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Population in Myanmar: 225,000 (2025)

Location: Shan State

Language Family: Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion: Christianity (80.0%)

Christians: 180,000 (80.0%)

**Location:** The 225,000 Lahu people of northern Myanmar are scattered over a wide area of Shan State near the Chinese border. Most dwell in the three townships of Kengtung District, while others live in Mong Yang and Mong Ya, which were reorganized into their own districts in 2022. Lahu communities are spread over hundreds of miles and across five countries, with 314,000 in China, 36,300 in Thailand, 18,700 in Laos, and 12,000 in northern Vietnam.

**Identity:** Two main Lahu groups in northern Myanmar have traditionally been labeled by the predominant color of their clothing. Lahu Na (Black Lahu) is profiled here, while the Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu), who have a different culture and language, have been listed separately. Several other Lahu subgroups are found in Southeast Asia. Because of the great hunting skills of Lahu men, other tribes have nicknamed the Lahu “Musso,” which means “hunters.”

**Language:** Lahu—which consists of seven tones, 24 consonants, and nine vowels—has been vividly described as “perhaps the most exquisite form of speech ever devised by the mind of man.”<sup>1</sup> It is only partially intelligible with Lahu Shi, although the two groups often inhabit the same areas. For centuries the Lahu were haunted by an ancient belief that the Creator, G’ui Sha, “had given their forefathers his law written on rice cakes. A famine came, and

the people ate the cakes for their survival. They said that G’ui Sha’s law would be inside them...but at the right time, G’ui Sha himself would send a white brother with a book containing the lost laws.”<sup>2</sup>

**History:** The Lahu have a long history of resisting their oppressors. In China they rebelled more than 20 times throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. After a defeat in 1890, an old man said, “The Lahu lost heart and were despised by other groups.”<sup>3</sup> However, more recently a missionary remarked: “From their quiet and peaceful character, they have earned the respect of savage and warlike neighbors, who grant them immunity from predatory raids.”<sup>4</sup> In 1972, after one of their prophets said they would overthrow the Burmese, “thousands of Lahu were massacred and dozens of villages destroyed, in fighting which continued until the 1990s.”<sup>5</sup>

**Customs:** Lahu women are renowned as “great weavers famed for their intricate basketwork, which is much prized by other tribes.”<sup>6</sup> They prefer to give birth in the privacy of their own homes, and “three days later they invite elderly relatives to a small feast where a name is given to the child. If an unexpected visitor comes in the meantime, he or she is given the honor of naming the newborn. When a Lahu dies, three shots are fired into the air to scare away the spirits and to announce the news to the village.”<sup>7</sup>

**Religion:** Although the Lahu lived in fear of and bondage to demons for countless centuries, God prepared their hearts by preserving a belief in the one supreme God. They faithfully passed on their traditions of a global flood and a huge pagoda which stretched into the sky, from where all the world’s languages were confused.<sup>8</sup> When the American Baptist missionary William Young first preached in Kengtung in 1901, the Lahu exclaimed, “We have been waiting for you for centuries.... We even have meeting houses built in some of our villages in readiness of your coming.”<sup>9</sup> Many Lahu men wore strings on their wrists and told Young, “We have worn these since time immemorial. They symbolize our bondage to evil spirits. You alone, as the messenger of G’ui Sha, may cut these manacles from our wrists—but only after you have brought the lost book to our very hearths!”<sup>10</sup>

**Christianity:** As the movement spread, Lahu tribesmen walked for days to hear Young preach, and 6,000 Lahu were baptized in 1905 and 1906.<sup>11</sup> William Young retired in 1932,<sup>12</sup> but his son Harold continued the work, “and by 1950, 28,000 of the 66,000 Lahu in Myanmar had converted.”<sup>13</sup> Today, an estimated 80% of Lahu in Myanmar are professing Christians.<sup>14</sup> Although there are many strong Lahu disciples, in 1999 a missionary described the faith of many Lahu believers as “very superficial.”<sup>15</sup>

OVERVIEW

**Population:** 225,000 in Myanmar (2025 Joshua Project) 200,000 (2012 D. Bradley) 27,184 (1931 census)

**Other Countries:** 314,000 in China 36,300 in Thailand 18,700 in Laos 12,000 in Vietnam

**Other Names:** Black Lahu, Lahoo, Lahu Dam, Lahu Na, Lahuna, Launa, Lohei, Mousseur, Muho, Muser, Museu, Muso, Musoe, Musser Dam, Musso, Mussur, Na

**Location:** Shan State: Kengtung, Mong Khet and Mong Ping townships in Kengtung District; Mong Yang Township in Mong Yang District; Mong La Township in Mong La District

**Language:** Lahu [lhu]

**Dialects:**

**Scripture:** Bible 1989 New Testament 1932 Portions 1924

**Jesus film:** Lahu

**Global Recordings:** Lahu #12682

**People ID:** 12949

