



Population
in Myanmar:
5,000 (2024)

Location:
Chin State

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (96.0%)

Christians:
4,800 (96.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
5,000 in Myanmar
(2024 Asia Harvest)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Khawngtu Chin,
Khongtu, Kongtu

Location:
Chin State: Paletwa Township
in Paletwa District

Language:
Chin, Khongtu [unclassified]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
New Testament 2005

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
None

People ID: 22528



Location: With a population of approximately 5,000 people, the Khawngtu tribe inhabits ten villages in western Myanmar's Chin State. All their villages (which from north to south are: Tein Kin Kone, Kin Kan Kone, Laung Yaw Kone, Baung Kone, Pa Ton Kone, Shwe Pyi Kone, Ah Ngin Kone, Pein Kone, War Laung Kone, and War Daing Kone), are situated in Sami sub-township, which is part of Paletwa Township in the district of the same name. The Khawngtu dwell in a small area encircled by seven other Chin tribes: the Mara and Asang Khongso to the north; Likhy and Khongso to the west; Lemi to the south; and the Rengca and Matu to east. A visitor described the terrain in 1907: "The hills are very steep and are separated by steep valleys. You see a village on an opposite hill, which seems to be a few hundred yards off, and have to travel up and down steep hills sometimes eight or ten miles to get to it."¹

Identity: The Khawngtu, who some publications mistakenly call "Khongtu," are a new Chin language group with their own ethnic identity, who until now have never appeared on any secular or Christian lists of the world's people groups. For generations the Khawngtu have viewed themselves as a distinct people, but governments and academics have lumped them

together with other Chin-related tribes for administrative purposes, not wanting to individually acknowledge the myriad of small tribes that inhabit the Chin Hills.

Language: In the past, Khawngtu was merely listed as one of over a dozen different Eastern Khumi dialects, but subsequent research has found that many of those "dialects" are actually distinct languages, including Khawngtu.² Many Chin tribes possess a legend that their lack of literacy was due to an act of deceit by the Burmese, who tricked the naïve Chin and caused them to lose their script.

History: Although some scholars have suggested the first Chin arrived in western Myanmar around AD 750, most agree that later waves of migrants established the Chin presence in the 1300s. For centuries the Chin tribes have been engaged in warfare and struggle, both with invading forces and with each other. It was said: "A slave in the Chin Hills in the late 19th century was worth four head of cattle, a good gun, or twelve pigs. Slaves were current coin in the hills and passed from hand to hand as easily as a banknote in more civilized regions."³

Customs: Paletwa is a mountainous area covered with subtropical forests. Wildlife in the area includes pangolin, tigers,

leopards, bears, and many species of monkeys, while hornbill birds are found in plentiful numbers. Most Khawngtu families are engaged in agriculture, and common crops include corn, coffee, oranges, plums, and potatoes.

Religion: For countless generations the Khawngtu venerated spirits, and great care was exercised not to offend demons that could bring disaster on the community. Key mountains, rivers, and even trees were worshipped as deities. In the 20th century, Christianity swept through Chin State, bringing tens of thousands of people into the kingdom of God, including among the Khawngtu. Today, only a few hundred Khawngtu living in remote villages hold on to the beliefs of their forefathers, although alarmingly, animistic rituals have carried over into some Khawngtu churches.

Christianity: Almost all Khawngtu families today profess faith in Jesus Christ. Frustrated by not having the Scriptures in their own language, Khawngtu church leader Wai Thihe began translating the New Testament from the English King James Bible in 1995. Although he completed his work in 1998, financial difficulties meant it was not published until April 2005, when 300 copies were joyously printed and distributed among the Khawngtu Christians.