

More than 30,000 members of the Saek tribe live in central Laos and adjacent areas of north-east Thailand. Approximately 19,000 inhabit the Hinbouan and Grommarol districts of Khammouan Province in Laos, while an additional 11,000 make their home in Thailand's Sakon Nakhon Province.¹ The Saek are not the same as the tribe with a similar-sounding name, the Sach of Laos. The 1,100 Sach people speak a Viet-Muong language. Until about ten years ago linguists believed that the Saek language was part of the Mon-Khmer family, but today they agree that it is part of the Tai-Kadai family. Today most Saek people are bilingual in the national languages of Lao and Thai.²

Because they have no written history, finding out where the Saek originated is difficult. According to the Saek's own oral stories, they believe they came from areas of Thua Thien-Hue Province in Vietnam, some distance south of where they live today. This would explain why the Saek language contains some Vietnamese words, even though there are no Saek people left in Vietnam today.³

The migrations of the Saek may be explained by the fact they are a peace-loving people. Whenever they had conflict with other tribes they preferred to pack up their meagre possessions and move away rather than to stay

and fight. Between 150 and 200 years ago, the Saek first migrated across the Mekong River into Thailand. 'The Saek have a legend about the angel *Ong mu*, which led them from Laos to their new destination in Thailand. *Ong mu* is the most respected supernatural being

sizeable village. One source in Laos states, 'Although they are surrounded by Buddhism, most of the Saek in Laos adhere to their traditional ethnic beliefs [animism]. For example, ancestor worship (praying to deceased ancestors for help and guidance) is a common practice. Because these spirits are thought to cause illness, they have to be appeased through offerings.'⁵

Descriptions of the Saek in Thailand, however, show them to be more orientated towards Buddhism, while retaining their animistic beliefs. 'The Saek are Buddhists and they have pagodas in their villages. In spite of their Buddhist religion, the Saek still believe in spirits. Traditionally they worship their ancestors and make offerings to the guardian spirit of the village, to the house spirit and to several other spirits of the rivers, mountains and trees. Before harvest, the land spirit is appreciated with sacrifices of chicken and wine whisky. The Saek still have shamans, called *moy yau*, who cure sick villages and placate the spirits who cause the sickness.'⁶

The extent of Christianity among the Saek is difficult to gauge, due to their high level of assimilation to neighbouring people groups. There may be a small number of Saek Christians in both Laos and Thailand. Missionaries produced gospel recordings in the Saek language in 1966, but the majority of this tribe has yet to hear the gospel.



in Saek beliefs, and the guardian of the village and its inhabitants.'⁴

Although the majority of Saek people are nominally Buddhist, there is a stark difference between those living in Laos, who have less Buddhist influence, and those in Thailand who have Buddhist temples in every



Population:
30,400 (2000)
36,400 (2010)
43,800 (2020)
Countries: Laos, Thailand
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 50

Overview of the Saek

Other Names: Sek, Seak, Tai Sek, Tai Set, Set, Xaek, Xek, Xec

Population Sources: 15,000 in Laos (1990, Asian Minorities Outreach)

11,000 in Thailand (2000, J Schliesinger [1995 figure])

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Sek

Dialects: 2 (Na Kadok, Khammouan)

Professing Buddhists: 55%

Practising Buddhists: 30%

Christians: 0.2%

Scripture: none

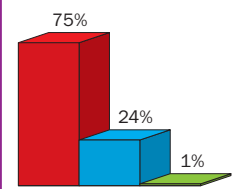
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Saek; Sek; Thai Saek

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: SKB

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