

# KHMU

More than 50,000 Khmu people live in northern Vietnam in five provinces along the Viet-Lao border. The majority are located in Nghe An Province. Others live in Lai Chau, Son La, Thanh Hoa and Yen Bai provinces. The greatest concentration of Khmu people in Asia are found in Laos. They are scattered throughout many parts of the country and number more than 400,000. Khmu communities are also located in Thailand, Myanmar, China, and as refugees in the United States, primarily in Santa Ana, California; Fort Worth, Texas; and Oklahoma City.

Most Khmu villages are relocated every three or four years after the land in the area has been exhausted and no longer produces a good harvest.

Despite being recognized as the original inhabitants of Laos, the Khmu have a long history of oppression and conflict with other peoples. They were driven from the most prosperous land on the plains by Lao invaders from southern China almost one thousand years ago. Many Khmu became slaves of the Lao. Still today the Khmu are widely known as *Kha*—a derogatory name meaning 'slaves'.

Basket making and food production allow the Khmu to barter with other ethnic groups for those items they are unable to make, such as cloth, salt and tools. The Khmu usually come off worse than the traders they are dealing with, as they do not have a reputation as sharp businessmen. Until the 1970s the Khmu did not use bank notes.

Shells were used as currency. Because their homes are situated far from the ocean, shells were considered a precious commodity. Today the Khmu use the shells as ornaments. Khmu women often tie them together and hang them around their necks. At a wedding the groom's family must give the bride a specified amount of this ancient currency.

In Khmu culture sons take their father's family names and daughters take their mother's. Every surname represents an animal or plant which those who bear that name are not allowed to touch. Some of the most popular names are *rvai* ('tiger'), *imoong* ('fox'), *ti ac* ('deer'), *thrang* ('phoenix'), and *om* ('bird').

The Khmu are animists. They believe all their actions are controlled by the supernatural cosmos. Their lives are seen as pre-ordained by forces more powerful than them.

Among the numerous spirits (*hroi*) worshipped by the Khmu are the *hroi Ivang* ('the spirit of heaven'), *chun drai* ('the spirit of thunder'), *hroi ple* ('the spirit of the earth'), *pru dong* (the water snake which represents the spirit of the water and the rivers), and *rvai*



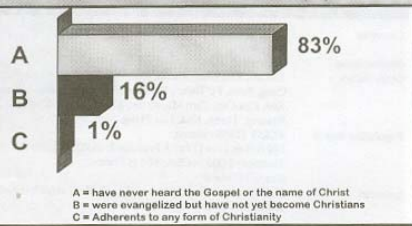
**Population:**  
42,853 (1989)  
53,200 (2000)  
64,900 (2010)

**Language:**  
Mon-Khmer

**Religion:**  
Animism

**Christians:**  
100

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



(the spirit of the tiger which represents the vastness and power of the forest).

Until recently the Khmu lived in fear of tigers. Many communities were completely decimated by attacks from tigers. People never ventured outside their villages at night, and in the daytime traveled in groups of people to defend themselves. Today there are few tigers left except in the most remote places.

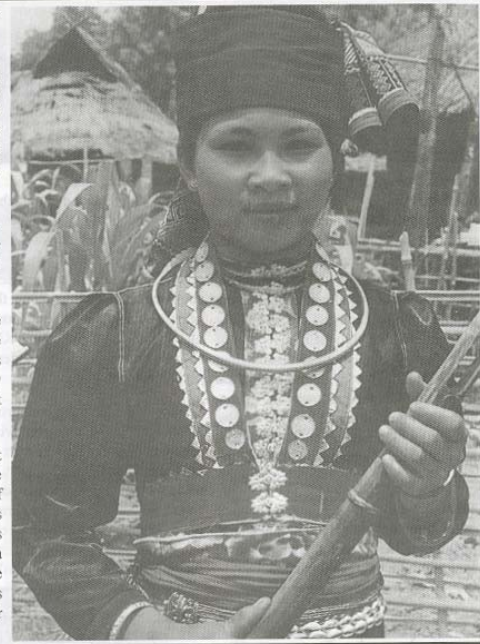
Every year the Khmu in Laos hold festivals to worship the spirits of the village and their ancestors, as well as praying for a plentiful harvest and good fortune.

There are only a handful of believers among the Khmu in Vietnam, but in Laos they are one of the strongest Christian groups. Various missions have targeted the Khmu in Laos since the early 1900s, sowing the seeds for the harvest of at least 50,000 Khmu believers in Laos today.<sup>23</sup>

Many Khmu in Laos are coming to Christ through Khmu Gospel radio broadcasts. Some believe the Khmu in Laos are on the verge of mass conversion. The short-wave signal is targeted at the Khmu in Laos, however, and is difficult to pick up in Vietnam. In 1997 a Khmu man in Vietnam heard people in Laos were talking about God and walked for four days through the jungles to hear the message. After receiving Christ he then walked home again!

The Khmu are not considered difficult to reach with the Gospel—most just haven't had the opportunity to hear it yet. It has also proven vital for the Khmu to hear the Gospel from another Khmu. Foreign mission work among them has proven relatively fruitless, while national workers have reaped a great harvest.

Bible portions were translated into the Khmu language almost 80 years ago, and new Bible translation projects are currently under way.



## Pray for the Khmu

- 1 Pray the revival that is presently under way among the Khmu in Laos would spread to the unevangelized Khmu in Vietnam as well as other ethnic groups throughout the region.
- 2 Ask the Lord to raise up Khmu believers to take the Gospel into northern Vietnam.
- 3 Pray for the translators of the Khmu Bible and other Scripture work. Pray their work may be both accurate and quick.

## Overview of the Khmu

Countries	: Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, USA, China, France, Myanmar	Language	: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Khmuic, Mal-Khmu, Khmu
Pronunciation	: "Keh-moo"	Dialects	: 0
Other Names	: Xa Cau, Kha Klau, Thenh, Kho-Mu, Tay Hay, Viet Cang, Tenh, Pu Thenh, Kimömu, Khomu, Khamu, Men Xen, Kha Cau, Cam Mu, Kernu, Khamu, Mou, Khamuk, Pouteng, Theng, Kha, Lao Terng, Samon	Subgroups (2)	: Quang Lam, Lao Thenh
Population Source	: 42,853 (1989 census), 389,694 in Laos (1985 F. Prochan); 15,000-40,000 in Thailand; 2,000 in USA; 500 in France; also in Myanmar	Religion	: Animism, Buddhism, Christianity
Location	: Nghe An, Lai Chau, Son La, Thanh Hoa; some have settled in Yen Bai	Christians	: 100
		Scripture	: Portions 1918; work in progress
		Jesus film	: none
		Gospel Recordings	: Khmu #01005
		Christian Radio	: available (FEBC)
		ROPAL code	: KJG00