

O-DU

The 1989 national census of Vietnam listed a total of just 32 individuals in six families belonging to the O-Du minority group. However, 1995 research put their population at 194 people. Apparently some O-Du had earlier declared their ethnic group to be Khmu or Thai.

Linguist Frank Proschan in 1989 listed an identical figure of 194 O-Du people in Samnuea Province, Laos. It is uncertain if the O-Du in each country happen to have precisely the same population (i.e. 194 people) or if the Vietnam authorities used the Laos figure to help justify the O-Du's status as one of Vietnam's official minorities.

In Laos the O-Du are known as the *Tay Phoong*, but they speak the same

language.

The few remaining O-Du in Vietnam live in the villages of Kim Hoa and Xop Pot in Kim Da Commune, Tuong Duong District of Nghe An Province.

The tiny O-Du tribe have been largely swallowed up by their large ethnic neighbors the Thai, Khmu and Hmong. These groups have mocked and oppressed the O-Du for many years. They still prefer to call the O-Du *Tay Hat*, which means 'rag people'.

The O-Du like to build their houses facing a mountain, contrary to many other groups who consider it taboo. The houses are built on stilts and have thatched straw roofs. Inside, rooms are partitioned off with plaited bamboo.

Despite being on the verge of extinction, the few remaining O-Du are proud of their ethnicity. They still use their own names for other ethnic groups in the area.

Five centuries ago the O-Du were a numerous and prosperous group who lived along the Nam Mon and Nam Mo rivers in both Vietnam and Laos. At different times they were attacked by the Thai, Han Chinese, Hmong and Khmu, who chased them away, took them as slaves, or forced them to assimilate.³⁸

Before the advent of Communism the O-Du were virtual slaves of the Thai landowners. The Thai were the most powerful group; they bullied weaker tribes such as the O-Du into laboring for them for free and forced them to pay high taxes. The Thais claimed to be the owners of all land, forests, mountains and rivers. In return for their labor, the O-Du were given the right to live on the Thai's land.

The O-Du language, which is part of the Northern Mon-Khmer family, is on the verge of extinction. It is only spoken by a few elderly people, who are greatly respected because of it. The O-Du believe they must learn

their language again in their old age so that when they die they will be able to communicate with their ancestors. They fear if they cannot speak their language their ancestors will not be able to recognize them in the after-life. In the same way, old O-Du women carefully preserve a traditional garment. They put it on at the end of their lives so they can be presented to their ancestors.

In the past the O-Du did not use family names. In recent decades they have adopted the family names of the Thai and Lao, such as Kham, May and Van.

The O-Du are a very superstitious people. They worship a multitude of spirits. They believe each person has a soul. When someone dies their soul leaves the body and resides in the house, watching over the family's activities. The O-Du believe that when a person dies it is caused by the spirit of the house who desired to be reincarnated and so caused the death.

The New Year starts in O-Du communities at the first sound of thunder in early Spring. As soon as the thunder is heard the people throw a great celebration and feast. In the past O-Du from many locations would come to Xop Pot Village. The O-Du would spend days together and performed rituals to worship the sky and the earth.

If a widow or widower wishes to remarry, they must wait until the sound of the thunder in Spring. That is the time the O-Du believe the souls of former spouses depart from the community. If the person cannot wait to get married, the O-Du believe the jealous soul of the deceased can wreak havoc on the new couple.

There has never been a single known O-Du Christian. Could it be that the O-Du may be become extinct as a people group before they have had the chance to hear the Gospel for the first time?



Pray for the O-Du

- 1 The O-Du are on the verge of fading away into the pages of history. Pray that for the first time in their long history they would hear the Gospel and respond to Jesus Christ.
- 2 Thousands of O-Du have passed into eternity without Christ. Pray this generation of O-Du would be known as a people redeemed by God's Son.
- 3 Pray the Lord of the Harvest would raise up laborers who are willing to take the Gospel to this small, forgotten people.



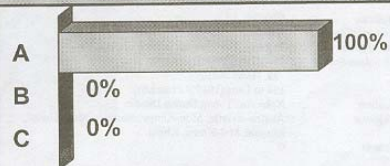
Population:
194 (1995)
215 (2000)
260 (2010)

Language:
Mon-Khmer

Religion:
Animism

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 O-Du

Countries : Vietnam, Laos
Pronunciation : "Oh-doo"
Other Names : Tay Hat, Tay Phoong, O'du, Iduh, Hat, Haat
Population Source : 194 (1995 Vietnam News Agency),
32 (1989 census);
194 in Laos (1989 F Proschan)
Location : Nghe An: Tuong Duong District
Language : Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Khmuic, Mal-Khmu, Khmu
Dialects : 0

Subgroups : 0
Religion : Animism, Polytheism
Christians : none known
Scripture : none
Jesus film : none
Gospel Recordings : none
Christian Radio : none
ROPAL code : TYH00