



**Population:**

15,700 (2000)  
18,400 (2010)  
21,600 (2020)

**Countries:** Thailand, Laos

**Buddhism:** Theravada

**Christians:** none known

**Overview of the Kaleung**

**Other Names:** Kaleun, Tai Kelung, Tai Kaleun, Lao Kaleun, Kalerng, Khalong, Laoeng, Kaleum

**Population Sources:** 8,000 in Thailand (2000, J Schliesinger [1995 figure])

6,500 in Laos (1995, Asian Minorities Outreach)

**Language:** Tai-Kadai, Tai, Southwestern, East-Central, Lao-Phutai

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 95%

**Practising Buddhists:** 60%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

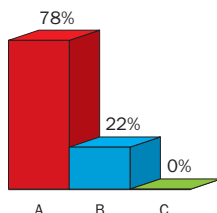
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** TTS02

**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

More than 16,000 Kaleung people live on each side of the Thailand-Laos border in Southeast Asia. Although the 8,500 Kaleung in Thailand presently outnumber their counterparts in Laos, within ten to fifteen years the Laos Kaleung are likely to outnumber the Thailand Kaleung due to the extremely high birth rate in Laos, where families of ten or more children are not uncommon today.

In Thailand, the Kaleung inhabit the provinces of Mukdahan (Don Tan and Chanuman districts), Nakhon Phanom (Muang District) and parts of Sakhon Nakhon Province. The majority of Kaleung

in Laos are located in the Khamkeut District of Borikhamxai Province. A small number also live in the distant Nakay District of Khammouan Province.

Some scholars regard the Kaleung as among the first inhabitants of Southeast Asia. 'Some Kaleung people state that their original homeland is central Laos near the border of Vietnam and that their forefathers migrated into Thailand in the early nineteenth century. They adjusted to Isan culture and gradually gave up their own language.'<sup>1</sup>

Although today the Kaleung language is classified as part of the Tai linguistic family, this is due to the fact that few people can speak the original Kaleung mother tongue, which was part of the Mon-Khmer linguistic affiliation (most people today speak a Tai language instead).<sup>2</sup> Joachim Schliesinger notes, 'For a long time, their language was classified as a Katuic branch among the Mon-Khmer language group . . . closely related to Bru, So and Saek. Therefore it could be assumed that they might have

a common origin with these peoples, especially the Bru. . . . Some elderly members of the Kaleung group in Thailand can still speak their original mother tongue. This language is of Mon-Khmer origin and definitely not a Tai dialect. The change of linguistic classification may have resulted out of the fact that most of the Kaleung people already residing for a long period of time in Thailand have totally forgotten their original tongue.'<sup>3</sup> Despite this fact, the Kaleung do retain a distinct ethnic identity, customs and history.

Kaleung villages are rectangular in shape. In the past their houses were raised on



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poles, but today most of their homes are similar in appearance to those of their Thai and Isan neighbours. One custom that has remained strong among the Kaleung in

Thailand is the prevalence of matrilineal extended families. Three or four generations of family members live under the same roof. The mother controls the family finances and makes all of the important decisions. When a wedding takes place, the groom's family must pay a bride price to the bride's family. An average price today is around 30,000 Thai baht (US\$700). After the ceremony, the groom moves into the home of his bride's parents.

The Kaleung are Theravada Buddhists. They also retain many animistic rituals. In Laos they still slaughter pigs and buffaloes as sacrifices to the spirits. There are no known Christians among the spiritually needy Kaleung people.