



Population:

7,100 (2000)
8,420 (2010)
10,100 (2020)

Countries: Cambodia, Thailand

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 50

Overview of the Chong

Other Names: Shong, Xong, Chawng

Population Sources: 5,000 in Cambodia (2000, B Grimes)
2,000 In Thailand (2000, J Schliesinger [1995 figure])

Language: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Eastern Mon-Khmer, Pearic, Western, Chong

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 98%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0.6%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: COG

The 7,000 Chong people, who inhabit areas along both sides of the Cambodia-Thailand border, make up one of the lesser-known Buddhist people groups in Southeast Asia.

Approximately 5,000 Chong live in Pursat Province in north-western Cambodia, while an additional 2,000 inhabit four main villages within Thailand’s Chanthaburi Province,¹ especially in Makhham District. Smaller numbers of Chong also live in Thailand’s Trat Province.

Although today they are small in number, the ancestors of the Chong were once widespread throughout the region. The Chong today proudly remember the time when they had their own kingdom in Kuankraburi between the 4th and 13th centuries AD. In 1767, ‘the Ayutthaya king Taksin fought the Burmese army and ordered the people in Chanthaburi to join the army. Most of the Chong, not willing to join the army, moved to Kichagud . . . to escape the Siamese authorities. Other Chong moved eastward into Trat province where they scattered near the Cambodian border.’²

In the past decade the Chong have started to inter-marry with Thai people, though not in great numbers.

The Thais look down on the Chong and consider them socially and culturally beneath them. The Chong language, which is part of the Mon-Khmer linguistic family, is endangered in Thailand but stronger in Cambodia. In Thailand the Chong have unsuccessfully petitioned the Thai authorities to allow their language to be taught in schools. Now it is mostly elderly people who can still speak the Chong language in Thailand. The

Somray language in Cambodia is closely related to Chong.

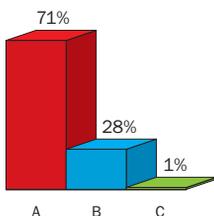
The Chong still retain many customs unique to their tribe, including a marriage ceremony called *gatak*. Joachin Schliesinger states, ‘Sets of buffalo and ox horns are bound to the heads of two elderly men during the marriage celebration. This custom symbolizes and honors the working capability and strength of buffaloes and oxen. . . . During the meal a young cock and hen are placed face to face. If they continue to look at each other during the wedding meal, the couple will stay together for a long time. If either turns away from the other, it is a bad omen for the outcome of the marriage. To avoid such a fate, some couples use stuffed chickens.’³

The Chong have been zealous Buddhists for hundreds of years, although vestiges of spirit appeasement are still found among them. Every Chong house has a Buddhist altar fixed on an inside wall. Many families also build a shrine, which is placed on a platform in the garden. Almost every Chong



Xayographix

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

family in Cambodia and Laos frequently visits their local Buddhist temple, and they gladly offer food and cash to the monks. Families consider it a great honour to send one of their sons to the temple to be trained as a monk.

Until recently there were no known Christians among the Chong, but since the late 1990s a small number have believed in Christ due to the witness of Christians in northern Cambodia.