



Matt Hahnwald

Location: With a population of 1,850 people, the small Kaang tribe of southwest Myanmar inhabits five villages (Kyuk Ywar Thit, Kyuk Ywar Haung, Hla Twi, Yoe Hpaung, and Ah Htet Sar Du) in a mountainous part of Mindat Township. Their territory is bordered by four other Chin groups: the Rawngtu and Matu to the north; Cho to the east; and the Daai to the south and west. All the Kaang villages are located west of the Mon Chaung stream. A 2008 survey found the Kaang population at the time was 1,438.¹

Identity: The Kaang, who are also known as Makaang or M'kaan, have remained largely hidden from view throughout their history, so that even many people in Chin State are unaware of their existence. They were officially counted during the British colonial era, however, with the 1931 census returning 3,141 “Mgan” people. All were animists with no Christians among them.

Language: The Kaang speak their own distinct language, which is considered part of the Cho-Asho branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. It is thought that all Kaang people speak their own language at home and in their villages, but only some have learned to read their language, which was first reduced to writing a few decades ago.

History: For generations, Kaang girls had their entire faces tattooed, including their foreheads and chins.

Most scholars believe the practice was to help pretty girls become “ugly,” thus avoiding the risk of being kidnapped by men from other tribes. Yaw Shen (pictured) received her tattoos at the age of 15 and remembers that her face was swollen for a week, but her mother assured her that one day her tattoos would help her find a good husband.² The Burmese government outlawed the custom in the 1960s and 1970s, although face tattooing is still practiced in remote parts of Chin State.

Customs: Yaw Shen is also one of the last remaining Kaang people who is able to play their tribe’s traditional nose flute. This resulted in her becoming the most photographed Kaang person, as visitors flocked to her village to capture her unique appearance and skills. One commented: “Kaang women can be recognized by their dotted tattoo pattern with lines breaking it, typically across the forehead, nose, and cheeks. They are also recognizable for their huge earrings. In the past, a Kaang woman of beauty was one who had the perfect tattoo, many necklaces, and the biggest earrings.”³

Religion: Animism prevailed among the Kaang until they embraced Christianity in the 1950s and 1960s, decades after most other Chin tribes had converted. At the time of the 1931 census, not a single Kaang

person reported being a Christian. Today approximately 90 percent profess faith in Jesus Christ, with the remainder continuing to hold on to their spirit-worshipping traditions and superstitions. One source says: “Although many Kaang have embraced Christianity in the larger towns, traditionally, they are an animist people and these practices are still valued by the elders.”⁴

Christianity: Mindat was untouched by the Gospel until the early 1950s, when a Christian named Zet Kio from the Lai Chin area in the north walked 225 miles (365 km) to the Kaang area to boldly share Christ.⁵ He initially encountered strong resistance, including curses and death threats, but the first Kaang Christian, U Nuen Lawng, was converted in 1953. A short time later, “four families professed faith in Christ and eagerly followed Zet Kio to a nearby stream, where each man and his wife walked down into the waters and were baptized.”⁶ Today, at least five denominations have churches among the Kaang. Although the Kaang believers eagerly desired to have the Bible in their language, it was delayed for years because of a disagreement among church leaders about how to write their language. The New Testament was finally completed in 2014, providing a boost to their faith.



Population
in Myanmar:
1,850 (2024)

Location:
Chin State

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (90.0%)

Christians:
1,665 (90.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
1,850 in Myanmar
(2024 Asia Harvest)
1,438 (2018 SIL)
3,141 (1931 census)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Kaang Chin, Kang, Makaang,
Mgan, Mkan, M'kaan

Location:
Chin State: Mindat Township
in Mindat District

Language:
Chin, Kaang [ckn]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
New Testament 2014
Portions 2006

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
None

People ID: 20557

