



CFEMI

**Location:** The 345,000 Lisu people in Myanmar are spread across a wide area in the north of the country. Most live in Kachin State, with others in Shan State and the Sagaing and Mandalay regions. More than 900,000 Lisu dwell on the Chinese side of the border in Yunnan Province, and an additional 43,000 live in Thailand and 3,500 in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, where they are officially known as the Yobin people.

**Identity:** According to one source, "The Lisu believe they are the only humans to have survived the great flood, and they claim eastern Tibet as their original homeland."<sup>1</sup> Since time immemorial, the Lisu have passed down stories of how the world was once destroyed by a massive flood, but a brother and sister survived by hollowing out "a very large tree trunk which was carried away by the rising water. When the waters receded, the tree trunk was left on a mountain top."<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** The Lisu,<sup>3</sup> who speak a Tibeto-Burman language, are one of the tribes that eagerly embraced Christianity due to an ancient belief that "a white brother with a book of the true God written in Lisu would come.... The Lisu language lacked even an alphabet, let alone printed material. Yet the Lisu were convinced that one day a white man would come and give them a book of God written in their own language."<sup>4</sup> Today, many Lisu in Myanmar struggle to communicate with Lisu in Thailand due to dialect differences.

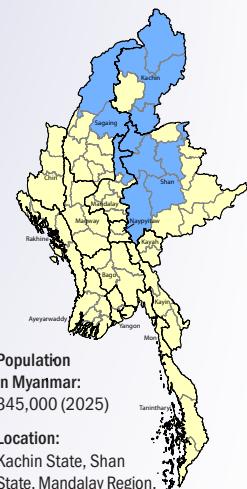
**History:** The name Lisu means "come-down people," as they believe they originated on the Tibetan Plateau, where they had a kingdom in the tenth century before migrating to their present locations in China and Myanmar.<sup>5</sup> The Lisu have a long history of being oppressed. A Lisu revolt from 1801 to 1803 proved devastating after the Qing government mobilized a

huge army of more than 10,000 soldiers to crush them. Chinese writers criticized this campaign as "using a cattle knife to kill chickens."<sup>6</sup> During the 1940s, the Lisu in China were forced to pay 65 different taxes and levies, including one of 3.5 Yuan for each airplane flying over their region!<sup>7</sup> To escape many similar provocations, thousands of Lisu began migrating to Myanmar in the mid-18th century, then into northern Thailand in the late 19th century.

**Customs:** Before they embraced Christianity, the Lisu were described as "utter savages."<sup>8</sup> They were so given over to alcohol that when one newly converted village threw out their liquor, all the pigs in the village got drunk.<sup>9</sup> A passion for gambling often degraded the Lisu into an abyss of suffering. Missionary Isobel Kuhn lamented: "When they have gambled away their money, they will often stake their children, their wives, and even themselves as slaves. As a result, in one night a whole family can be gambled away into life-long slavery."<sup>10</sup>

**Religion:** The 1931 census of Burma returned 9% of Lisu people as Christians, but it was just the beginning of one of the greatest stories of mass conversion in Christian history. During one interrogation by the Communists, a young Lisu man exclaimed, "Christianity has already penetrated into our flesh and blood, and it will not be easy to tear it away from us."<sup>11</sup>

**Christianity:** Many missionaries served among the Lisu on both sides of the border in the first half of the 20th century, including well-known figures like James Fraser, A. B. Cooke, John and Isobel Kuhn, and the Morse family. In 1916 and 1917 alone, Fraser baptized 60,000 Lisu.<sup>12</sup> Today, an estimated 85% of Lisu people in Myanmar are followers of Christ. They have accepted responsibility to evangelize many other groups for Christ, including the head hunting Naga and Tangshang tribes in the Sagaing Region, who were first reached by Lisu believers in the early 1960s.



Population  
in Myanmar:  
345,000 (2025)

Location:  
Kachin State, Shan  
State, Mandalay Region,  
Sagaing Region

Language Family:  
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:  
Christianity (85.0%)

Christians:  
293,000 (85.0%)

## OVERVIEW

**Population:**  
345,000 in Myanmar  
(2025 Joshua Project)  
300,000 (2019 D. Bradley)  
19,854 (1931 census)

**Other Countries:**  
923,000 in China  
43,000 in Thailand  
3,500 in India

**Other Names:**  
Lisaw, Li-Hsaw, Li-Shaw, Lu-Tzu, Yao  
Yen, Yaw-Yen, Yaw Yin, Yeh-Jeh

**Location:**  
Kachin State: Myitkyina, Putao, Bhamo, and Tanai districts; Shan State: Lashio, Mongmit, Nansang, Hopang, and Loilen districts; Palaung Self-Administered Zone; and Kokang Self-Administered Zone; Mandalay Region: Thabeikkyin and Pyin Oo Lwin districts; Sagaing Region: Katha and Hkamti districts

**Language:** Lisu [lis]

**Dialects:** 3

**Scripture:**  
Bible 1968  
New Testament 1938  
Portions 1921

**Jesus film:** Lisu

**Global Recordings:** Lisu #22811

**People ID:** 13076

