



Paletwa Chin Khumi Song

Location: The small Lemi tribe, who number 5,500 people, live in the extreme western part of Myanmar. They inhabit a small mountainous area of Paletwa Township in Chin State, especially in 11 villages north of the small town of Sami, which is situated near the international border with Bangladesh. Some of these villages consist only of Lemi people, while others are mixed with families from several ethnic groups. The territory occupied by the Lemi is surrounded by neighboring tribes, with the Khawngtu to the north, Khongso and Likhy to the west, Kanise to the south, Rengca to the east, and multiple other tribes nearby.

Identity: The Lemi are one of dozens of tribes that have been overlooked and lumped together under the broad banner of “Chin” for administrative purposes by both governments and academics. Historically, the Lemi were thought to be only a dialect group of the Eastern Khumi, but in recent years they have been recognized as a distinct ethno-

linguistic group in their own right.

Language: Although most of the Lemi people can speak Eastern Khumi to some extent, the two languages are distinct, although linguists still refuse to list Lemi separately. Most younger Lemi people can also speak Burmese after having used the national language at school. When leaders of different Eastern Khumi dialects came together to consider developing a common script, their differences soon surfaced. Although “almost all the people expressed considerable interest in having a Bible translation in their own varieties, they did not seem very willing to use another group’s literature.”¹

History: Lemi history mirrors the history of most other Chin tribes in that warfare has never been far from their communities. In 1894, during the British occupation of Chin State, the colonial authorities disarmed the tribes and seized over 10,000 guns. While “this action consolidated British rule over most of the Chin, the British did not however

attempt to change the lifestyle or the living standards of the people, and the country remained peaceful for over a decade.”²

Customs: Although marriage had enjoyed a much higher status since the Lemi people converted to Christianity, in the past a Chin husband “could dissolve his nuptial vows by simply telling his wife that he is divorcing her or sending her back to her father’s house. In doing this, he loses the entire marriage price he has given, except in the case of adultery, when he can demand a refund of the matrimonial fee.... Ordinarily the man, having found it difficult to purchase the one wife he has, would certainly hesitate before divorcing her and losing what he has paid on the marriage contract.”³

Religion: The Lemi were animists with a small number of Buddhists among them before their mass conversion to Christianity, which mostly occurred from the 1960s to the 1990s. Today, around 95 percent of Lemi people are followers of Jesus Christ.

Christianity: Because of their strong desire to have the Bible in their own language, Lemi believers translated the Scriptures, and the Lemi New Testament was published in 2018. Prior to this development, it was reported that “Most currently read the Bible in Burmese and Khumi, but they cannot understand these Bibles well. Scripture use is fairly limited at present. In some areas, the Bible is used as a charm. Conducting Scripture use workshops for pastors and Christian leaders could be a helpful tool to increase the impact of future Scripture production.”⁴ Although the Lemi New Testament was completed and printed by the Myanmar Bible Society, mission websites do not mention its existence due to Lemi still not being considered an official language. Lemi Christians are thankful to have their own Bible, while remaining bemused that it is in a language scholars continue to insist does not exist!



Population in Myanmar: 5,500 (2024)

Location: Chin State

Language Family: Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion: Christianity (95.0%)

Christians: 5,230 (95.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population: 5,500 in Myanmar (2024 Asia Harvest)

Other Countries:

Other Names: Akelong, Aki Along, Kaja, Kajauk, Lemi Chin

Location: Chin State: Paletwa Township in Paletwa District

Language: Chin, Lemi [unclassified]

Dialects: 0

Scripture: New Testament 2018

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings: Eastern Khumi Chin: Lemi #5182

People ID: 22538

