



I Heart Chin

Location: With a population of 18,000 people, the Lautu tribe inhabit 17 villages in western Myanmar’s Chin State. Their communities lie within the townships of Matupi and Thantlang, which border the Indian state of Mizoram. Thantlang means “cemetery mountain,” as until 1995 the south side of the mountain that overlooks the town contained many old cemeteries. The Burmese military subsequently built a camp on that spot. Lautu territory is bordered by several other Chin tribes with the Mara to the west, Zophei to the north, Senthang north and east, and Zotung to the south.

Identity: The Lautu have been recognized as a distinct ethnic group for a century in Myanmar. The 1931 census returned 9,675 Lautu people, all of whom identified as animists. One book notes: “Lautu is a linguistic area in Hakha District, and the hereditary ruling lineages of Lautu claim to be from a prominent family of rulers. Although there are various dialects in the Hakha area, the Lautu dialect is

akin to Maru.”¹

Language: Unlike dozens of Chin tribes whose languages and dialects remain undetermined or have been grouped together with other languages for convenience, for decades the Lautu have been recognized as speaking their own distinct language. Although there are many differences in vocabulary between Lautu and the vernaculars spoken by neighboring tribes, Lautu reportedly shares an 87 percent lexical similarity with Mara, 82 percent with Zophei, and 80 percent with Senthang.²

History: Since time immemorial, the Chin have been renowned and feared for their fighting ability, and their region has been in almost constant turmoil for generations. In 1901, a British officer reflected on some of the conflict he had observed over the previous few decades: “The Chins were the terror of the Burmans who inhabited the country at the foot of the hills, which was almost depopulated. In 1886, the Chins attacked a village at dawn. By the time the troops could cross the river, the Chins

had killed all the men and carried off the women and children, and the troops were unable to overtake them. Such raids were a constant occurrence.”³

Customs: Chin have generally been viewed as simple and naïve people, while the Burmese were said to take advantage of them through their craftiness, which fanned the flames of hostility between the two ethnicities. A local historian opined: “Burmans are generally polite, friendly and easy going, but as soon as a Burman notices weakness in his partner, he immediately shows his attitude of superiority. Chin people, handicapped by limited knowledge of the Burmese language, culture and religion, are regarded as mentally inferior, and their habit of easily trusting a Burman has been used to exploit them.”⁴

Religion: Although most Lautu are Christians today, they were zealous animists a century ago, diligently ensuring that the protective spirits their ancestors had worshipped for centuries were placated in a bid to keep disaster and famine far from their communities. A visitor to a Chin village in the late 19th century wrote: “The Chins are spirit-worshippers, and all their ceremonies conclude with a fast, at which there is much drinking, and the drinking often terminates in a fight, which is frequently deadly, as all the Chins are armed.”⁵

Christianity: The relatively late entrance of the Gospel to the Lautu area was reflected in the 1931 census, which didn’t return a single Christian among the 9,675 Lautu people at the time. Over the decades the scales tipped strongly in the direction of Christianity, and today more than 15,000 Lautu people profess to be followers of Christ. They belong to a host of different churches, of which the Baptists are the largest. As a confirmation of their linguistic distinctiveness, the New Testament was translated and published into Lautu in 2015, although it’s unclear when the entire Bible might be available.



Population in Myanmar: 18,000 (2024)

Location: Chin State

Language Family: Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion: Christianity (85.0%)

Christians: 15,300 (85.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population: 18,000 in Myanmar (2024 Joshua Project) 15,000 (2005 SIL) 9,675 (1931 census)

Other Countries:

Other Names: Chin Lautu, Lautu Chin, Lawhtu, Laythu, Lutuv

Location: Chin State: Matupi Township in Matupi District; Thantlang Township in Hakha District

Language: Chin, Lautu [clt]

Dialects: 0

Scripture: New Testament 2015

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings: Chin Lautu #5139

People ID: 20559

