



Population:
 23,000 (2000)
 25,800 (2010)
 29,000 (2020)

Countries: Myanmar
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: none known

Overview of the Thet

Other Names: That, Sakkya, Shakama

Population Sources: 23,000 in Myanmar (2002, Myanmar Faces and Places)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Jingpho-Konyak-Bodo, Jingpho-Luish, Luish

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 75%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

According to Myanmar Faces and Places, an organization that produces excellent calendars on the country of Myanmar, there are 23,000 Thet people living in the northern part of Rakhine State and southern Chin State in western Myanmar. The Thet are related to, and live near, the Dainet tribe.

Although a number of books and articles mention the Thet people in passing, there is no exhaustive research available on them. The *Ethnologue* merely refers to Thet as an

alternate name for the Kado language, which is part of the Tibeto-Burman family.

Six dialect groups, including the Thet, are listed for the Kado in Myanmar.¹ One other source suggests that the Thet are the same as the Chakma Buddhist

people of Bangladesh, but the Chakma speak a language from the Indo-European linguistic family—so the two groups are completely unrelated, except for their mutual adherence to Theravada Buddhism.

More exhaustive research needs to be conducted in this remote and politically-sensitive part of Asia to determine the relationship between the Thet, Sak and Kado. It remains uncertain whether these names all represent distinct ethnic identities, or if they are all varieties of the one larger ethnic component. In the 1931 Burmese census all of these groups were classified under the category 'Sak', which returned a population of 51,820.² The *Ethnologue* gives a 1983 population of 128,500 for these groups.³

Most sources only give small, isolated nuggets of information about the Thet people. One says, 'Living in Rakhine State, the Thet are one of the oldest and smallest tribal groups from the age of Pyu. They are known by foreign scholars as the Sakkya tribe and famous for their large earrings made of silver and bamboo.'⁴ Some tourism websites include a visit to a Thet village on the itinerary for a trip to the ruins of the Buddhist kingdom of Mrauk-U. One Burmese commercial enthusiastically

states, 'A full day of sightseeing. Trekking tours as well as drives with horse carriages in and around Mrauk-U. You will remain reverential in the ruins of ancient temples. . . . You will be amazed by the almost gothic-like atmosphere in an intact Buddha temple . . . and you will meet people from the Thet tribe with huge holes in their ears. And in the evening the Buddhist monks will preach in ancient monasteries old prayers from time immemorial.'⁵

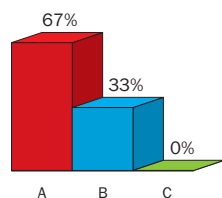


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Richard Diran, in his book *The Vanishing Tribes of Burma*, has a full-page photograph of an elderly Thet woman. The description of the image says, 'This Thet (or Shakama) woman from the Kaladan River region in [Rakhine] State broke down and cried after I photographed her, amazed that anyone would be interested in her people today. In 1919, C C Lewis said the Thet were practically disappearing from [Rakhine] State, remarking that only 230 villagers had returned themselves as Thet in the census of 1901.'⁶

One thing that is certain, however, is that the Thet people have been strong believers in Theravada Buddhism for many centuries. There are no known Christians among them.

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