

# Bulang

Approximately 100,000 Bulang people live in three different countries. The majority (over 80,000) live in Yunnan Province, China—especially in Menghai, Zhenkang, Shuangjiang, Lincang, Lancang and Mojiang counties. In China their villages are often located in extremely remote mountains, some three or four days' walk from the nearest road. Bulang history in China dates back as early as AD 220.<sup>1</sup>

Eastern Shan State in Myanmar is home to about 14,000 Bulang, especially in the Mong Yang area and near the city of Kengtung. Of the three countries inhabited by the Bulang, Thailand has the smallest number, with 1,200 people. Of these, 1,000 live outside Mae Sai City near the Golden Triangle where Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 200 Bulang work as gardeners in Bangkok. The Bulang in Thailand fled China in the 1960s because of persecution from the Communist authorities. About 200 families first moved into Myanmar, before entering Thailand in 1974.

The Bulang language is of great interest to scholars because of its uniqueness and variety.<sup>3</sup> It is a part of the Mon-Khmer linguistic family, related to Wa and Palaung. Despite the relatively small population, the Bulang in China use two different

alphabetic scripts: the *Totham* script is used in the Xishuangbanna Prefecture, while the *Tolek* script is used in Dehong Prefecture. Among the small number of Bulang in Thailand there is remarkable linguistic variety, with one report listing between six and ten dialects spoken in just one Bulang refugee village.<sup>4</sup>



Dwayne Graybill

ever heard of Christ, and few care to seek for anything beyond what they already believe. They strive to observe the Buddhist *tripitaka* (three baskets) teaching: self-discipline, preaching and discussing doctrine. The Bulang believe that right thinking, sacrifices and self-denial will enable the soul to reach *nirvana*, a state of eternal bliss.<sup>5</sup>

Most Bulang also observe animistic rituals. Since the arrival of Buddhism they have cloaked their spirit worship with a veneer of Buddhist teachings, but they still fear and appease a large number of spirits. When a Bulang person dies, the family members of the deceased 'kill a chicken to call back the soul of the deceased, bath the body, dress it in new clothes and finally wrap it in white sheets. The [animistic] Bulang usually bury the dead in a wooden coffin on their village burial ground. The Buddhist Bulang, however, burn their deceased community members at the temple compound.'<sup>6</sup>

For centuries the Bulang have been ardent followers of Theravada Buddhism. They were first converted by their Lu and Tai Mao neighbours. Today, 'Temples and idols are scattered throughout their communities. Many Bulang men enter the Buddhist monkhood, which brings great honour to their families. Few Bulang have

There are perhaps 100 Bulang Christians today: 50 in China and a few dozen in Myanmar and Thailand. Protestant missionaries reached out to the Bulang in China prior to the Communist takeover in 1949, and 30 families were converted.<sup>7</sup> Most of them gave up their faith during the horrific persecution of the Cultural Revolution.



## Population:

95,050 (2000)  
120,050 (2010)  
146,100 (2020)

**Countries:** China, Myanmar, Thailand

**Buddhism:** Theravada  
**Christians:** 100

## Overview of the Bulang

**Other Names:** Blang, Pulang, Pula, Plang, Kawa, Kontoi, Sen Chun, Hkawa, K'wa, Khon Doi, Plaang, Braang, Bprang, Brang, Prong, Hkun Loi, Loi, Tai Loi, Lo, Lua

### Population Sources:

79,850 in China (2000, P Hattaway)<sup>8</sup>  
14,000 in Myanmar (2000, B Grimes [1994 figure])  
1,200 in Thailand (1998, SIL)  
**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer,

Palaungic-Khmuic, Palaungic, Western Palaungic, Waic, Bulang

**Dialects:** 2 (Phang, Kem Degne)

**Professing Buddhists:** 80%

**Practising Buddhists:** 35%

**Christians:** 0.1%

**Scripture:** work in progress in Thailand

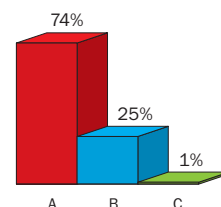
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** Blang: Blang-Shan

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** BLR

## 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