

Khup Tungnung



Location: With a population estimated at 68,000, the Zokam are one of the largest Chin tribes, inhabiting a wide area comprising three townships in the southern Sagaing Region and three townships in northern Chin State. Another 30,000 live across the border in India's Manipur State, where they are officially named "Zou" and have status as one of India's Scheduled Tribes. In India, many of the groups related to the Zokam are counted under collective names such as Paite, Vaiphei, and Simte.¹ In recent decades many Zokam people have fled the chaos of life in Myanmar and now live scattered across the globe, including in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States.

Identity: Identifying the Zokam people is one of the more challenging classification problems in Myanmar today. The British first listed them as "Yo" in 19th century documents, before the spelling of their name morphed into Zo, Zoham, Zou, Zomi, and other varieties. Although today they are commonly referred to as Zo, the leaders of the tribe consented to the use of Zokam as a shared

identifier. Some people insist that all Tedim Chin people in northern Chin State should come under the Zokam label, but we have profiled the Tedim Chin separately as they are a collection of smaller tribes and clans, and they possess a different dialect that necessitated the production of a separate Bible translation and other resources.

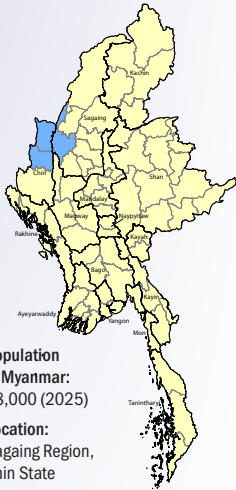
Language: The Zo language is spoken across a widespread area of Myanmar. It is related to Tedim Chin and is part of the Sizang branch of the Chin group of languages, which includes Siyin and Gangte. The Zokam are one of the most literate ethnic groups in Myanmar, with almost all people able to read and write. Most are also fluent in Burmese.

History: The earliest historical accounts of Zo people were written by a Chinese diplomat of the Tang Dynasty, who in the year 862 mentioned a kingdom in the Chindwin Valley whose princes and chiefs were called Zo, Shou, or Zhou. Since the independence of Myanmar in 1948, a fledgling movement has emerged to try to create a sovereign Zo nation which would combine related tribes in Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh.²

Customs: Zokam culture straddles the line between the Chin and Burmese worlds. Those living in the Sagaing Region have had more contact with the Burmese and have subsequently absorbed many Burmese customs. A Catholic priest, Vincentious Sergamano, wrote in 1833: "To the east of the Chin Mountains is a pretty nation called Jo. They are supposed to have been Chin, who in the progress of time have become Burmanized, speaking their language, although very corruptly, and adopting all their customs."³

Religion: In the past the Zokam were feared for their practice of dark arts, with Sergamano noting: "These Jo generally pass for necromancers and sorcerers; and are for this reason feared by the Burmese, who dare not ill-treat them, for fear of them revenging themselves by some enchantment."⁴ Many Zokam people living in Sagaing have adopted Buddhism because of influence from the Burmese, whereas almost all Zokam people in Chin State are Christians. The first Zokam Christian, Thuam Hang, was baptized in 1906 after being led to the faith by a Karen evangelist.⁵ Missionary Herbert Cope arrived in the Tedim area in 1908 and helped establish the Gospel throughout the area for the next 30 years. Revival swept through the area in the 1970s and beyond, with preachers Myo Chit, Philip Ahone, and Pum Za Thang holding crusades that brought thousands of Zokam and other people into the Kingdom of God.⁶

Christianity: The Zo New Testament was published in 1967 to meet the needs of the burgeoning number of Zokam Christians. It helped establish the faith of thousands of former animists and Buddhists, although a quarter of a century elapsed before the full Zo Bible was finally available in 1992. The Jesus film has also been produced in the Zo language. In India, the Zou overwhelmingly identify with Jesus Christ, with 99.4 percent of their population declaring they are Christians in the 2011 Indian census.



Population in Myanmar: 68,000 (2025)
Location: Sagaing Region, Chin State
Language Family: Tibeto-Burman
Main Religion: Christianity (84.0%)
Christians: 57,100 (84.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population: 68,000 in Myanmar (2025 Joshua Project) 61,000 (2012 P. Tungdim)
Other Countries: 30,000 in India Also in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, USA
Other Names: Bhaiphei, Chin Zokam, Guite, Jo, Jou, Kuite, Paite, Shou, Vaiphei, Vaiphei, Veiphei, Yaw, Yo, Zo, Zhou, Zoham, Zome, Zomi
Location: Sagaing Region: Kalay Township in Kale District, Khampat and Tamu townships in Tamu District; Chin State: Hakha Township in Hakha District, Tedim and Tonzang townships in Tedim District
Language: Zo [zom]
Dialects:
Scripture: Bible 1992 New Testament 1967 Portions 1981
Jesus film: Zo
Global Recordings: Zo Chin #18625
People ID: 18358

