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**Location:** Approximately 800 Gaqyi people live in northwest Myanmar, with similar numbers distributed in Sagaing Region and neighboring Kachin State. In Sagaing they inhabit the villages of Nalon and Phayon in Nanyun Township, with ten or more households of Gaqyi people in each village. Although that may not sound like many, Tangshang households are often large, with a dozen or more family members living under the same roof. In Kachin State, at least 20 Gaqyi households are found in the village of Khalon near Shinbwiyan in Myitkyina District. Additional Gaqyi families dwell in mixed communities with people from other Tangshang tribes.

**Identity:** This profile is the first attempt to document the existence of the Gaqyi people, who have remained concealed from the world until now. Although language is often put forward as the main determining factor for identifying people groups in Myanmar, it is not always enough to determine whether a people qualify as a distinct group or not. Commenting on difficulties he encountered while conducting the 1931 census, British official J. H. Green wrote: "Some of the races or tribes in Burma change their

language almost as often as they change their clothes. Languages are changed by conquest, by absorption, by isolation, and by the general tendency to adopt the language of a neighbor who is considered to belong to a more powerful, more numerous, or more advanced tribe or race.... Communities are becoming more mixed, and the threads are increasingly difficult to untangle."<sup>1</sup>

**Language:** In 2012, a team of linguists traveled to the Gaqyi area to study and document the various Tangshang languages and dialects spoken there.<sup>2</sup> After interviewing 290 Gaqyi people and compiling word lists from various Tangshang varieties, Gaqyi was placed in a group of 13 Tangshang dialects that appear to be related. Other varieties in the group include Lungkhi, Gaqchan, Khalak, Lakki, Ringkhu, Shangti, Kochung, Henching, and Rasa, each of which has been profiled separately in *Operation Myanmar*. Although the customs, sense of identity, and dialect of each group differ, linguists hope their findings will one day help these tribes establish a common orthography which, with some tweaking, would allow the creation of a Bible translation that can be used by multiple groups.

**History:** Because they do not possess a written script, the history of tribes like the Gaqyi is uncertain. Their oral traditions suggest their ancestors originated in Tibet before migrating south to today's Yunnan Province and ultimately into Myanmar, where the Tangshang settled in the mountains straddling both sides of today's Myanmar-India border. Headhunting was practiced for many generations, with raids on other villages and tribes resulting in thousands of deaths. The atmosphere of violence kept the Tangshang populations low and isolated the tribes from each other. Many villages, in a bid to protect themselves, built impenetrable fortresses on mountain ridges so approaching enemies could be seen.

**Customs:** One common custom among many Tangshang and Naga men in this part of Asia is the use of red hats, which are adorned with massive wild boar tusks on the sides, and black bear fur protruding from the top. A man's appearance is crafted to display his prowess as a hunter, which earns the respect of his community and makes him a more attractive prospective partner to young women.

**Religion:** Animism was the key belief system among the Tangshang people for centuries, with the need to placate spirits with offerings and sacrifices at the heart of numerous tribal activities, including headhunting. The Gaqyi living in Kachin State have been influenced by the Buddhist beliefs of other people groups, and some have converted to that religion.

**Christianity:** In the past 60 years, the Gospel swept through the Gaqyi area due to the efforts of Naga and other tribal preachers. A large majority of Gaqyi people today profess to be Christians, although without any part of the Bible translated into a language they understand, Gaqyi believers must rely on infrequent visits by Bible teachers to remind them of the core tenets of the Christian faith.



Population in Myanmar: 800 (2024)

Location: Sagaing Region, Kachin State

Language Family: Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion: Christianity (85.0%)

Christians: 680 (85.0%)

## OVERVIEW

Population: 800 in Myanmar (2024 Asia Harvest)

Other Countries:

Other Names: Gaqyi Tangshang

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

Language: Naga Tangsa, Gaqyi [unclassified]

Dialects: 0

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings: None

People ID: 22512

