom (849-1297) and mixed freely with the Burmese.... They lived side by side with the Khami for about two centuries before separating into two groups, one moving south."<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** Although the Asho submitted to the Burmese authorities and paid tax to them,

their assimilation was not complete as a result of some of their customs. "Sacrifices of fowl, pigs, and buffalo were offensive to their neighbors, and keeping pigs, which roamed freely in their villages, was despised by the Burmese."<sup>4</sup> The Asho have many customs involving courtship and marriage. "All the marriageable girls have their own rooms where young men come courting at night. If a girl gets pregnant, the parents allow them to marry. If the girl's family agrees, they may demand five or six pigs or a couple of cows as a dowry."<sup>5</sup>

**Religion:** Although most Asho living on the plains have converted to Theravada Buddhism, those living in mountainous areas have retained more of their animistic rituals. Today approximately 60 percent of Asho are Buddhists, 15 percent are Christians, and the rest continue in the beliefs of their ancestors by worshipping a myriad of spirits.

**Christianity:** The first known conversion of a Chin person occurred in 1834, when an Asho woman was baptized. In 1856, ten more Asho people were baptized at Pyay in Bago Region.<sup>6</sup> The renowned American Baptist missionaries Arthur and Laura Carson arrived in Thayet (in today's Magway Region) in 1886 "to begin their mission among the Asho, baptizing 13 converts before moving on to the Chin Hills."<sup>7</sup> Missionaries later translated the Gospel of Mark into Asho in 1921 using the Roman script, and the New Testament was published in 1954 in the Burmese script.<sup>8</sup> The full Bible was completed more than half a century later in 2008. Because of their deeply entrenched Buddhist beliefs, the Gospel has never taken hold among the Asho as it did among dozens of animist Chin tribes in Chin State. According to one source, the Asho were an untouched group until native evangelists visited them in 1987: "The tribe was isolated from others and accessible only by dugout canoes, since there was not even a footpath or road to their villages. During the time the missionaries taught, 76 people invited Jesus into their lives."<sup>9</sup>



Population in Myanmar:  
180,000 (2024)

Location:  
Ayeyarwady Region,  
Magway Region,  
Rakhine State, Bago Region

Language Family:  
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:  
Buddhism (60.0%)

Christians:  
27,000 (15.0%)

## OVERVIEW

Population:  
180,000 in Myanmar  
(2024 Asia Harvest)  
170,000 (2015 LSDO)  
9,029 (1931 census)

Other Countries:  
4,826 in Bangladesh

Other Names: Asho Chin, Ashu, Chin Asho, Hyow, Khamaw, Khamoe, Khyang, Kyang, Plains Chin, Qin, Saingbaung, Sho, Shoa, Southern Chin

Location:  
Ayeyarwady Region: Hinthada and Pathein districts;  
Magway Region: Mindon Township in Thayet District;  
Rakhine State: Taungup Township in Thandwe District;  
Bago Region: Pyay District

Language: Chin, Asho [csh]

Dialects: 2

Scripture:  
Bible 2008  
New Testament 1954  
Portions 1921

Jesus film: Chin, Asho

Global Recordings:  
Chin Asho #401

People ID: 10454

