



**Population in Myanmar:** 2,400 (2024)

**Location:** Sagaing Region

**Language Family:** Tibeto-Burman

**Main Religion:** Christianity (90.0%)

**Christians:** 2,160 (90.0%)



Jon Arnold

**Location:** Boasting an estimated population of 2,400 people, the Kaishan are one of many Tangshang groups located in and around the town of Pangsau in Lahe Township. Lahe is within the Naga Self-Administered Zone in western Myanmar's Sagaing Region. Although Kaishan people are scattered throughout the area, their main village appears to be Lunglong, which contains over 70 households of Kaishan families, while Takon (25 households) and Khamkeik (18) are two other communities where they reside.

**Identity:** Although the dozens of Tangshang tribes in Myanmar identify themselves by their various tribal names, one source says: "They consider themselves and are considered by others as being part of the broader Naga group. Naga is a term generally used to refer to an ethnically and culturally related group of people who live along the India-Myanmar border. Identification of which groups are Naga in Myanmar is quite clear-cut and has become even more salient with the creation of a Naga Autonomous Zone. The situation is less clear in India, where the Tangshang live outside

of the state called Nagaland. Within Tangshang, a large number of subgroups have joined together under the Tangshang name and more are still joining."<sup>1</sup>

**Language:** A linguistic research team traveled to Lahe to study the Kaishan language in an area containing 850 Kaishan people. After examining their findings, they were unable to link Kaishan with any other Tangshang language or dialect in Myanmar. What their research did reveal is that Kaishan shares only a 48 percent lexical similarity with Shecyu, which is considered a premier dialect for Scripture translation. As Kaishan differs so greatly from Shecyu and other Tangshang varieties, the Kaishan people will require their own Bible translation, but this is highly unlikely to occur as translation ministries today generally focus their workers and resources on larger languages, while ignoring the claims of smaller groups like the Kaishan.<sup>2</sup>

**History:** Although they tend to avoid the topic today, until the 1970s headhunting played a key role in Naga and Tangshang societies on both sides of the Myanmar-India border. This

account by a Baptist missionary in 1951 is told from the perspective of a young boy as men returned from a raid: "He could hear clearly the wild shouting coming up the mountainside. Theirs was not the dirge of death, but the shout of victory. Heads had been taken. The whole village sprang to life. The young men and the girls began to pour out of the village and down the path.... Wildly the victorious party shrieked and danced, their swords and spears flashing against the light of the moon. It was his father who led the procession. From his belt hung three heads. Others had two, some had one, and some had none. In all, 23 heads had been taken. The remainder of the night was given over to properly preparing the heads and to feasting and dancing."<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** Because they are an agricultural group, all Kaishan people who are physically able are required to work in the fields, as a poor harvest threatens the very existence of their community. In 2017, a video showing Kaishan men and women hard at work in the fields was uploaded to the internet, providing a rare glimpse into this hidden tribe.<sup>4</sup>

**Religion:** Today almost all Kaishan people identify as Christians, and their past slavery to the spirit world has been replaced by faith in Jesus Christ. Headhunting itself was a practice rooted in spirit-appeasement, with the man who took a head believed to inherit the mana, or supernatural power, of the victim. Taking heads was also believed to bring prosperity to the village, with "bumper crops, many children, and good hunting and fishing all ascribed to this practice."<sup>5</sup> Today, Kaishan warriors remember those days in traditional dances.<sup>6</sup>

**Christianity:** Many Kaishan people now have a vibrant, personal faith in Christ. They love to worship God and are renowned for their beautiful singing.<sup>7</sup> As with all other Tangshang tribes in Myanmar, no Scripture exists in a language they can easily understand.

## OVERVIEW

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

**Other Countries:**

**Other Names:** Kaishan Tangshang

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

**Language:** Naga Tangsa, Kaishan [unclassified]

**Dialects:** 0

**Scripture:** None

**Jesus film:** None

**Global Recordings:** None

**People ID:** 22525

