



Location: More than 13,000 Riang Lai people inhabit several villages in northern Shan State within Namsan and Mantong Townships in the Palaung Self-Administered Zone.¹ In Namsan, Riang people occupy the villages of Maemunglon, Saimon, Sam Kha, and Kon Pung. Besides the dominant Palaung people, Namsan is also populated by Karen, Lisu, and Shan people, and by ethnic Indians and Chinese. The 1931 census of Burma returned 2,677 "Yangsek" people, who are presumably today's Riang Lai.

Identity: This fascinating tribe is also known to other ethnicities as the Yinchia—a name given to them by the Burmese, which means "Striped Karen." The Riang Lai are related by ancestry and culture to the Riang Lang, but their languages are different. Both groups are historically related to the Palaung, but over the centuries their languages and customs diverged, making them separate ethnicities today. Traditionally, the two Riang

tribes occupied different social and geographic space and have their own clothing styles. They are not related to the identically named Riang tribe of northeast India and Bangladesh.

Language: Riang Lai and Riang Lang came from the same historical roots as the Palaung people, but over generations their languages diverged and are no longer intelligible with Palaung. Riang Lai has been categorized as an "endangered" and "decreasing" language.² Although all Riang Lai adults speak their language, many young people now prefer to use Shan or Burmese.

History: The region inhabited by the Riang Lai has a very long history, dating back to the founding of the Dutthavati State in 58 BC. During the Sino-Burmese War (1765-1769), Chinese imperial troops invaded the area, overrunning town after town. By the 1880s, the various Shan princes had submitted to the British colonial rulers. Namsan served

as the capital of Tawngpeng, a Palaung substate of the Shan States in British Burma. The main Riang Lai area was incorporated into the newly formed Palaung Self-Administered Zone in 2012, but tensions between the residents and the Burmese military simmered. In December 2023 Namsan fell under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army after two weeks of fierce fighting, despite a Chinese-backed ceasefire agreement between the TNLA and the military junta.

Customs: Noted for their predominantly black clothing, which is adorned by colorful tassels and headdresses, Riang Lai people are also easily identified by "their custom of men and women capping their four front teeth in gold, which is then inlaid with ruby and green jade. This is regarded as a mark of great beauty."³

Religion: Eight out of ten Riang Lai families today observe the animistic rituals of their forefathers. A significant number of people adhere to Buddhism and Christianity, but they often use their beliefs as a veneer over their true inward adherence to spirit worship. For centuries the Riang Lai have been served by shamans, whose job is to mediate between people and the spirit world. To receive directions, the shamans often go into a trance to interact with various spiritual guides.

Christianity: The Gospel arrived among the Riang Lai people about a century ago, with 11 Riang Lai people saying they were Christians at the time of the 1931 census. A remnant of Riang Lai believers remains today, but a lack of Christian resources in their language has hampered their growth. Any prospective Bible translators will first need to teach the people how to read Roman characters, as the Riang Lai language has never had an orthography. Audio recordings in Riang Lai were created by the mission Global Recordings decades ago, but they do not appear to have been widely used.



Population in Myanmar:
13,000 (2024)

Location:
Shan State

Language Family:
Austro-Asiatic

Main Religion:
Animism (80.0%)

Christians:
100 (0.1%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
13,000 in Myanmar
(2024 Joshua Project)
12,000 (2008 Ethnologue)
2,677 (1931 census)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Ban Roi, Liang Sek, Ranei, Red Riang, Riang Saek, Riang Sak, Sak, Striped Karen, Striped Kayin, Striped Riang, Striped Yin, Yang, Yang Lai, Yangsek, Yinchia, Yinja, Yinkya, Yinnet, Yinchar, Yinn Kya, Yinset

Location:
Shan State: Namsan and Mantong Townships in the Palaung Self-Administered Zone

Language:
Riang Lai [yin]

Dialects: 1

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings:
Yinnet #18583

People ID: 15091

