

Location: More than 1,200 Kuan live in Jinghong County in Xishuangbanna Prefecture, located in the southwestern corner of Yunnan Province.¹ More than 8,000 live in nearby Laos. A number of Kuan families also live on the West Coast of the United States: in Richmond, California; and in Seattle, Washington. They were accepted into America as refugees from Laos following the 1975 Communist takeover of their country.

Identity: The Kuan have appeared in research under several different spellings. Their name has been listed as *Khuen*, *Kuanhua*, *Kween*, *Khween*, and *Khoun*. Some publications have listed *Kuan* and *Khuen* as two separate groups, but they are the same people. The Kuan are also different from the *Khun*, a Tai group found in eastern Myanmar. It is uncertain under which minority group, if any, the Chinese authorities have placed the Kuan.

Language: Kuan is a member of the Mon-Khmer language family and is related to Khmu. “The typological features of all Mon-Khmer languages include extensive morphology, including infixation.... In phonology, many Mon-Khmer languages of the core Southeast Asian area have developed a register (phonation-type) system.”²

History: The Kuan live in Jinghong — the center of Tai Lu culture in southern China. The Tai Lu have the following tale of how Jinghong was

discovered by accident several thousand years ago: A hunter named Bayalawu had led some youths into the forest to hunt, where they came upon a golden deer. “Bayalawu purposely shot an arrow into its leg to stop it so that they could take it home to raise. But the golden deer escaped with the arrow in its leg. He then led the young hunters in a chase after it, taking them over 77 peaks and 99 rivers before there suddenly appeared before their eyes a glittering golden lake into which the golden deer leapt and vanished from sight. In a twinkling the lake was filled with lotus flowers.”³

Customs: The Kuan wear their own distinctive clothing. Many aspects of their culture are similar to the Khmu, including their family names — which are taken from the names of sacred animals or plants. For the duration of their lives, the Kuan are not allowed to touch the particular animal or plant that bears their name.

Religion: Some Kuan have been converted to Theravada Buddhism by the Tai Lu. They also worship a hierarchy of demons and ghosts. Every year the Kuan hold a festival to worship the spirits of the village and their ancestors.



Dwayne Graybill

Christianity: Although Xishuangbanna Prefecture in 1996 had “more than 10,000 Christian believers... from half a dozen different national minorities,”⁴ the hidden Kuan remain an unreached and unevangelized people group. Few Kuan have any awareness of the gospel. Most of the believers in the area are among the Han Chinese, Tai Lu, Jino, and Akha minorities. As of yet, few have any vision to reach the numerous small, isolated groups such as the Kuan. There are no Scriptures or other evangelistic resources available in a language the Kuan easily understand.



Population in China:
 1,000 (1991)
 1,260 (2000)
 1,620 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Buddhism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Kuan

Countries: Laos, China, USA
Pronunciation: “Khooh-ahn”
Other Names: Kuanhua, Khuen, Kween, Khween, Khoun
Population Source:
 1,000 (1991 EDCL);
 8,000 in Laos (1995 L. Chazee);
 Also in USA
Location: SW Yunnan:
 Jinghong County in the
 Xishuangbanna Dai Prefecture
Status: Unidentified

Language: Austro-Asiatic,
 Mon-Khmer, Northern
 Mon-Khmer, Khmuic, Mal-Khmu,
 Khmu
Dialects: 0
Religion: Theravada Buddhism,
 Animism, Ancestor Worship
Christians: None known
Scripture: Work in progress
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: QAKOO; KHFOO

