

MUONG

By 1998 the population of the Muong minority group in Vietnam exceeded one million, making them the third largest of Vietnam's 53 official minority groups. Only the Thai and Tay minorities have more people.

The Muong are located in the northern provinces of Thanh Hoa, Vinh Phu, Son La, Yen Bai and Hoa Binh. The main concentration live in Hoa Binh and the mountainous areas of Thanh Hoa. Muong territory is noted for its single ethnic habitation. One can travel through Muong villages for long distances without seeing communities of any other ethnic groups. The range of Muong is roughly from the lower reaches of the Da River to the upper reaches of the Ma River.

The Muong are believed to have come from the same historical roots as the Vietnamese people. Today the Muong language (which has five tones) and Vietnamese are still closely related. It is believed when the Chinese invaded Vietnam at around the start of the Christian era, the Vietnamese migrated southward into the plains. They expanded to fill all of the country, while the Muong stayed in the mountains in the north and developed as a separate ethnic group.

Muong villages are usually medium in size, containing between 10 to 50 houses. The Muong live at a variety of different altitudes, but most Muong villages in the mountainous areas are located more than 2,600 feet above sea-level.

As well as rice cultivation and animal husbandry, the Muong rely on their skills at gathering food from the forest, including fragrant mushrooms, honey, cinnamon, bamboo and medicinal plants. The Muong take these items and use them to trade with people on the plains. Instead of daily tending to their livestock, the Muong usually let their buffaloes and cattle roam freely in the forests, feeding themselves. In the past they could not do this because of the presence of tigers and bears, but these have now been hunted to extinction in the area. The animals are only rounded up when the Muong need them for food or to sacrifice in a religious ceremony.

The Muong live in villages called *quei* or *que*. The area of each village is clearly defined with marker posts or large rocks. A collection of villages (sometimes 30-40) in one area form a *muong*. This name may be where the ethnic name for the group is derived from. Before the Communist revolution in 1945, the village headmen, called *lang cun*, had complete authority over the Muong. In some places the *lang cun* took advantage of the people, threatening

them and imposing unfair taxes and other burdens on the people.

Muong societies are strongly patriarchal. Girls are not allowed to choose their own partners, but must let their parents find a husband for them. There are numerous songs and poems in Muong culture that reflect the girl's sadness at bad marriages that had been arranged by parents against the wishes of the girl concerned. Because many more men were killed during the Vietnam-American War than women, there has been an imbalance between the sexes as thousands of women were suddenly widowed.

A rich collection of Muong songs, poems, stories and legends have been published in Vietnam. It includes *The Birth of the Earth and Water*, a story that tells of the Muong creation legend. Others celebrate Muong heroes and stories of love conquering adversity. The *vi dum* is a song sung alternately in 6 to 8 word verses.

The majority of Muong are polytheists. They worship numerous deities, including local heroes, the spirit of the village and the spirit of the land. The Muong also practice ancestor worship. The most highly revered ancestor is the person who first led the Muong to the land where each particular community is now located. In some areas the Muong worship the spirit of Mount Ba Vi, the highest and greatest mountain in Muong territory.

Significant ceremonies and festivals among the Muong include 'Going to the Fields' (*khuong ma*), and 'Praying for the Rain' (in the 4th lunar month).

The Muong are an unreached people group. There are relatively few Christians in their midst. The Gospels of Mark and John are available in Muong, and work is in progress to translate other parts of the Bible.



Pray for the Muong

- 1 Pray for the unreached Muong people. Despite their relatively large population, little Christian work has ever been undertaken to the Muong.
- 2 Pray those responsible for translating the Bible into Muong would be encouraged, strengthened and shielded from demonic attack while their valuable labors are being completed.
- 3 Pray that many Muong would soon be exposed to the Gospel by evangelists and by print, radio or other means.



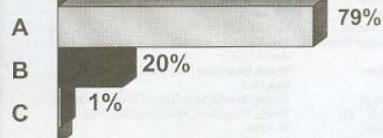
Population:
914,596 (1989)
1,135,900 (2000)
1,385,800 (2010)

Language:
Mon-Khmer

Religion:
Polytheism

Christians:
3,000

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 Muong

Countries : Vietnam, USA
Pronunciation : "Moo-ong"
Other Names : Mon, Mol, Mual, Moi
Population Source : 914,596 (1989 census); also in USA
Location : Thanh Hoa, Vinh Phu, Son La, Yen Bai, Hoa Binh
Language : Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong, Muong
Dialects (7) : Thang, Wang, Mol, Mual, Moi, Bôi Bi, Ao Ta
Literacy : 50-75%
Subgroups (2) : Moi Bi, Au Ta

Religion : Polytheism, Animism, Ancestor Worship, Christianity
Christians : 3,000
Scripture : Portions 1963
Gospels of Mark and John are available; work in progress
Jesus film : none
Gospel Recordings : Muong #00790
Christian Radio : available (FEBC)
15 minutes per week
ROPAL code : MTQ00