

**Location:** Approximately 30,000 Achang inhabit an area along the Yunnan-Myanmar border near the Chinese town of Ruili. The Achang share the southern end of the Gaoligong Mountains with about a dozen other colorful ethnic groups. An additional 1,700 Achang live in Myanmar's Shan State where they are mainly employed as seasonal laborers.<sup>1</sup>

**Identity:** The Achang are one of 55 minorities officially recognized by China. In Myanmar the Achang, traditionally known as *Mongsha*, are culturally and historically linked to the Shan. There is speculation that the Achang were originally Zaiwa who moved east to their present location.

**Language:** The Achang language — which has four tones — is related to the Phun, Maru, Lashi, and Zaiwa languages. It also appears to be influenced by Shan which is part of the Tai linguistic family. The Achang minority include speakers of three mutually unintelligible dialects.<sup>2</sup> Longchuan is the most distinct, using many Tai Mao loanwords.<sup>3</sup> The Lianghe and the Luxi dialects, on the other hand, contain many Chinese words.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Achang also has some Burmese loanwords.

**History:** The Achang have a rich heritage of singing ballads and telling folk tales to each other. These stories are the main way Achang culture and history are passed down to children. The Achang claim to have once lived in a matriarchal society in

northwestern Yunnan. After the Achang migrated to their present location, they began to rely more on farming and less on hunting to feed themselves. During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), the Achang were ruled by hereditary chiefs.

**Customs:** Achang women wear colorful skirts and wrap dark cloth high upon their heads. Traditionally, unmarried women tie their pigtails together on top of their heads. During an Achang funeral, a cloth ribbon, 10 to 20 meters (11 to 22 yds.) long, is attached to the coffin. A Buddhist monk is hired to walk in front of the procession holding the ribbon, which signifies the monk leading the soul of the deceased to the afterworld.<sup>5</sup>

**Religion:** Although they are nominally Theravada Buddhist, the older generation of Achang exhibit many traits of polytheism and animism in their religious rituals and everyday lives. Most Achang homes have posters of deities and demons pasted on their walls. However, there are also some Christians in nearly every Achang village in China.<sup>6</sup> The present generation, having been educated in atheistic schools, are gradually forsaking the religious practices of their parents.



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**Christianity:** A 1989 report commented that the Achang had “at least one known Christian.”<sup>7</sup> The situation appears to have improved rapidly; by 1992 the same source reported there was a church in nearly every Achang village in China.<sup>8</sup> A strong, vibrant church also exists directly across the border among the Jingpo (Kachin), as well as among the Achang of Myanmar. Members of the new Achang church are often invited for training in northern Myanmar. The Achang New Testament was completed in 1992, using a script that was invented specifically for the Achang in Myanmar.



**Population in China:**  
 22,708 (1990)  
 29,300 (2000)  
 37,800 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Polytheism  
**Christians:** 2,000

## Overview of the Achang

**Countries:** China, Myanmar  
**Pronunciation:** “Ah-tsung”  
**Other Names:** Achung, Atsang, Acang, Ahchan, Mongsha, Maingtha, Ngacang, Ngatsang, Ngachang, Ngac’ang, Ngochang, A-ch’ang, Achan, Mongsa  
**Population Source:**  
 27,708 (1990 census);<sup>9</sup>  
 20,441 (1982 census);  
 12,032 (1964 census);  
 1,700 in Myanmar (1983)  
**Location:** W Yunnan:  
 Dehong Dai Prefecture<sup>10</sup>  
**Status:**  
 An official minority of China

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Burmish, Northern Burmish  
**Dialects (3):**  
 Longchuan, Luxi, Lianghe  
**Literacy:** 39%  
**Religion:** Polytheism, Theravada Buddhism, Daoism, Animism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity  
**Christians:** 2,000  
**Scripture:** New Testament 1992  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:**  
 Ngochang #04370  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:** ACN00

