

Tai Khang

More than 5,600 Tai Khang people live in northern and central Laos. 'They are concentrated in the Xam-Tai District of Houaphan Province, near the Vietnam border. A few spill across into the Nongkhet District of Xiangkhoang Province, while a Diaspora group live further south in the Viangthong District of Borikhamxai Province.'¹

The Tai Khang population is expected to grow quickly in the coming years, numbering more than 7,000 in 2010 and estimated to grow to almost 9,000 by 2020. Laos has one of the highest birth rates in the world. 'In some communities, women have ten or more children. Children are seen as a great blessing, especially in rice-farming areas where as many hands as possible are needed to work in the fields.'² It is possible that Tai Khang people also live inside Vietnam, where they may be part of the official Thai minority group.

There is some debate about whether the main religion of the Tai Khang should be listed as animism or Buddhism, although a recent booklet by the Overseas Missionary Fellowship has listed them as a Buddhist group.³ Another report states, 'The Tai Khang are traditionally animists, but in recent decades they have come under the influence of Buddhism more as ethnic Lao expand to some of the more far-flung parts of the nation.'⁴

According to one Christian missionary, the history of Buddhism in Laos dates back to around the 5th century AD,

when 'there came missionaries from Ceylon [Sri Lanka] into the Laos provinces bearing with them the sacred scriptures of the Buddhists. We might say that these missionaries were very successful, for they were not persecuted or stoned, nor killed and they had the reward of seeing the people by villages and towns embracing their teachings. How different was the reception and spread of this religion from the true religion which the white-faced missionaries brought fourteen centuries afterwards! The secret lay in the fact that Buddhism was not exclusive while Christianity was; Buddhism allowed its adherents to retain their old system of spirit-worship, while Christianity said, Ye cannot serve two masters. Buddhism simply supplemented the existent faith, adding hereto a moral code and a clerical literature, while Christianity insisted, first, put off the old man with his deeds. . . . And so Buddhism flourished and became the nominal religion of the land, save of a few hill tribes here and there. But the old religion [animism] brought down with the Tais from the valley of the Yangtzi still lived and ruled men's hearts.'⁵

The twin strongholds of animistic spirit-worship and Theravada Buddhism continue to grip the hearts of the Tai Khang to this day. There are no known Christians among them. One book laments, 'Without hope in this world or the next, the Tai Khang of Laos have little awareness of the gospel. A few may have listened to gospel radio broadcasts in the Tai Dam or Lao languages, but most remain completely ignorant of the claims of Christ or their need for the Savior.'⁶



Christian Far East Ministry



Population:

5,620 (2000)
7,090 (2010)
8,950 (2020)

Countries: Laos, possibly in Vietnam

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: none known

Overview of the Tai Khang

Other Names: Kang, Tai Khaang, Tay Khang, Khang

Population Sources: 5,000 in Laos (1995, Asian Minorities Outreach)

possibly also in Vietnam

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Unclassified

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 55%

Practising Buddhists: 25%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

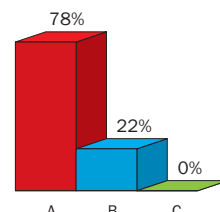
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TNU (Tay Khang) and possibly KYP (Kang)

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity