

Jon Arnold



Location: With a population of just 200 people, the Henching are one of the smallest ethnic groups in Myanmar. They dwell in villages scattered throughout the Pangsau Sub-township in western Myanmar's Sagaing Region. Takhet and Tarung are two of the villages where pockets of Henching people live alongside other Tangshang tribes. The Stilwell Road, built to help the allies repel Japanese advances in World War Two, cuts through the Pangsau area, although much of it is now overgrown with weeds.

Identity: In today's modern world, many people think it is implausible that entire tribes and geographic regions may not yet have been brought into public knowledge. The Henching, along with a cluster of other Tangshang tribes in Pangsau, have remained hidden until now. This has largely occurred because governments have refused to classify them. During the colonial era, the British simply labeled all Tangshang tribes as "Nagas" and had no desire to consider their differences, nor did they care to learn about their distinct languages and dialects.

Language: For such a tiny group, the Henching language has received a surprising amount of study. When researchers visited them in 2012, they distributed questionnaires to Henching speakers. After carefully analyzing

wordlists, they concluded that the Henching vernacular is related to nine other Tangshang varieties: Gaqchan, Gaqyi, Khalak, Kochung, Lakki, Lungkhi, Rasa, Ringkhu, and Shangti. Each of these dialects is spoken by a different people group with its own customs and sense of identity, each of which has been profiled separately in *Operation Myanmar*. The researchers also estimated that Henching shares a lexical similarity of between 70-78 percent with those other varieties,¹ which represents the degree of overlap between the vocabulary of two languages. Usually, a lexical similarity of 85 percent or more is required for linguists to call one variety a dialect of another language. English and German share a 60 percent similarity, for example, while English and French are only 27 percent similar.

History: Inter-tribal conflict plagued the Tangshang for generations, contributing to the splintering of groups into numerous smaller entities and dialects. Some tribes that were documented a century ago, such as the Aaktung, can no longer be found. This tribe had moved away from the area after a fishing dispute that led to bloodshed, and after relocating to the Khamti area, the people presumably were assimilated by the dominant ethnic groups there.

Customs: These days, people from various Tangshang tribes freely

intermarry, especially with partners from similar dialect groups. This has led to most villages being mixed with people from a few to as many as a dozen different tribes. Only a handful of the Tangshang groups have remained homogenous by insisting their young men and women marry within the community.

Religion: Although the Henching are one of many Tangshang tribes in the area to have converted to Christianity, vestiges of their pre-conversion belief in Animism remain and can be seen in some of the rituals performed at festivals. Although pressure has occasionally been placed on them to convert to Buddhism by the Burmese, very few Tangshang in the Pangsau area have done so.

Christianity: It is believed that all Henching people are Christians today. Living in such a tiny community makes it difficult for anyone not to adhere to the faith of the rest of its members. The Baptists dominate the church scene in Lahe Township, with some influence from Catholics and other denominations. As there are no Tangshang Scriptures in a language they can read, the Henching believers use Burmese Bibles in their services. This is helpful for younger Christians who have had greater exposure to Burmese, but elderly believers often struggle to understand the national language.



Population
in Myanmar:
200 (2024)

Location:
Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (100.0%)

Christians:
200 (100.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
200 in Myanmar (2024)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Henchin, HenchingTangshang, Sanching, Shangchaing, Shangchein, Shangcheing, Shangching

Location:
Sagaing Region: Lahe Township in the Naga Self-Administered Zone

Language:
Naga Tangsa, Henching [unclassified]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
None

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
None

People ID: 22521

