

Intha



Population:

170,800 (2000)
192,000 (2010)
215,800 (2020)

Countries: Myanmar

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 200

Overview of the Intha

Other Names: Inntha

Population Sources: 141,100 in Myanmar (2000, B Grimes [1983 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Lolo-Burmese, Burmish, Southern

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 98%

Practising Buddhists: 90%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

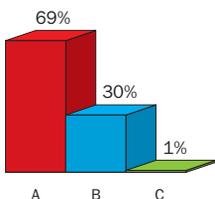
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: INT

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

Approximately 170,000 Intha people live in south-west Shan State of Myanmar. The 1931 census in Burma (the most recent census held in this troubled land!) recorded 56,901 Intha people.¹ The Intha are one of the most famous ethnic groups of Southeast Asia. Their name means 'children of the lake', and most Intha can be found living in villages surrounding Lake Inle, near Taunggyi. The entire lake and surrounding area is within the Nyaungshwe township. There are 130,000 people from the Intha, Shan, Pa-O, Taungyo, Danau, Kayah and Burmese ethnic groups living in the township. Approxi-

mately 70,000 of them live directly around Lake Inle itself. The beautiful Inle Lake is 22 kilometres (13 mi.) long, and 11 kilometres (7 mi.) wide. It has 'very calm waters dotted with patches of floating vegetation and busy fishing canoes. High hills rim the lake on both sides; the lakeshore and lake islands bear 17 villages on stilts, mostly inhabited by the Intha people.'²

Linguistically the Intha language is closely related to Burmese. The *Ethnologue* states that it is 'one of the better known varieties of nonstandard Burmese with profound pronunciation and vocabulary differences from Burmese'.³

Scholars have long debated the origins of the Intha people, but most seem to agree on two or three main theories. One source says, 'Speaking a distinctive and unusual Burmese dialect, there is mystery over their origins in this area. Like the Pa-Os and Taungyos, it is thought that they arrived from Lower Burma many centuries ago. By one account, they are descendants of southern Burmans who migrated north during the reign of King Narapatisithu (1174–1210), although some scholars

believe they stem from slaves taken captive during on-and-off wars with the Mons and Tavoyans.'⁴

Another source states that the Intha originally came from Dawei in southern Myanmar, 'According to one story, two brothers from Dawei came to Nyaungshwe in 1359 to serve a [local ruler]. The latter was so pleased with the hard-working demeanour of the brothers that he asked



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them to invite 36 more families from Dawei; purportedly, all the Intha around Inle Lake are descended from these migrant families.'⁵

The Intha are famous for their highly unusual 'leg-rowing' technique. 'Fishermen wrap a paddle around one hand and leg and use this to propel the boat, while balancing precariously on the other. This position leaves them with one hand free, allowing them to drop a large conical net over passing fish in the shallow waters of the lake.'⁶

The Intha people are entrenched in their Buddhist beliefs. For centuries they have clung to their culture and religion, seeing little need for change. Around Lake Inle are at least 100 Buddhist temples and pagodas. Buddhism pervades every part of Intha life and culture, giving them their identity, security and traditions. Consequently, Christianity has failed to make any significant impact among the Intha people. Although there are a few scattered believers here and there, overall only one out of every 1,000 Intha people has put faith in Jesus Christ.