

# CONG

Although numbering only about 1,500 people in Vietnam, the Cong speak five different dialects and are known by a host of ethnic names.

The Cong in Vietnam live in the Muong Te District of Lai Chau Province in the extreme northwest of Vietnam, bordering Laos and China. More than 20,000 Cong live in Laos, where they are better known as the *Phunoi*. Speakers of the same language as the Cong also live in Thailand.

The Cong were probably part of a larger Tibeto-Burman race that formerly lived in southern China before migrating down the rivers and waterways into Southeast Asia. Today the *Bisu*, *Puyen* and *Mpi* languages are closely related to Cong.

In the past the Cong lived in the mountains, but now they live in stilted houses on the banks of the Black River.

Fishing is the primary occupation of the Cong. They catch fish by hand, spear, or by placing poison in the water, which stupefies the fish and makes them easy to catch. In recent years the Cong have purchased boats from their Thai neighbors, and have learned to catch great quantities of fish by using nets.

Marriage across ethnic lines was strictly forbidden until the last 20 years. These days the Cong are allowed to intermarry with members of neighboring tribes such as the Thai, Hani and Sila.

Although the Cong may get married and live together, the actual wedding ceremony is not held until after the birth of the first child. In many Asian tribal societies a woman is not truly considered married until she has proven able to bear children. Married Cong women are easily identifiable by their custom of wearing their hair tied up in a bun.

After the birth, the baby's placenta is placed inside a bamboo tube and buried under the mother's bed. Six or seven days after the umbilical cord has fallen off, the baby's grandfather or uncle ties a string around the infant's wrist and gives it a name.

Relatives and friends coming to visit the mother and newborn baby often remark how ugly or stupid the infant is. This is done to trick any demons who may be present into thinking the baby is of no special quality and is not worth harming. If the baby suffers much sickness, the Cong take it as a bad sign and another name may be chosen.

Cong houses are separated into four sections. The central part is reserved for socializing with guests and drinking alcohol. The next section contains

the bedroom of the oldest son and his wife. The parent's bedroom, which is located directly opposite, contains the family's ancestral altar.

Ancestor worship is the dominant religion among the Cong. Although technically it is not an organized religion, ancestor worship shapes the world-view of many tribal groups throughout Asia in such a manner that it can become a major stumbling block in seeing people embrace Christianity.

Cong ancestors down to the third generation are worshipped. Each of the four Cong clans—Lo, Ly, Chao and Hu—has its own way of observing their rituals. Sacrifices are held on several occasions throughout the year at appointed times such as New Year's Day, after the Rice Harvest, and at weddings, births and funerals.

When a parent dies the body is kept in the bedroom, but the body of a dead child is placed in the center of the house. A shaman is called in to determine the place where the body should be buried. The shaman uses eggs to ask the spirits where the burial site should be. The eggs, apparently by diabolical power, turn black at a certain spot in the forest.

The coffin for Cong funerals is constructed from a single length of hollowed out tree trunk. The eldest son must show he is in mourning by shaving his head for up to one year.

There are no known Christians among the Cong, who live in one of the most far-flung parts of Vietnam. Although there is a significant Christian presence in southern and central Vietnam, very few parts of northern Vietnam have been touched by Christianity.

The Cong are still waiting to hear the Gospel for the first time in their long history.



Pray for the Cong

- 1 Ask God to glorify the Name of Jesus Christ throughout northern Vietnam, which has been under Communist domination for more than 50 years.
- 2 Pray that evangelists would travel up and down the Black River and plant strong churches among the Cong who live in small villages on the river's banks.
- 3 Pray the Cong would be known as a Christian people who have found forgiveness and liberty in the sacrifice of Christ.



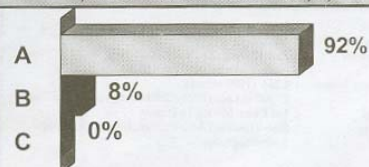
**Population:**  
1,261 (1989)  
1,560 (2000)  
1,910 (2010)

**Language:**  
Sino-Tibetan

**Religion:**  
Ancestor Worship

**Christians:**  
none known

## Status of Evangelization (Awareness of Christ and the Gospel)



A = have never heard the Gospel or the name of Christ  
B = were evangelized but have not yet become Christians  
C = Adherents to any form of Christianity

## Overview of the Cong

Countries : Laos, Vietnam, Thailand  
Pronunciation : "Kong"  
Other Names : Xam Khoong, Xa Coong, Xa, Coong, Mang La, Phunoi, Puno, Phomoy, Xa Xam Khoong, Xa Xeng  
Population Source : 1,261 (1989 census), 20,000 in Laos (1993 P Johnstone); also in Thailand  
Location : Lai Chau: Muong Te District  
Language : Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo, Lolo, Southern, Phanoi

Dialects (5) : Black Khoany, White Khoany, Mung, Hwethom, Khaskhong  
Subgroups : 0  
Religion : Ancestor Worship, Animism, Polytheism, Shamanism  
Christians : none known  
Scripture : none  
Jesse film : none  
Gospel Recordings : none  
Christian Radio : none  
ROPAL code : PH000