



Chin History & Culture

Location: Boasting a growing population of 19,000 people, the Ngawn tribe occupies 16 villages north of Falam Township in western Myanmar’s Chin State. Their territory is bordered by six other Chin groups: the Teizang and Siyin to the north; the Zahau and Sim to the west; and the Phadei and Zanniat to the south. Further north in the Sagaing Region, Ngawn communities are scattered throughout the Kabaw Valley, which is situated between the Chindwin River and the Yomadong mountain range, which constitutes Myanmar’s border with the Indian state of Manipur. Despite their proximity to India, there is no indication of any Ngawn villages across the border.

Identity: Although historically, culturally, and linguistically the Ngawn are related to dozens of other Chin tribes in the region, their autonym is simply “Ngawn,” and they generally do not use the name “Chin” unless they are speaking with outsiders. For a century, they have been acknowledged as a distinct people group in Myanmar, with the 1931 census returning a population

of 5,119 “Ngorn” people.

Language: Although many Chin varieties in Myanmar have been classified as mere dialects of Chin by linguists, Ngawn has been recognized as a distinct language for decades. It is spoken by all Ngawn people, most of whom can also speak the national language, Burmese.

History: Because of the strategic location of the Ngawn area, a centuries-old tug-of-war occurred between the kings of Manipur and the Burmese over control of the region. The Manipuri kings first conquered the Kabaw Valley in the 15th century and controlled it for generations. In 1829, the village of Moreh was established and served as a penal colony for female prisoners. One historian noted, “Chin tribesmen had never been ruled by the Burmese. Just before the British conquest, the Burmese King Bodawpaya raided and claimed areas of Manipur and Assam. At the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1834, the British drew an imaginary line across Chin territory and allotted a part to Manipur. When Britain separated India and Burma in 1937 the line

became the international boundary. Thus, part of Chin country was incorporated into Burma and another part into India.”¹

Customs: The rolling hills and many rivers in the Ngawn area supported an abundance of wildlife, and for many generations Ngawn men have been renowned for their prowess as hunters. Many tigers roamed the forests, frequently carrying off people who strayed too close to them. Missionaries Arthur and Laura Carson first shared the Gospel with the Chin people and opened schools in the Hakha area further south. The idea that girls could learn to read and write and could gain an education was radical at the time, and the vision soon spread to Falam and other parts of the Chin Hills. The twin pillars of education and faith in Christ gradually transformed Ngawn society in every way.

Religion: At the dawn of the 1930s, Christianity had only just begun to scrape the surface of religious life among the Ngawn, with the 1931 census returning just five Ngawn individuals who identified as Christians, while the other 5,114 members of the tribe were listed as animists. By the 1960s, however, thousands of Ngawn had trusted Jesus Christ and had experienced His grace and power. Today, approximately nine out of ten Ngawn people are Christians, while others, especially those living in remote areas, continue to observe animistic rituals and sacrifices.

Christianity: Although the first books of the Bible were translated into the Ngawn language by missionaries in 1951, the independence of Burma and the subsequent expulsion of missionaries stalled progress, and the Ngawn New Testament was not completed until 2006, with the full Bible finally published in 2014. The Ngawn people, once trapped in spiritual darkness, have proved to be a jewel in the crown of God’s grace and have been set free from the oppressive spirit world that had enslaved their ancestors for centuries.



Population
in Myanmar:
19,000 (2024)

Location:
Chin State, Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (90.0%)

Christians:
17,100 (90.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
19,000 in Myanmar
(2024 Joshua Project)
18,600 (2017 J. Leclerc)
5,119 (1931 census)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Chin Ngawn, Ngon, Ngorn

Location:
Chin State: Falam Township
in Falam District;
Sagaing Region: Kale Township in
Kale District and Tamu Township
in Tamu District.

Language:
Chin, Ngawn [cnw]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
Bible 2014
New Testament 2006
Portions 1951

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings:
Chin, Ngawn #8789

People ID: 13343

