

Approximately 28 million Central Thai people are the main ethnolinguistic group in the country of Thailand. More than 200,000 Central Thais also live scattered in many nations around the world. Wherever a Thai restaurant can be found serving its delicacies, a Central Thai can usually be found nearby. Unlike other Asian peoples such as the Chinese, Indians or Vietnamese, the Thais have not spread out around the globe in such great numbers. Most Thais are happy to remain in their homeland.

The number of Central Thai in Thailand is difficult to estimate because of the high level of overlapping between languages that occurs. Because Central Thai is the national language used in education and media, the majority of the 60 million people in Thailand can speak it. About five million ethnic Chinese people living in Thailand now speak Central Thai as their first language.

The Thai people love their country, their king and their culture.¹ They have a very strong sense of national identity, reinforced by the fact that theirs is the only country in Asia never to be controlled by a colonial power. The Thais are proud of their independence. They changed their name from Siam to *Thailand* (meaning 'Land of the Free') in 1939. The Thais have many sayings that reflect their stubborn resistance to change, such as 'We have been neighbours of the Chinese for four thousand years but we don't use chopsticks!'²

Thai people are known around the world for their gentleness and friendliness, which has given birth to Thailand's nickname as 'The Land of Smiles'. They place great value on meekness, tolerance and humility.³ Underneath this happy veneer, however, lie major social ills that the Thais do not readily acknowledge, such as the more than one

million people working in the sex industry, rampant AIDS, drug abuse and corruption.

The identity of the Thai people is wrapped up in their culture, of which Buddhism is a major component.⁴ It is a common saying that "To be Thai is to be Buddhist". This cultural-religious tie has given Thailand a reputation for being a "graveyard for missions".⁵ Christianity has had a presence in Thailand for almost 500 years. Catholic



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priests accompanied a Portuguese embassy to the nation in 1511. Protestant work commenced more than three centuries later, in 1816. To this day, work among the Thais has been slow. As late as 1957, '140 years after the beginning of resident Protestant Missions, Henry McCorkle correctly observed that Thailand had "more Buddhist temples than Protestant church members".⁶ Over the past century, many godly Christian men

and women have faithfully sowed the seed of the word of God, and a small yet significant Christian minority is beginning to emerge in Thai society.⁷

Today there are an estimated 100,000 Central Thai Christians worldwide (four out of every 1,000 people). The Central Thai remain one of the largest, yet most accessible, unreached groups in the world.



Population:

27,498,200 (2000)
30,060,200 (2010)
32,861,700 (2020)

Countries: Thailand, Taiwan, Myanmar, Singapore, Camodia, Malaysia, USA, Japan, Australia, Brunei, Canada, United Arab Emirates, Finland, China, Laos, United Kingdom, France, Germany, New Zealand and many other nations

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 100,000

Overview of the Central Thai

Other Names: Thai, Central Thai, Siamese, Thai Khom, Thai Klang, Tai Noi, Standard Thai, Bangkok Thai

Population Sources:

20,000,000 to 25,000,000 in Thailand (1990, A Diller)
100,000 in Taiwan (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk)
37,000 in Myanmar (2003, Joshua Project II)
35,000 in Singapore (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk)
28,000 in Cambodia (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk)
20,000 in Malaysia (2003, Joshua Project II)
14,416 in USA (1996 B Grimes—1970 figure)
10,000 in Japan (2003, Joshua Project II)⁸

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Chiang Saeng

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 98%

Practising Buddhists: 55%

Christians: 0.4%

Scripture: Bible 1883; New Testament 1843; Portions 1834

Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings Thai, Thai: Central

Christian Broadcasting: available

ROPAL code: THJ

Status of Evangelization

