



Population:
 18,050 (2000)
 20,600 (2010)
 24,500 (2020)
Countries: Laos, Thailand
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 40

Overview of the Tai Wang

Other Names: Tai Wang, Angkham, Tai Wang Na Yom, Phu Tai Wang

Population Sources: 10,000 in Laos (2003, P Hattaway)
 8,000 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [1999 figure])

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Lao-Phutai

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 98%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0.2%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

One of the least-known people groups in Southeast Asia is the Tai Wang. More than 10,000 live in several villages in the Viraburi District of Savannakhet Province in central Laos, while an additional 8,000 Tai Wang live in and around the city of Phanna Nikhom in Sakhon Nakhon Province, north-east Thailand. In fact, Tai Wang is the main ethnic group living in the town of Phanna Nikhom, which lies on national highway number 22, about an hour's drive from the Thailand-Laos border.

Like many tribes and ethnic groups in this part of the world, the Tai Wang in Laos and Thailand were separated by a tumultuous history. In 1843, the ancestors of the Tai Wang who live in Thailand were captured as prisoners of war by the Siamese army and taken across the Mekong River from their homeland in central Laos to their present location in Thailand.¹ For two generations they were forced to render manual labour for the Thai authorities.



Xayographix

traditional black dress decorated with 'several rows of colored horizontal stripes at the lower part, a long-sleeved vest buttoned with small silver coins in front and decorated with red bands along the hem. . . Every woman wore a heavy bracelet and a heavy silver belt.'³ These days the women do not wear their traditional dress on a daily basis, but they do wear a modified form of it during important festivals when young Tai Wang maidens dress up in their best clothes in the hope of attracting the eye of a young suitor from a neighbouring village.

Until the 1970s the Tai Wang were very skilled at weaving cotton clothing on their large traditional looms. These days this skill

has all but disappeared, as the practical Tai Wang have found it much easier to buy the modern clothing sold in markets and shops.

The economic backbone of the Tai Wang community in Thailand is agriculture. They are well known for producing watermelon seeds, which are exported as far away

In Laos the government does not recognize the Tai Wang as a distinct people group but has combined them—along with several other loosely related tribes—with the Phutai minority. Indeed, the Tai Wang do share some cultural and linguistic similarities with the Phutai, but as one scholar has stated, the 'languages are comparable but dissimilar. The Tai Wang speak a more distinctive Lao language variety.'² Historically and socially, the Tai Wang do consider themselves a separate people group, while at the same time they acknowledge their connection to the Phutai on a wider scale.

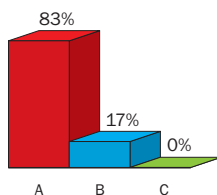
In the past the Tai Wang women wore a

as Europe and the USA. They also grow peanuts, cucumber, chilies, paprika and cotton.⁴

Almost all Tai Wang people in Laos and Thailand believe in Theravada Buddhism. They also worship a spirit known as *san chao pu sae na narong* which, they believe, protects their villages.

There are thought to be a small number of Christians among the Tai Wang. Most of this precious people group live and die without the slightest knowledge of the name of Jesus Christ.

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