



**Population:**

360 (2000)

450 (2010)

570 (2020)

**Countries:** Laos, Myanmar

**Buddhism:** Theravada

**Christians:** none known

## Overview of the Tai Doi

**Other Names:** Doi

**Population Sources:** 320 in Laos (1995, L Chazee)

also in Myanmar

**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Palaungic-Khmuic, Palaungic, Western Palaungic, Angkuic

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 70%

**Practising Buddhists:** 25%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

The *Tai Doi*—whose name simply means ‘mountain people’—are a tiny little-known group living on both banks of the Mekong River in Southeast Asia. In 1995, a total of 320 *Tai Doi* people (in 54 families) inhabited three villages in the Long District of Luang Namtha Province in north-west Laos. The names of the three villages are Muang Kham, Dondchay and Muong.<sup>1</sup> The *Tai Doi* have lived in Long District of Luang Namtha in Laos for at least five generations. In April 1994, some 19 *Tai Doi* families reportedly left the village of Muang

Kham with all of their possessions and walked two days to join Lu and *Tai Dam* villages.<sup>2</sup> A small number of *Tai Loi* are also located on the other side of the Mekong River in the eastern part of Myanmar’s Shan State.

There is some confusion regarding the differences between *Tai Doi* and *Tai Loi*. The authoritative *Ethnologue* lists *Tai Doi* as a dialect of *Tai Loi* and places it under the Palaungic branch of the Mon-Khmer language family,<sup>3</sup> while the *Atlas des Ethnies et des Sous-Ethnies du Laos* places *Tai Loi* under the *Tai* section and even states that the *Tai Doi* language is close to *Tai Dam*, while their culture is similar to that of the *Lu*.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that the *Tai Doi* are a Mon-Khmer speaking group, but the confusion is caused by the fact that they have lived for centuries surrounded by *Tai*-speaking peoples and have absorbed many linguistic and cultural influences. The *Tai Loi* live further to the north, near the borders of Laos, China and Myanmar.

Neither group is even mentioned in official literature on ethnic groups in Laos.

The *Tai Doi* share their villages with *Lu* and *Akha* people. Each *Tai Doi* house contains two families. Shamans are consulted to locate the most auspicious place to build before construction begins, which usually ends up being near a river or stream.

The *Lu* have been influential in converting their *Tai Doi* neighbours to Buddhism. The *Tai Doi* also worship their ancestors once a year. Both the animistic and ancestor

worship practices of the *Tai Doi* do not stop them from claiming to be Theravada Buddhists. Many *Tai Doi* people in Laos and Myanmar are animists, appealing a variety of spirit beings of which they live in fear. If anything goes wrong during the course of the year, such as a poor crop or an accident, the blame is always placed on the family involved for having done

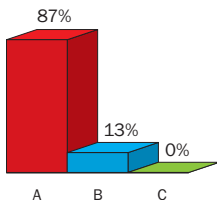
something wrong to offend the spirits. Buddhist monks and shamans are summoned, and for a price they chant and pray over the family, seeking to correct the spiritual imbalance that has caused the spirits to display their displeasure.

Missionary organizations have generally refused to place any importance on small tribes like the *Tai Doi*, and researchers have been hesitant to profile them, preferring to focus on the larger groups instead. Consequently, few prayers have ever been spoken on behalf of the *Tai Doi*. They remain an unevangelized and unreached people group with little access to the gospel.



Myanmar Faces and Places

## 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