



Being Chikkin

Location: With a population of over 25,000 people in central areas of Myanmar's Chin State, the Laizo reside in more than 20 villages south and west of Falam Township. The region is mountainous, with foothills above the Neyinzaya and Myittha rivers rising to high peaks along the border with the Indian state of Mizoram. Laizo territory is bordered by six other Chin tribes: the Zahau and Sim to the north; Taisun, Lente, and Khualsim to the east; and the large Lai Chin group to the south and west.

Identity: For decades, researchers viewed the Laizo as part of the regional Falam Chin people, although the British listed the Laizo separately in the 1931 census, when they numbered 7,503 people. Many Chin and other tribes in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and northeast India have the term "Zo" in their name (e.g. Mizo, Zokam, Zophei, and Zotung), leading some scholars to suggest that these related tribes should abandon using the Burmese label "Chin" and adopt "Zo" as their ethnic name. This idea has not

been welcomed by some Chin, however, and the last thing the three regional governments want to see is a large collection of armed tribes forming a cohesive identity. A draft constitution for a new "Zo State" was written in 1971, but the Burmese Colonel Sein Lwin immediately rejected the proposal, telling the group that Chin people were "backward, weak, and unimportant, and they should not bother with such matters."¹

Language: There was a time in 1924 when the authorities in Chin State planned to adopt Laizo as the main dialect to be used in all Chin schools throughout the region. The plan was abandoned, however, and ever since, Laizo has at best been considered a mere dialect of Falam Chin. While it's true that Laizo people have few problems communicating with several of the other Chin tribes in the area, they retain a distinct sense of identity, history, and culture.

History: Across the border in India, the tribes known as "Chin" in Myanmar have been labelled "Kuki" by the Indian government,

although this term is despised and has never been used by the groups themselves. The Indians do not want to use the name Chin for political reasons, as it is the name of a state in Myanmar. Historian J. D. Saul claimed that the name Kuki dates to the seventh century, when an influx of tribal people who knew how to make silk arrived from China and were called "Keke" by the established groups.²

Customs: Laizo women love to dress up for festivals and special occasions in their beautiful traditional dresses and distinctive headdresses, which display their tribal identity. A century ago, it was noted: "A point of distinction among these hill tribes is the matter of dress, which presents sundry colors and styles. Blankets, which are worn by all, differ as to being plain, striped, checked, or dyed one color. The wrap skirts of the women may be very short, not reaching the knees, or perhaps trailing on the ground."³

Religion: Like almost all other tribes in the border regions of Myanmar, for countless generations the Laizo were animists, appeasing a host of evil spirits. The Gospel first reached them in the early 20th century, but progress was slow, and by 1931 just 17 Laizo people were Christians and the other 7,486 were animists. Revival swept through dozens of Chin tribes in subsequent decades, however, with entire communities fleeing the bondage of animistic rituals to embrace the freedom offered to them by the living God. Today, almost all Laizo are followers of Jesus Christ.

Christianity: As the Laizo Church matured, many of their brightest young believers were sent to attend Bible schools in other parts of the state and beyond. After graduating, they returned home to serve their people as pastors and church leaders. For decades the Laizo Christians have used the Falam Chin Bible due to the absence of any specific translation in the Laizo dialect, although Christian audio resources do exist in their vernacular.



Population in Myanmar:
25,700 (2024)

Location:
Chin State

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (96.0%)

Christians:
24,650 (96.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
25,700 in Myanmar
(2024 Asia Harvest)
18,600 (1983 SIL)
7,503 (1931 census)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Laizo, Laiza, Laizau, Laizo Chin,
Laizo-Shimhrin

Location:
Chin State: Falam Township
in Falam District

Language:
Chin Falam, Laizo [cfm]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
Bible 1991
New Testament 1951
Portions 1933

Jesus film:
Chin, Falam

Global Recordings:
Chin Falam: Laizo #5136

People ID: 22535

