

Tai Bueng



Population:

5,700 (2000)
6,200 (2010)
6,800 (2020)

Countries: Thailand

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: none known

Overview of the Tai Bueng

Other Names: Tai Berg, Lao Bueng, Lao Berg

Population Sources: 5,600 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [1998 figure])

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Unclassified

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 95%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

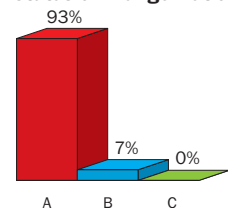
Jesus film: none

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

Few people have ever heard of the existence of the 5,700 Tai Bueng people of central Thailand. They live in two villages within the Phatthana Nikhom District of Lopburi Province, north of Bangkok. Ban Klok Salung is the larger of the two villages and is considered 'pure Tai Bueng'. Its approximately 5,000 residents still maintain many traditional customs. The smaller village is called Ban Manao Hwan and is home to about 600 Tai Bueng and families from other ethnic groups.

Quite simply, no one knows much about the origins of the Tai Bueng people. The name *bueng* means 'big', or 'great'—therefore they consider themselves the Great Tai, but they are not to be confused with the Tai Yay (Shan) people of northern Thailand and Myanmar, whose name carries the same meaning. Researcher Joachim Schliesinger points out that 'There are no known Tai Bueng communities in Laos or Vietnam, nor can any of them explain from where and how the designation derived. They insist strongly that they are Tai Bueng people distinct from other Tai groups.'¹ Not until linguists visit the Tai Bueng and conduct extensive comparative research can an accurate picture be drawn of how the Tai Bueng language relates to other Tai varieties in Southeast Asia.²

Some of the older Tai Bueng people claim that their ancestors migrated to their present location in Thailand more than 200 years ago, from a place in north-eastern Laos called Muang Ou Then. They don't know why they made such a long journey,

but several other groups first entered Thailand from Laos as war captives during this same period.

Unlike many small tribal groups who have largely been assimilated to Thai culture, the Tai Bueng women still wear their distinctive clothes—a traditional *chong kaben* dress with a heavy silver belt around the waist.

Tai Bueng men are keen fishermen. They live near the Pa Sak River, which has an abundant supply of fish. The Tai Bueng use homemade wooden boats to go fishing and also construct traps of thinly sliced bamboo. The Thai government has constructed a dam on the river, with the result that half of the people in



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Ban Manao Hwan had to relocate to avoid the raised water line. Besides rice, 'sugar cane and corn are cultivated as cash crops. The Tai Bueng also grow cotton, vegetables and fruits such as banana, jackfruit, melons and mangoes.'³

It would be safe to assume that all Tai Bueng people are Buddhists. Each of their villages has its own temple, and the people zealously observe all of the Buddhist festivals and rituals. 'The temple at Ban Manao Hwan, including its *vihar*, *sala*, bell tower and quarters for the monks, will be flooded when the Pa Sak River dam is completed; all religious relics and removable items will be relocated to a new site.'⁴

Christianity has not made any impact among the Tai Bueng. They remain an unreached and unevangelized group without any known Christians in their midst.