

Palaung, Pale

Approximately 300,000 Pale Palaung people live across a widespread area of three countries. The vast majority (more than 95%) live in a 16,000 square-kilometre (10,000 sq. mi.) area of northern and central Myanmar. Their main population centre is in southern Shan State around the towns of Kalaw and Namtu.¹ Population estimates for the Pale Palaung in Myanmar range from 190,000 to 290,000. Nobody is certain of figures in Myanmar due to the fact that no government has held a census for more than 70 years. In the 1931 census the Pale Palaung numbered 138,746.²

In China, the Pale Palaung number approximately 8,500. They live in Luxi County of western Yunnan Province, just a few miles from the border with Myanmar. The 1995 Thailand census counted a total of just 1,937 Pale Palaung people. Some sources say that the real number of this group in Thailand may be closer to 5,000. They moved into the Fang District of Thailand's Chiang Mai Province in 1983 to flee fighting in Myanmar. Their main village is on a mountain ridge literally atop the Thailand-Myanmar border. Just yards away, Thai and Burmese border guard posts face each other.

In China, the Pale Palaung have been combined with the Shwe Palaung, Rumi Palaung and the Riang to form the official *De'ang* minority group.³ Although the four groups share much in common, their languages are different and they usually live in separate communities. The self-name of these Palaung groups is *Ta-ang*, which means 'rock people'. *Palaung* is a Burmese word.

The Pale Palaung have been Buddhists for many centuries. They were possibly converted by the Shan, who still exert a strong influence over the Palaung to this day. Every Palaung village has a temple, and it is considered a great honour for families when their sons become monks.⁴ The Palaung also

'strongly believe in spirits, called *ganam*. These supernatural powers exist in all natural surroundings, for instance in the water, forest, sky, trees, village and houses. Offerings to the spirits are most often made by ordinary people, although identification of the spirit causing illness or misfortune is made by a sorcerer, called *pho moo muang*. The meat of the sacrifices is boiled before offering it to the spirits. Each Palaung village has a spirit house, located

some distance outside the village, and spirit gates to protect malevolent spirits from entering the village.⁵

Very few Pale Palaung have come to Christ. Kachin Christians in Myanmar have attempted to reach them in recent years, with limited success, while a few families have converted to Christ among the Pale Palaung in China. For years, gospel radio broadcasts in the Pale Palaung language have sown seed throughout their widespread villages.

Those few Pale Palaung who come to

faith in Christ invariably face strong opposition from their families and local communities, who believe that such decisions offend the evil spirits that control the Pale Palaung people and can bring disaster. In the mid-1990s, about a dozen Christian Palaung families in Myanmar were expelled from their villages and their homes were dismantled.⁶



Paul Hattaway



Population:

300,260 (2000)
337,100 (2010)
378,600 (2020)

Countries: Myanmar, China, Thailand

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 300

Overview of the Pale Palaung

Other Names: De'ang Pale, Ngwe Palaung, Silver Palaung, Pale, Palay, Benglong, Bonglung, Bonglong, Penglung, Darang, Manton, Nam Hsan, Ta-ang, Bulei, Palong, Polaung, Da-ang, Da-eng, Di-ang, Bulai, Pulei, Southern Ta'ang

Population Sources:

190,000 to 290,000 in Myanmar (2000, B Grimes)
8,260 in China (2000, P Hattaway)
1,937 in Thailand (1995 census)

Language: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer,

Palaungic-Khmuc, Palaungic, Eastern Palaungic, Palaung

Dialects: 2 (Bulei, Raojin)

Professing Buddhists: 99%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: work in progress

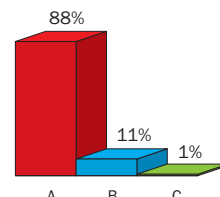
Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: Pale; Palaung Pale

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: PCE

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity