



**Population:**  
 257,900 (2000)  
 292,700 (2010)  
 333,900 (2020)  
**Countries:** Thailand, Laos, Cambodia  
**Buddhism:** Theravada  
**Christians:** 9,500

## Overview of the Kui

**Other Names:** Sui, Suay, Suai, Suoi, Souei, Suel, Soai, Kuoy, Kuy, Cui, Kui Souei, Khamen-Boran, Aouei, Dui, Xuay, Xouay

**Population Sources:**  
 180,000 in Thailand (2000, J Schliesinger [1995 figure])<sup>1</sup>  
 45,498 in Laos (1995 census)<sup>2</sup>  
 15,495 in Cambodia (2000, B Grimes [1989 figure])

**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Eastern Mon-Khmer, Katic, West Katic, Kuay-Yoe

**Dialects:** 7 (Damrey, Anlour, O, Kraol, Antra, Chang, Na Nhyang)

**Professing Buddhists:** 75%

**Practising Buddhists:** 30%

**Christians:** 3.5%

**Scripture:** New Testament 1978, Portions 1965

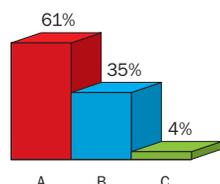
**Jesus film:** available

**Gospel Recordings:** Thailand: Kuy, Kuoy, Kui, Kui Antra; Cambodia: Suai, Sui, Suoi; Laos: Souei Bung Sai, Souei Kapeu, Souei Kham Noi, Souei Saneum, Souei Thateng, Sui North, Sui South, Sui Tunla

**Christian Broadcasting:** available

**ROPAL code:** KDT

## 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

More than 260,000 Kui people are scattered over three countries in Southeast Asia. The majority (approximately 190,000) live in east-central Thailand in the three provinces of Ubon Ratchathani, Sisaket and Surin.<sup>3</sup> Over 50,000 Kui inhabit more than 70 villages in neighbouring parts of southern Laos,<sup>4</sup> while another 20,000 make their homes in north-east Cambodia.<sup>5</sup> Kui, or Kuy, is the self-name of this group in all three countries where they live. The Thais and Laos call them Sui, or Suay.

Although the origins of the Kui are uncertain, most historians consider them the first inhabitants of parts of Thailand and Cambodia. Later, the Khmer and Thais entered the region and took control. One source states, 'The Negroid features apparent in some Kui may indicate a relationship to the Negroid aborigines of the Malay peninsula. Other Kui are fair skinned, a result from intermixing with Indonesians or Melanesians, driven out or absorbed by subsequent Mon-Khmer invaders.'<sup>6</sup>

In Laos today the Kui are recognized as the best elephant handlers in the nation. Their counterparts in Thailand, however, have been forced to give up this profession due to the deforestation of their habitat. The last wild elephant captured in Surin Province was in 1961.

The Kui (especially those in Laos) have a strongly matriarchal and matrilineal society. 'The wife takes care of her family's finances. All possessions and the family name are handed down through the female side of the family. After marriage, newlyweds must live with the bride's family.'<sup>7</sup>

Although the majority of Kui people profess Buddhism as their religion, for most it

seems little more than a thin veneer covering a deeper belief in animism. The Kui in Thailand have been described as practising 'a kind of folk Buddhism, modified with beliefs in spirits, sorcerers, ghosts, evil spells and the like. Therefore, although they are all officially considered Buddhists, the Kui have retained many of their traditional animistic beliefs and superstitious practices and rituals. They feel that many powerful spirits, living in the forest and hills, must be suitably propitiated in order to avoid misfortune.'<sup>8</sup>

Between three and four per cent of Kui people today are estimated to believe in Christ. In Laos there are 'several Catholic villages'<sup>9</sup> among the Kui, while in Thailand,



Christian Far East Ministry

where mission-ary work can be conducted more freely, there are thousands of Kui Christians of various denominations. The New Testament was translated into Kui in

1978, using the Thai script because the Kui did not have an orthography of their own. Scripture portions were first translated in 1965. Today the Kui have Christian radio broadcasts, the Jesus film and more than a dozen gospel recordings in various Kui dialects. Despite the efforts that the body of Christ has expended to reach them, most Kui remain indifferent to the gospel. The Kui Church is generally institutionalized and unable to display a strong vibrant witness to their communities.