

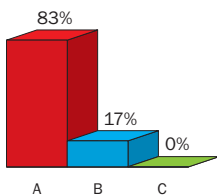


Population:
 450 (2000)
 570 (2010)
 710 (2020)
Countries: Laos
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: none known

Overview of the Tai Laan

Other Names: Tai Lan, Laan
Population Sources: 400 in Laos (1995, Asian Minorities Outreach)
Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Unclassified
Dialects: 0
Professing Buddhists: 55%
Practising Buddhists: 30%
Christians: 0%
Scripture: none
Jesus film: none
Gospel Recordings: none
Christian Broadcasting: none
ROPAL code: none

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

One of the smallest and least-known Buddhist people groups in the world is the 450-strong Tai Laan of north-central Laos.

They inhabit a few villages in the Kham District of Xiangkhoang Province in Laos, less than 100 kilometres (62 mi.) from the Vietnam border. 'Formerly, their home was in an isolated part of Laos and they had little contact with other people. Now, since the construction of Highway No. 6 the Tai Laan have gained exposure to outside people, thoughts and merchandise.'¹

Very little is known about the Tai Laan people. Until recently their existence was not known outside of their area, and little research has been conducted since. While one source lists their religion as animism, with 'a degree of Buddhist influence',² another booklet lists the Tai Laan as one of the Buddhist people groups of northern Laos.³

Many people in Laos say they are Buddhists, but even a casual look at their daily religious practices shows them to be animists, worshipping and appeasing a wide variety of demonic spirits, as well as other spirits the people consider benevolent. It is often during important celebrations and events that groups like the Tai Laan resort to Buddhist rituals. For the Tai Laan, one such event is the burial of their dead.

A Christian missionary once related her experiences of a Buddhist funeral in Laos: 'The thoughtful and devout always secure the presence of a monk at the deathbed. He recites passages from the sacred books, which few understand, because of their being expressed in Pali instead of the

vernacular, and he sprinkles the dying with holy water. . . . If the family of the dead is very poor and cannot afford a cremation, the body is tightly wrapped in a cloth and either laid in a box or tied in a mat. It is then lashed to a pole and is borne to the forest on the shoulders of two men. There a shallow grave is dug, the body buried, and the spot soon forgotten.'⁴

In recent years, Christianity has finally started to gain a small foothold in the nation of Laos. Early missionary endeavours



Christian Far East Ministry

sowed the seed for later harvest, often with the blood of the saints. 'In 1868 the first converts, eight in all, were arrested. Two were taken before the authorities and confessed that they had forsaken Buddhism. The death yoke was then put around their necks and a small rope was passed through holes in their ears and carried tightly over the beam of the house.

After a night of torture they still refused to deny Christ and were told to prepare for execution. Taken off into the jungle, they were pounded to death with clubs and one of them who lived too long under this punishment was also thrust through the heart with a spear.'⁵

As yet, there are no reports of any Christians among the Tai Laan people. One book laments this and states, 'Hopefully, with the opening up of the area to the outside world, the gospel will also be one of the commodities imported to the Tai Laan. At this time, the Tai Laan have no awareness of the gospel. No Scriptures, recordings or other material exists in the Tai Laan language.'⁶