

Approximately 120,000 Khun people live in north-east Myanmar (formerly Burma) and areas of northern Thailand. There is some confusion regarding the Khun people. Some sources state that there are 100,000 living in Thailand, but this is not accurate.¹ There are few Khun communities in Thailand, with perhaps a population of only 5,000. The authoritative *Ethnologue*, which lists every known language in the world, doubts there are any Khun in Thailand at all.² Joachim Schliesinger says that the Khun in Thailand inhabit four districts (Muang, San Pa Tong, Sam Lang and Hang Dong) in Chiang Mai Province.³

Part of the reason for this confusion is that the Tai-speaking groups in the Kengtung valley area in Myanmar's Shan State—where the Khun live—seem to be ethnically, culturally and linguistically interrelated. It is said that the Khun River, which flows through their homeland, lent its name to the Khun people. They are distinguished from the other Tai groups in Shan State by 'slight differences in dialect,⁴ physiognomy and the dresses of their womenfolk. The Khun are taller and fairer, and their noses are not so flat.'⁵ The Khun should not be confused with the Khouen, Khuen or Tai Khouen people of Laos and Thailand, who speak a Mon-Khmer language.

The Khun people themselves are said to have a 'deep and strongly rooted culture of self-determination. Their homeland . . . has been their center of civilization for many centuries.'⁶ Kengtung City has been the main centre of habitation for the Khun since a son of the Lanna King Mengrai founded the Kingdom of Kengtung in the 12th century. The ancestors of the Khun in

Thailand were war captives brought from Myanmar in the early 1800s.

Although the large majority of Khun people are Theravada Buddhists, their religious worldview includes strong elements of spirit worship and ancestor worship. 'The most important spirit is the spirit of the land, which has to be propitiated daily with food and beverage, at the spirit house found in almost every Khun compound. The Khun honour ancestral spirits. On the full moon in June, Khun villagers worship their ancestors with offerings of boiled pork meat, chicken,



Create International

fruit, rice and flowers at a special altar inside their houses.'⁷

In the past few decades a significant Christian church has emerged in Myanmar's Shan State. Thousands of people from ethnic groups such as the Shan, Akha and Lahu have put their trust in Christ. As a result, some Khun have heard the

gospel, and about 2,000 are Christians today. In 1997, the Christian mission Asia Harvest supplied New Testaments to the Khun Christians in Myanmar. The Bibles were in the Lu script of 1933, but the Khun were able to read it easily and were deeply appreciative. One Khun pastor said, 'Before now the Buddhist monks mocked us, saying, "If your God is so great, how come his book is not in our language?" Now that we have God's Word in our script, the monks have requested hundreds of copies and are studying the words of Jesus intently.'⁸



Population:
117,400 (2000)
131,700 (2010)
147,900 (2020)
Countries: Myanmar, Thailand
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 2,000

Overview of the Khun

Other Names: Tai Khun, Hkun, Khun Shan, Gon Shan, Khuen, Khoen, Tai Khoen, Tai-Khuen

Population Sources: 100,000 in Myanmar (1990, A Diller)
5,000 in Thailand (2003, P Hattaway)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 95%

Practising Buddhists: 60%

Christians: 1.7%

Scripture: Portions 1938

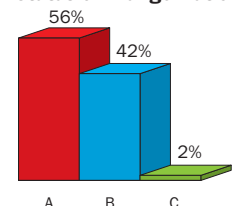
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Khun; Khun Shan; Tai Khun

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: KKH

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