



Population:
 50,000 (2000)
 54,600 (2010)
 59,700 (2020)

Countries: Thailand
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 300

Overview of the Lao Wieng

Other Names: Tai Wieng, Lao Wiengchan, Thai Wiengchan, Vieng, Wiang

Population Sources: 50,000 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [2000 figure])

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 90%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0.6%

Scripture: available (Lao and Thai scripts)

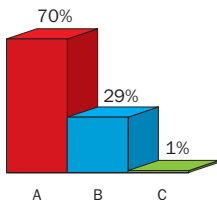
Jesus film: available (Lao and Thai)

Gospel Recordings: available (Lao and Thai)

Christian Broadcasting: available

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

At least 50,000 people in central and north-east Thailand are known as the Lao Wieng. They inhabit villages in the provinces of Prachinburi, Udon Thani,¹ Nakhon Sawan,² Nakhon Pathom, Chai Nat, Lopburi, Saraburi, Phetchaburi and Roi Et. In the past 20 years a significant number of Lao Wieng have moved to Bangkok in search of employment.

The Lao Wieng do not usually appear on lists of ethnic groups in Thailand, but there is little doubt that they are a group with a cohesive self-identity, a common history and a proud culture.

The Thais name this group 'Wieng' because they are the descendants of prisoners of war who originally came from Wieng (Vientiane) in Laos. Joachim Schliesinger, in his excellent book *Tai Groups in Thailand*, recounts the tumultuous time that led to this group being present in Thailand today: 'Because of rivalry for the throne, the once united and powerful Lao kingdom of Lan Xang split in 1713 into three weak kingdoms. . . .

The result was that the rulers of all three states soon had to acknowledge Siamese suzerainty. King Anuvong of Vientiane took offense at the Siamese taking thousands of Lao slaves for doing corvée labor in central Siam. In 1827, he recruited a large army to attack the Siamese garrison in Nakhon Ratchasima and seized vast areas in the Isan region. The Siamese army immediately counterattacked and overran the Lao defense. . . . Within a few days the Siamese sacked Vientiane and following an order from their King Nangklao (Rama III) totally destroyed Vientiane, completely

depopulating it and deporting thousands of its inhabitants—the Lao Wieng—to central Thailand as war captives.³

After generations as slaves, the Lao Wieng and other communities were granted their freedom by King Chulalongkorn. Today they are full citizens of Thailand.

Despite their long separation from their homeland, the Lao Wieng still retain different cultural and linguistic traits from the Thais surrounding them. Until recently Lao Wieng women wore a traditional dress, which consisted of a knee-length *phaa*



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sin, woven from rough cotton and interwoven with several multi-coloured stripes of cloth. These days the Lao Wieng wear the same clothing as their Thai neighbours (except for certain festivals). The Lao Wieng men who live in farming areas are hard-working agriculturists, while those living in more remote rural locations are skilled hunters and fishermen. They use bamboo traps to catch field rats, the meat of which is considered a delicacy.

From long before their forced departure from Laos, the Lao Wieng have been Buddhists. 'The spirits, however. . . must be propitiated by offerings of food at small spirit houses located in the compound or under the eaves of houses. Every Lao Wieng village has a communal spirit house outside the village, where the villagers meet once a year to bring sacrifices of chicken, pig heads, and rice whiskey to the guardian of the village, to ask for protection and good luck for the community.'⁴ There are just a few Christians among this needy unreached people group.