

LU

More than 4,000 Lu people live in northwest Vietnam. The Lu are part of one of Southeast Asia's most ancient races, the Tai Lu. The homeland of the Lu is the region of Sipsongpanna in southern China where more than 500,000 Lu live. Sipsongpanna means 'Twelve thousand rice-fields' in the Lu language.

In Vietnam the Lu live in the Phong Tho and Sin Ho districts of Lai Chau Province. In addition to the Lu in Vietnam and China, more than 300,000 are located in Myanmar, Thailand and Laos.

Although they now number a mere 4,000 individuals in Vietnam, evidence exists that the Lu were once the dominant people group in the region,

and that Lu may have been in northwest Vietnam as early as the 1st century AD. When the Black Thai first arrived in the Dien Bien Phu area in the 11th and 12th centuries, they recorded the existence of the famous citadel of Xam Mun which had been built by the Lu.

At the end of the 1700s the Lu were attacked by invaders from Myanmar and many fled into Laos and China to escape the carnage. Large numbers of Lu have also been assimilated by other ethnic groups such as the White Thai, so that today their numbers in Vietnam are few.

One early missionary who visited the Lu had this mixed report to say about them: "The Lu impressed me as less

civilized as any Tai people I had ever met. They are less polite and deferential, more talkative, even rude in their manners. But they are less timid, more sturdy, more hospitable, more receptive."²⁹

By the 9th century AD, the Lu already had a well developed agricultural system. They used oxen and elephants to till the land and constructed extensive irrigation systems.

The Lu possess an ancient script, still used by Buddhists in the region. The Lu language is part of the Tai linguistic family. Because of their centuries of separation, it is possible the Lu language in Vietnam is now very different from Lu in China and elsewhere, although no research is available regarding the degree of intelligibility between Lu in different nations.

Although nominally adherents to Theravada Buddhism, most Lu observe many animistic rituals designed to protect them from the threat of evil spirits. The Lu believe if they live good lives they will be reborn into a higher social position, but if they are wicked they will come back as degraded animals. At certain times of the year the Lu pay homage

to the spirits of those who have contributed greatly to the well-being of their descendants... "Sacrifices are offered to the spirits [and] the village is shut in on itself; all roads and tracks giving access to the community are blocked with barricades of trees and branches...the whole village is encircled with ropes made of straw or a line of white cotton thread, to represent symbolically an encircling wall preventing entry or exit. No outsiders of any description, not even monks or members of the elite ruling class, are permitted to attend these rites."²⁹

After two Lu have started a relationship, a fortune-teller is called in to inspect each person's horoscopes and to determine whether they should be married. After the wedding the husband must live with his wife's family for two or three years before they go off to make their own home. Marriage is considered sacred among the Lu. If a divorce occurs, the partner who actively pursued the divorce is fined.

When a Lu person dies their relatives build a large paper hearse which is filled with some of the belongings of the deceased including their mattress, rice bowl and a certain amount of money. The Lu believe these items will help nourish and give peace to the soul of the deceased.

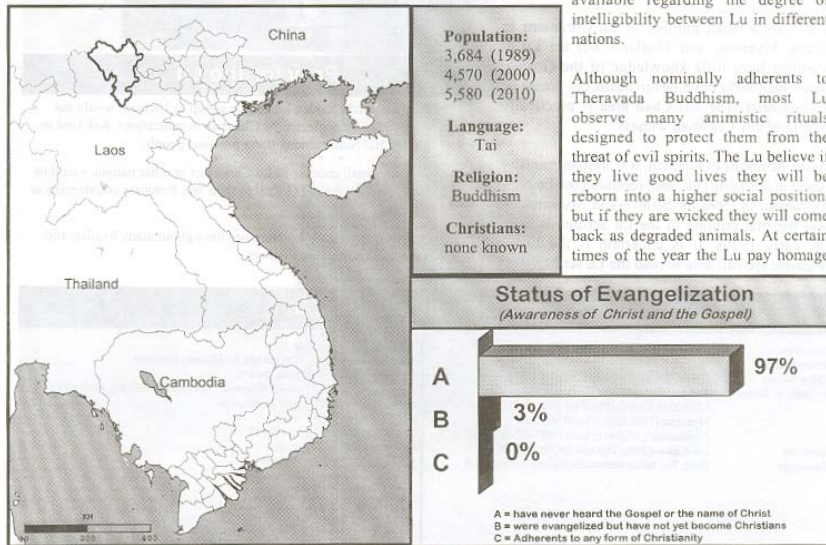
There are a small number of Lu Christians in China, Myanmar and Thailand, but the Lu in Vietnam have little knowledge of the Gospel. More than 90% have never heard the Name of Jesus Christ. The Lai Chau area is practically devoid of any Christian witness.

Asian Minorities Outreach, a Christian ministry based in northern Thailand, reprinted the Lu New Testament in 1996 for believers in Myanmar. It was the first printing of the Lu Scriptures since the early 1930s. It is uncertain if the Lu in Vietnam are still able to read the Lu script.



Pray for the Lu

- 1 Pray the small, hidden Lu people group in Vietnam would not continue to be neglected by Christian organizations. Ask God to glorify His Name among these precious people.
- 2 Pray the small number of Lu Christians in other nations would be motivated to take the Gospel to their less fortunate counterparts in Vietnam.
- 3 Ask God to raise up Lu churches throughout many hamlets and villages in northwest Vietnam.



Overview of the Lu

Countries	: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam	Subgroups	: 0
Pronunciation	: "Leu"	Religion	: Theravada Buddhism, Animism
Other Names	: Nmon, Doon, Tai Lu, Dai Lu, Pai-i, Shui-Pai-i, Lue, Ly	Christians	: none known
Population Source	: 3,684 (1989 census); 550,000 in China (1986 Tien Ju-K'ang); 200,000 in Myanmar (1981 SIL); 78,000 in Thailand (1993 P. Johnstone); 20,000 in Laos (1993 P. Johnstone)	Scripture	: New Testament 1933 (reprinted 1996); Portions 1921; work in progress
Location	: Lai Chau: Phong Tho and Sin Ho districts	Jesús film	: none
Language	: Dale, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Northwest	Gospel Recordings	: Lu#01147
		Christian Radio	: none
		ROPAL code	: KHB00