



Langte Zahau

Location: Approximately 20,000 members of the Zahau tribe inhabit western Myanmar’s Chin State, dispersed in at least 40 villages from Falam Township to the border with India. The 2011 Indian census returned a figure of 2,100 “Zahao” people, who have status as a Scheduled Tribe of that country. In Chin State, the Zahau are surrounded by six Chin tribes: the Teizang, Ngawn, Sim, Laizo, Lai Chin, and Hualngo.

Identity: Zahau legend says that they originated when “the sun laid an egg on the earth. A Burmese woman picked it up and took it home with her and placed it in a pot. In due course, the egg hatched and produced four boys who grew up to become the progenitors of the Zahau people.”¹ The group’s name comes from Zahau, who was the youngest of four brothers who founded the village of Tlao in the 17th century. Although the Zahau in Chin State are now considered a dialect subgroup of the larger Falam Chin group, their existence

has been known for over a century. The 1931 census of Burma returned 5,802 Zahau people under the name “Yahow.”

Language: In 1983, linguists found that 14,400 people spoke Zahau in Myanmar, but they considered it just one of many dialects of Falam Chin. Consequently, the Zahau became recognized as a distinct people group that speaks the Falam Chin language. In the past the Zahau and Taisun were closely related groups that shared the same origins, but over time they diverged to become separate ethno-linguistic identities.

History: For much of their history the Zahau engaged in war against other tribes. As just one example among a myriad of violent escapades, in 1805 the Zahau raided the village of Senam and carried off 13 heads and 90 slaves.² Earlier, in 1753-54, the Zahau engaged in a prolonged war with the Mizo (Lushai) tribe. The Zahau had grown comfortable

with their power and success and were completely unprepared when the Mizo hatched a devious plan by inviting the Zahau to come and collect their annual tribute. After supplying a lavish feast with rice wine for three days, the Mizo waited until the Zahau chiefs and their 300 warriors were fast asleep before launching a surprise attack, massacring all Zahau except a few men who escaped to report what had happened.³ After this incident, the Mizo were afraid of retribution and many migrated west, becoming the dominant ethnic group in today’s Indian state of Mizoram.

Customs: In the mid-19th century, the Zahau were struggling in a battle when “they appealed to the Falam Chin for assistance, which was granted on the understanding that in return the Zahau should pay tribute to the Falam forever. The Zahau later tried to break free from Falam control in 1889 and 1894, but were thwarted from doing so by the British.”⁴ As a result of their subjugation, many Zahau customs mirror those of the Falam Chin, although they have retained their tribal identity, which is reflected in the beautiful, intricate dresses worn by Zahau women.

Religion: Animism, characterized by ardent appeasement and constant sacrificial offerings to a host of demons and deities, was the religious belief of the Zahau people for centuries before they converted to Christianity at various stages during the 20th century.

Christianity: The Gospel first made incremental advances among the Zahau in the first two or three decades of the 20th century, although of the 5,802 Zahau people reported in the 1931 census, just 32 were Christians and the rest animists. Since that time almost all Zahau have embraced Christianity and they have become a blessed people. Zahau believers use the Falam Chin Scriptures. The New Testament was published in 1951 and the full Bible a generation later in 1991. Practically the entire community of Zahao people in India are also professing Christians.



Population
in Myanmar:
20,000 (2025)

Location:
Chin State

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (99.0%)

Christians:
19,800 (99.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
20,000 in Myanmar
(2025 Asia Harvest)
14,400 (1983 SIL)
5,803 (1931 census)

Other Countries:
2,100 in India

Other Names:
Jahau, Kuki Chin Zahao,
Lyen-Lyem, Yahow, Zahao,
Zahau-Shimhrin, Za-How

Location:
Chin State: Falam Township
in Falam District

Language:
Chin Falam, Zahau [cfm]

Dialects:

Scripture:
Falam Chin Bible 1991
New Testament 1951
Portions 1933

Jesus film:
Chin, Falam

Global Recordings:
Chin, Falam #19401

People ID: 19754

