

Gong

The Gong are one of the smallest distinct Buddhist people groups in the world. In 1995 they numbered just 200 individuals living in two villages in western Thailand. Thirty Gong families live in Ban Kok Chiang in the Dan Chang District of Suphan Buri Province. Their village is located just a mile or so from the site of the 1991 Lauda Air disaster, in which all 223 people on board died. An additional ten Gong families inhabit Ban Khog Kwai in the Ban Rai District of Uthai Thani Province. In both villages the Gong live in community with Thai people. Inter-marriage with the Thai is widespread, so that today there are only a few Gong people who are considered pure-bred.

achieved many soldiers were left behind in southern Yunnan, where they intermarried with local women and gradually formed into the Jino tribe.¹ Could it be that some of those early settlers moved into Myanmar and—many centuries later—ended up as the Gong people in western Thailand?

The Gong language is still spoken by all adults in this people group, although Gong children reportedly now speak Thai as their main language at home. Despite their small numbers, researchers have discovered linguistic differences between those living in the two Gong villages and have separated them as two dialects. The two villages have minimal contact with each other.



Xayographix

The origins of this small tribe are a mystery. It appears that they were once much more numerous, inhabiting many villages in Kanchanaburi Province and westward towards today's border between Thailand and Myanmar. The Gong say they moved to Thailand from Myanmar about 100 years ago, but it appears there are no people identified as Gong living in Myanmar today.

Clues as to the origins of the Gong may be found in their language, which is a unique variety within the Southern Lolo branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The most closely related language to Gong appears to be Jino, spoken by about 23,000 people in far-away Yunnan Province in south-west China. The Jino claim their ancestors were soldiers who fought in Kong Ming's army during its southern conquests around AD 200. After the peace was

Buddhism, and they willingly accepted. Although all Gong people now profess Buddhism as their religion, they have retained many of their traditional animistic beliefs. 'They believe in supernatural powers that inhabit the sky, forest, trees, water and other natural surroundings.' Once a year, the entire village 'brings chickens and pig heads to make sacrifices to the village spirit. The chickens are killed near the spirit house, and placed together with the pig heads inside the spirit house. After the shaman has completed the rituals, the villagers take the chickens and pig heads back to their homes, where they are eaten.'²

There are no known Gong Christians. Few have ever heard the gospel. Most mission organizations consider them a low priority because of their small population.



Population:
210 (2000)
230 (2010)
250 (2020)
Countries: Thailand
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: none known

Throughout their history the Gong were animists, worshipping and being enslaved by a large number of spirit-beings. About 70 years ago the Thais converted the Gong to

Overview of the Gong

Other Names: Ugong, Lawa, Ugawng, U Gong, Giong, Kwang, U Kwang

Population Sources: 200 in Thailand (2000, J Schliesinger [1995 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Lolo-Burmese, Loloish, Southern

Dialects: 2 (Kok Chiang, Suphanaburi)

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 65%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

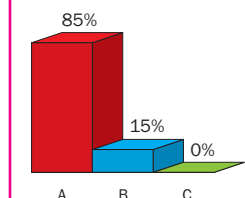
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: UGO

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