



Nat Coffee

Location: Approximately 180,000 Aso 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 1785.¹ Almost 5,000 Aso also live across the border in the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh.²

Identity: The Aso 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 Aso are mostly plain-dwellers. When the British first took over Rakhine in 1825 they named this tribe “Khyang,” but their self-name is Aso. It is telling that, because of their proximity to the Burmese and Rakhine, most Aso 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 Aso in Myanmar, with the Hill Aso dialect centered on Mindo Township in the Magway Region, while further south in Rakhine State the Plains Aso dialect is spoken. Although Aso 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.

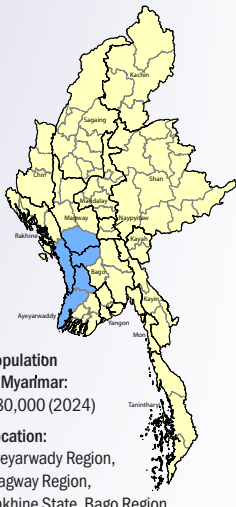
History: The Aso claim their forefathers first settled in the area west of the confluence of the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin Rivers. Aso tradition says: “They moved east across the Ayeyarwady during the time of the Pagan Kingdom (849-1297) and mixed freely with the Burmese.... They lived side by side with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

Customs: Although the Aso 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.”⁴ The Aso 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.”⁵

Religion: Although most Aso 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 Aso 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 Aso woman was baptized. In 1856, ten more Aso people were baptized at Payay in Bago Region.⁶ 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 Aso, baptizing 13 converts before moving on to the Chin Hills.”⁷ Missionaries later translated the Gospel of Mark into Aso in 1921 using the Roman script, and the New Testament was published in 1954 in the Burmese script.⁸ 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 Aso as it did among dozens of animist Chin tribes in Chin State. According to one source, the Aso 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.”⁹



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: Aso Chin, Ashu, Chin Aso, Hyow, Khamaw, Khamoe, Khyang, Kyang, Plains Chin, Qin, Saingbaung, Sho, Shoa, Southern Chin
Location: Ayeyarwady Region: Hinthada and Patheingyi districts; Magway Region: Mindon Township in Thayet District; Rakhine State: Taungup Township in Thandwe District; Bago Region: Pyaw District
Language: Chin, Aso [chsh]
Dialects: 2
Scripture: Bible 2008 New Testament 1954 Portions 1921
Jesus film: Chin, Aso
Global Recordings: Chin Aso #401
People ID: 10454

