

Lao Ti



Population:

200 (2000)
220 (2010)
240 (2020)

Countries: Thailand

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: none known

The second smallest of the Buddhist people groups profiled in this book are the two hundred Lao Ti people of Ratchaburi Province in western Thailand. They inhabit just two villages—Ban Goh and Nong Ban Gaim in the Chom Bung District not far from Thailand’s border with Myanmar. They share their communities with families from other ethnicities, especially the Central Thai, Northern Thai and Isan. Despite their small numbers, the Lao Ti were first studied by the anthropologist Erik Seidenfaden in 1939.¹

Although they now live far from Laos, the Lao Ti say their ancestors came from Vientiane in Laos, where they were ox cart drivers ‘who transported goods and materials across the countryside. Because of this itinerant

occupation, their group name was derived from the Lao term *ti* meaning *pai nai* in Thai or ‘where are you going?’ in English.² Elderly Lao Ti still recall the oral history of their people. They say their forefathers were slaves of the Lao rulers in the mid-1800s when Vietnamese and Siamese armies laid claim to Laos. During the reign of the great Thai King Chulalongkorn, the Lao Ti were captured by the Siamese army and taken as prisoners of war to their present location in Ratchaburi Province in Thailand.

Although almost all young Lao Ti people today have lost the use of their mother tongue, elderly Lao Ti can still speak their distinct dialect, which is different from that of all neighbouring people including the Lao Song, who live in a nearby village. Because

the Lao Ti vernacular is not being taught to the younger generations, it is likely that the language will become extinct when the present elderly generation dies out.

Animals play an important role in the economy of the two Lao Ti villages. ‘They raise buffaloes, oxen, horses, chickens, ducks and pigs, the former as draft animals and the latter for consumption. Occasionally, Lao Ti men hunt deer, wild pigs, rats and snakes to supplement their daily diet. They catch fresh water fish with hooks and

traps in streams and ponds.³

Many ethnic groups in Southeast Asia observe the practice of the groom paying a bride price before a wedding can take place, but the traditional bride price paid by the Lao Ti was unique and reflected their history. A young Lao Ti man had to give an ox cart, one pair of draft oxen and 60 *baht* to his parents-in-law.



Paul Hattaway

Elderly Lao Ti people can still remember doing this when they were younger, but the custom has gradually died out. In fact, these days the Lao Ti have sold almost all of their traditional carts (which were wooden and made with huge wheels) to be garden decorations in restaurants and private residences.

The Lao Ti say that every single member of their small tribe is a Buddhist. Parents consider it a great honour to dedicate their son to serve in the temple as a monk or novice. Unlike many Buddhist groups in Thailand, the Lao Ti say ‘they do not believe in any of the supernatural spirits inhabiting the surroundings. Because of their disbelief, they neither have shamans or religious practitioners to please these spirits nor do they make any sacrifices.’⁴

Overview of the Lao Ti

Other Names: Lao Di

Population Sources: 200 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [1998 figure])

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

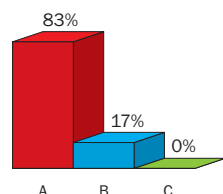
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

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