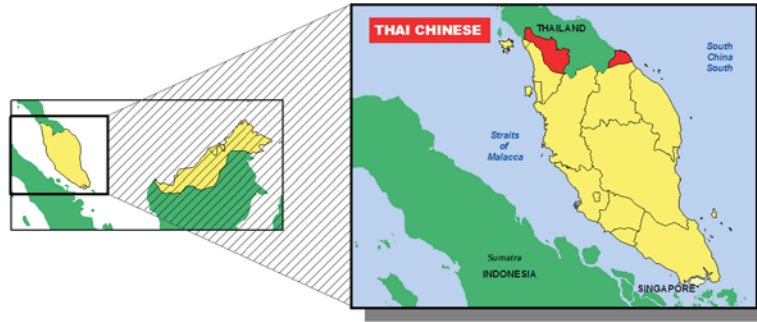


# THAI CHINESE OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA



Population	Major Religion	Language
100,000	Theravada Buddhism	Hokkien/ Malay/Thai

## Who are the Thai Chinese of Peninsular Malaysia?

Thai Chinese are a minority group of acculturated Chinese villagers residing in three northern states Malaysia. They generally have a darker complexion and appearance similar to that of Malays and Thais. The majority of the Thai Chinese have been in their present settlements for four to eight generations and have a long history of interaction with the rural Malays and Thai community.

Originally rural-based and of Hokkien descent, they are known as *Cina Kampung*, which means “rural or countryside Chinese.” While the mainstream Chinese in the same region call them Hokkien-Siam (Siamese Hokkien), the local Thai population labels them *Cin-Thai* (Thai Chinese). Recently, local researchers have labeled them *Peranakan Hokkien Chinese*.

The villagers speak their own version of Chinese Hokkien that has borrowed many Malay and Thai terms. Many speak fluent Malay as well as local Thai. Their settlements exist among Malay and Thai settlements, and are seldom exclusively Chinese. There are at least 60 known Thai Chinese settlements distributed among the states of Kelantan, Kedah, and Perlis.

### What are their lives like?

The early Chinese settlers planted fruit trees in addition to engaging in planting ground nut, coconut, areca nut, and tobacco. Padi was also planted and livestock such as pigs, cattle, and chickens were reared. Presently, they work on small-scale agricultural land in the countryside, especially along the Kelantan River and in the upper regions of the state of Kedah. Through their long association with Malay culture, a significant number of them have gained positions as schoolteachers and clerks,

and other middle income salaried jobs.

Their houses in the rural areas are unique—like traditional Malay and Thai houses that are built on silts, yet their architecture is very Chinese. There are also Malay and Thai influences in their dress and food—a unique combination of Malay, Thai, and Chinese culinary art. Dressing for both men and women in rural areas is the sarong and the women wear a Malay-style blouse called *kebaya*.

### What do they believe?

The Thai Chinese religion is a combination of traditional Chinese Religion and Theravada Buddhism of the Thai variant. They indulge in ancestor and deity worship at home and also pray at Thai Buddhist temples. Besides joss sticks, sacrificial food is offered to ancestors and village deities during festivals.

The community has its own patron deity, and a grand celebration called *ang kong su*, literally meaning the affairs of the deities, is observed during the deity’s birthday. During such a celebration, there are spirit-mediums who perform various religious rites for devotees. In the evening, a Thai Dance-drama called *menora* or the Malay shadow play called *wayang kulit* may be staged.

### What are their needs?

Thai Chinese are very much rural Chinese people and are sometimes shut out from the economic prosperity of the urban Chinese. They have also been isolated from exposure to the good news. Pray for committed believers from the greater Chinese community who can see, relate, and respond to all the needs of the Thai Chinese community.