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Location: The 1,400 Khmu in China are located in the extreme southwest corner of the country. More than 560,000 Khmu also live throughout Southeast Asia, particularly in Laos where 500,000 are found. The Khmu in China came from northern Laos into Xishuangbanna earlier this century. Twenty-five hundred Khmu have also settled in Western countries as refugees.¹ In Yunnan, “the area they inhabit is surrounded by mountains and situated in the Shanyong District adjacent to China’s border with Laos and south of the Nanla River in Mengla County.”²

Identity: There has been much talk of the Khmu in China being granted status as China’s 56th official minority. Twenty Chinese experts “urged that the Khmu be classified as a separate nationality.”³ The government has so far resisted and has included the Khmu in a list of *Undetermined Minorities*. The Khmu have been

described in such unflattering terms as “poverty stricken, dirty, and primitive.”⁴

Language: Khmu is a Mon-Khmer language. The Khmu in Jinghong use a classical written script — called *Duota* — while those in Mengla have no orthography, which suggests linguistic differences between the two.⁵

History: Despite being recognized as the original inhabitants of Laos,⁶ the Khmu have a long history of oppression and conflict with other peoples. They were driven from the most prosperous land on the plains by Lao invaders from southern China almost 1,000 years ago. Many Khmu became slaves of the Lao. Still today the Khmu are known as *Kha* — a derogatory name meaning “slaves.” In the latter part of the 1800s the Khmu were attacked by the Hmong in northern Laos after the Khmu had unwisely demanded tribute from the newly arrived Hmong.⁷

Customs: In Khmu culture, sons take their father’s family names, and daughters take their mother’s. Surnames represent an animal or plant which those who bear that name are not allowed to touch.⁸ The Khmu in China, who refuse to marry outside of their tribe, “have no special festivals but in their times of leisure, the villagers, men and women, like to sit in a ring with wine jars put in the middle from which the wine can be sucked up through long straws.”⁹

Religion: Most Khmu believe their lives are controlled by the spirit world. This complex hierarchy of spirits includes the spirit of heaven, the spirit of thunder, the spirit of the water snake, etc. Every year the Khmu in Laos hold festivals to worship the spirits of the village and their ancestors, as well as to pray for a plentiful harvest and good fortune.

Christianity: There are only a handful of believers among the Khmu in China, but in Laos they are one of the strongest Christian groups. Various missions were prominent in the early 1900s, sowing seeds for the harvest of at least 50,000 Khmu believers in Laos today.¹⁰ Many Khmu in Laos are coming to Christ through gospel radio broadcasts in the Khmu language. Some believe the Khmu in Laos are on the verge of mass conversion.¹¹ Bible portions were translated into the Khmu language almost 80 years ago, but new Bible translation projects are currently under way.



Population in China:
 1,100 (1990)
 1,420 (2000)
 1,830 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Animism
Christians: 10

Overview of the Khmu

Countries: Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, USA, China, Myanmar

Pronunciation: “Keh-Mu”

Other Names: Kemu, Khamu, Mou, Khamuk, Pouteng, Theng, Kha, Kamhu, Kamu, Lao Terng, Kammu, Khomu, Samon

Population Source:
 1,600 (1990 census);¹²
 500,957 in Laos (1995 census);
 42,853 in Vietnam (1989 F. Proschan);
 15,000 to 40,000 in Thailand;
 2,000 in USA; 500 in France;
 Also in Myanmar

Location: SW Yunnan: Banhuai Village, Mengla County, in Xishuangbanna Dai Prefecture; Also in Jinghong County

Status: Counted in census as an *Undetermined Minority*

Language: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Khmuic, Mal-Khmu, Khmu

Dialects: 0

Religion: Animism, Theravada Buddhism

Christians: 10

Scripture: Portions 1918; Work in progress

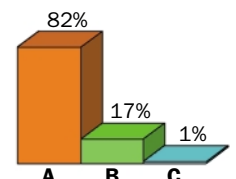
Jesus film: In progress

Gospel Recordings: Khamu #01005

Christian Broadcasting: Available (FEBC)

ROPAL code: KJG00

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Were evangelized but did not become Christians
C = Are adherents to any form of Christianity