



Jane Sweeney

**Location:** Numbering about 2,000 people, the Cyamkok are one of a few dozen distinct and previously undocumented tribes located in and around Pangsa in Lahe Township.<sup>1</sup> This mountainous area in the Sagaing Region is located near the border between Myanmar and India and is off-limits to foreign travelers. According to the only researchers known to have visited this remote area, the main villages inhabited by Cyamkok people are Phapong (44 households) and Khamkeik (20 homes) in Pangsa Town, with an additional 20 households in Namlip village of Nanyun Township. Further east in Kachin State, a small number of about 20 Cyamkok families live in Khalon village near the town of Shinbwiyan.

**Identity:** The Tangshang, who are known as the Tangsa in India, are a collection of dozens of small tribes, each speaking its own language or dialect. Remarkably, despite their relatively small overall population, 49 different Tangshang tribes have been identified and profiled in *Operation Myanmar*. Most of these tribes, including the Cyamkok, have never appeared in people

group lists before. This group's name, Cyamkok, has also been spelled Chamkok or Thamkok in English.<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** In 2012, a team of linguists surveyed 830 Cyamkok people. They found that the Cyamkok vernacular is related to several other Tangshang varieties, which were placed in a group of dialects called Ole.<sup>3</sup> Despite efforts to group together related Tangshang dialects according to their linguistic affinities, the diversity among the dozens of Tangshang varieties in Myanmar has prompted a senior linguist to say that between 12 and 15 different Bible translations would be necessary to meet the literary needs of the many Christians within this myriad of tribes.<sup>4</sup>

**History:** Although the Tangshang are broadly related to the dozens of Naga tribes that fill the rugged mountains of northeast India and adjacent areas of Myanmar, in 2003 the Tangshang leaders came together and created their new tribal name, as they were keen to distance themselves from the Nagas for political and social reasons. Naga history dates back many centuries, with the Roman scholar Claudius

Ptolemy mentioning the name "Nagagalo" in his book *Geographia* in 150 AD. The word meant "the realm of the naked" and covers the area where the Naga and related peoples now live.

**Customs:** Headhunting was practiced among almost all the Naga and Tangshang tribes for countless generations, contributing to the small size of their populations today. Although the last reported case of communal headhunting took place in Myanmar in 1983, across the Indian border it continued into the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Although the inter-tribal killings were sometimes motivated by revenge in response to a perceived wrong such as the stealing of livestock, on most occasions the ghoulish massacres were conducted to appease the demonic spirits, which people believed would secure blessings and a bountiful harvest for their communities.

**Religion:** Although today most Tangshang people are at least nominally Christian, their traditional animistic beliefs are still evident in festivals, which may include the sacrifices of chickens, pigs, or buffaloes. The Cyamkok in Kachin State have been influenced more by Theravada Buddhism than those in Sagaing. Converting to Buddhism often obtains for communities certain benefits from the Myanmar government, such as the construction of a school or road to their village.

**Christianity:** Courageous missionaries from the Kachin Jingpo tribe boldly ventured into Tangshang head-hunting territory in 1954, risking their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Lisu believers followed in the 1960s, and today nine out of every ten Cyamkok people profess to be Christians. They are mostly affiliated with Baptist, Catholic, and Church of Christ fellowships. Tellingly, just one or two of the 49 Tangshang tribes or dialect groups in Myanmar have any Scripture or other Christian resources available in their own language, which has adversely affected their spiritual growth and maturity.



Population  
in Myanmar:  
2,400 (2024)

Location:  
Sagaing Region,  
Kachin State

Language Family:  
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:  
Christianity (90.0%)

Christians:  
2,160 (90.0%)

## OVERVIEW

Population:  
2,400 in Myanmar  
(2024 Asia Harvest)

Other Countries:

Other Names:  
Chamkok, Cyamkok Tangshang,  
Tamko, Thamkok

Location:  
Sagaing Region: Nanyun and  
Lahe townships in the Naga  
Self-Administered Zone;  
Kachin State: Yanai Township in  
Myitkyina District

Language:  
Naga Tangsa, Cyamkok  
[unclassified]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:  
None

Jesus film:  
None

Global Recordings:  
None

People ID: 22501

