



Population in Myanmar:
46,000 (2025)

Location:
Shan State

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Buddhism (98.4%)

Christians:
280 (0.6%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
46,000 in Myanmar (2025 Joshua Project)
40,000 (2000 D. Bradley)
22,296 (1931 census)

Other Countries:

Other Names:
Taru, Taung Yoe, Taung-yo, Toru, Twing Reu, Twinreu

Location:
Shan State: Kalaw Township in Kalaw District, Taunggyi Township in Taunggyi District, and Pinlaung Township in the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone

Language: Taungyo [tco]

Dialects:

Scripture:
None

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
None

People ID: 15290



Religious adherence



Myanmar Places & Faces

Location: With a population approaching 50,000 people, the Taungyo inhabit the hills above Inle Lake in southern Shan State, specifically in Kalaw, Taunggyi, and Pinlaung townships. Their territory “borders the vast dry zone to the west and the mountains and forests of Shan State to the east. They 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.”¹ The heart of the Taungyo homeland could be said to be the town of Pindaya. Most of the population of the town and surrounding villages are Taungyo people.

Identity: Not to be confused with the city of Taungoo in central Myanmar, the Taungyo people have been described as “an enigma in Shan State. Like the local Intha and Danu, they appear to speak a dialect of Burmese, but they are also influenced by the culture and speech of the Shan and Pa-O among whom they live.”² The Taungyo have

long been considered a distinct ethnic group by the government of Myanmar, and had a population of 22,296 people in 1931, which, remarkably, is the most recent census that counted all people groups in this troubled country.

Language: Although the Taungyo language is a variety of Burmese, “the people differ ethnically and culturally. When the Taungyo speak Burmese, they do so with a very strong accent.”³ Technically, SIL says that Taungyo is an “unwritten non-standard variety of Burmese with low intelligibility between distant villages. It has 89% lexical similarity with Burmese and Intha, and 91% with Danu.”⁴

History: Although their history is sketchy, most scholars believe the Taungyo were originally Mon people from the Dawei region of southeast Myanmar. After the Mon kingdom collapsed in 1057 following its defeat by the Burmese, the forefathers of today’s Taungyo people either migrated or were taken to Shan State as slaves and prisoners of war. After settling in

their present locations, they married local women and gradually formed a new ethnic identity.

Customs: Most Taungyo families are engaged in simple agriculture or fishing, and two to three generations of the same family often live together under one roof. A visitor noted that “Taungyo men wear a costume similar to the Shan, 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.”⁵ Most Taungyo festivals coincide with the Buddhist calendar, but they do celebrate one festival each March that is unique to their group, when people are expected to make donations to the local monks and monastery.

Religion: The grip that Buddhism has on the Taungyo people was reflected in the results of the 1931 census. Of the 22,296 Taungyo people at the time, 22,295 identified as Buddhists, one said he was a Muslim, and nobody believed in Christ. In a 2004 book it was noted: “Almost all Taungyo people believe in Theravada Buddhism. In rural areas they also practice *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 of which are considered benevolent and some malevolent.”⁶

Christianity: Although the Taungyo area is relatively easy to access, less than one per cent believe in Jesus Christ. Although an SIL study described the Taungyo as “very resistant” to Christianity, it noted: “Some outreach is being done among them by local evangelists and missionaries from other groups within Myanmar. Since the Taungyo people speak a nonstandard variety of Burmese, they may not like seeing their language in print. However, audio and video evangelistic materials in the Taungyo language may be very effective.”⁷