

Taungyo

More than 560,000 Taungyo people live in central Myanmar. At the time of the most recent census held in Myanmar (then called Burma) in 1931, the Taungyo numbered just 22,296.¹ They are 'primarily located in mountainous valleys of southwest Shan State and southeast Mandalay Division. They border the vast dry zone to the west and the mountains and forests of the Shan State to the east. The Taungyo share their homeland with several other groups

indigenous to the area, including the Pa-O, Palaung, Shan and Danau. Most of the area they inhabit has been deforested for agricultural use.'²

The centre of the Taungyo homeland could be said to be the town of Pindaya in Shan State. Pindaya contains a population

of 25,000 people, the majority of whom are Taungyo, while most of the villages surrounding the town are also full of Taungyo people. It is common for two to three generations of the same family to live together under one roof. In many respects the Taungyo do not have a strong sense of self-identity as many other peoples in Myanmar do. They see themselves as linked to the Burmese people, with their main differences being cultural.

Linguistically, the Taungyo language is a variety of Burmese, but the people differ ethnically and culturally. When the Taungyo speak Burmese, they do so with a very strong accent. One source says that they have been 'influenced by the culture and speech of the Shans and Pa-Os among whom they live. . . . They may have

been refugees from Tavoy in Mon State, south-east Burma, or have been brought as slaves to Shan State, where they soon intermarried with locals. . . . Taungyo men wear a costume similar to the Shans, but the women are easily distinguishable by their heavy silver earrings and bracelets. They also wear heavy brass coils on their legs. If they are married, the rings are worn just under the knee; if they are single, they wear silver rings around the ankles.'³



Myanmar Faces and Places

Almost all Taungyo people believe in Theravada Buddhism. In rural areas they also practise *nat* (spirit) worship. Often the practitioners of this form of animism walk deep into the forests, where they conduct rituals to call on certain protective spirits. Some spirits are considered benevolent, while others are malevolent.

Most of the festivals that the Taungyo celebrate coincide with the Buddhist calendar in Myanmar. The Taungyo do have one festival in March each year that is unique to their group. During this time the people are expected to make donations to the local monks and monastery.

Less than one per cent of Taungyo people believe in Jesus Christ. Because of their linguistic relationship with Burmese, missionary organizations have not found it worthwhile to produce Taungyo-specific Scripture translations or media. One researcher has stated, 'Of the unreached groups of Myanmar, the Taungyo are one of the most readily accessible. Foreigners are legally permitted to travel to Pindaya, the city of highest Taungyo concentration, and home to a budding trekking industry.'⁴



Population:
560,000 (2000)
629,400 (2010)
707,500 (2020)
Countries: Myanmar
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 3,000

Overview of the Taungyo

Other Names: Taru, Dawe, Dawai, Tawe-Tavoy, Toru

Population Sources: 560,935 in Myanmar (2003, Myanmar Faces and Places)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 98%

Practising Buddhists: 75%

Christians: 0.6%

Scripture: none

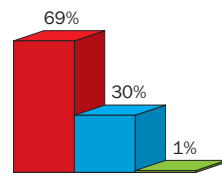
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TCO

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