



Sumtu Chin Society

Location: Almost all of the 16,000 Sumtu people inhabit villages in southwest Myanmar's northern Rakhine State, making them one of just a handful of the 61 Chin tribes in Myanmar not to live in Chin State. They live in the four townships of Ann, Kyauktaw, Minbya, and Myebon, which are nestled in hazardous mountainous terrain. In recent decades, a significant number of Sumtu people have migrated to the nation's largest city, Yangon, where they proudly maintain their cultural identity despite being separated from their homeland.

Identity: The Sumtu are a distinct people group with their own culture and language. For centuries they were exposed to Rakhine and Burmese language and culture, resulting in many Sumtu people converting to Buddhism and adopting many of the customs of their large neighbors. Partly because of concern over their declining language and culture, the Sumtu community in Yangon

established the Sumtu Chin Society, and a new emphasis on teaching their language to the next generation is underway.

Language: The Sumtu language reportedly has 91 percent lexical similarity with Laitu and 84 percent with Uppu,¹ but other factors block comprehension between the speakers of those languages, who must use a third language to communicate with each other. Because of the isolation of their communities, dialect variation exists between Sumtu speakers in different townships, with those in Ann Township showing the greatest differences.

History: The areas inhabited by the Sumtu have a long history with the Buddhist faith, which has been entrenched for countless generations. The town of Ann, for example, was founded in 1333 by King Min Hti, who built many temples there. In 2024, the Arakan Army ousted the Burmese military from northern Rakhine State during the civil war, taking

control of all four townships where the Sumtu people live.²

Customs: In the past, the Sumtu were one of a dozen or more Chin tribes that tattooed girls' faces, but evidence of the practice is rarely seen today, as it was abandoned in the 1960s and many of the girls who received tattoos have now passed away. Malaria decimated the Sumtu for centuries, keeping their population low. The region is also subject to extremely powerful cyclones that lash the Bay of Bengal. In October 2010, Myebon Township where the Sumtu people live was struck by Cyclone Giri. Many villages were destroyed, and thousands of people were left homeless and destitute.

Religion: The Kingdom of Mrauk U, which flourished from 1429 to 1785, spread Buddhism throughout the area and to other parts of Southeast Asia. At the height of its power, Mrauk U "was home to a multi-ethnic population with mosques, temples, shrines, seminaries, and libraries."³ As a result of this powerful influence, Buddhism dominated Sumtu society for generations. Few Christians were found among them until the last 50 years, when the Gospel has gradually risen in prominence.

Christianity: The rugged, densely forested mountains of northern Rakhine State received almost no Christian witness during the missionary era, with a 1917 report stating: "The unadministered territory has a population of at least 30,000, though no proper census has ever been taken. There has never been a missionary of any denomination among them."⁴ Consequently, the Sumtu previously had one of the lowest percentages of Christians of any of the 61 Chin tribes in Myanmar, but the situation has rapidly improved since the 1970s, and today the followers of Christ outnumber those who do not believe. Despite this promising growth, no Scripture or any other Christian resources have ever been translated into the Sumtu language.



Population in Myanmar: 16,000 (2025)

Location: Rakhine State, Yangon Region

Language Family: Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion: Christianity (60.0%)

Christians: 9,600 (60.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population: 16,000 in Myanmar (2025 Joshua Project) 14,000 (2007 SIL)

Other Countries:

Other Names: Ahmyo, Chang, Cumtu, Hmyo, Settu, Settu Hmyo, Sungtu

Location: Rakhine State: Ann Township in Ann District; Kyauktaw, Minbya, and Myebon townships in Mrauk-U District; Yangon Region

Language: Chin, Sumtu [csv]

Dialects:

Scripture: None

Jesus film: None

Global Recordings: None

People ID: 20562

