

# THAI

In the early 1960s the Vietnamese government constructed the Thai minority group, which now contains more than 1.2 million people. This singular classification is far from being ethno-linguistically accurate, however, as it contains at least six groups and six distinct languages. The largest of these groups is the *Black Thai* who contain more than 500,000 people. The *White Thai* number around 200,000, the *Phu Thai* 150,000, and the *Red Tai* more than 100,000. Several smaller groups include the *Tai Hang Tong* and *Tai Man Thanh*.

Although the Vietnamese claim the generic classification was agreed to by representatives from each Thai group in the 1960s,<sup>45</sup> each group still sees itself as distinct from the others and

has different customs, histories and languages. Despite their name, it should be noted that the Thai groups in Vietnam are only distantly related to the Thai people of Thailand. People belonging to the same ethnic groups as the Thai in Vietnam are also found in Laos, Thailand, China, the United States, Australia and France.

The Black Thai primarily live along the Red and Black rivers in northern Vietnam. The Red Tai live along the Red River further south. The White Thai live in communities alongside the Black Thai, and in many areas have learned to speak Black Thai.

The Black Thai originated in southern China, but gradually migrated into Southeast Asia due to oppression by

the Chinese. The Black Thai even had their own government near Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam for a short time in the 1950s.

It is common for all the elders of a Black Thai family to be equally responsible for raising children. Each village is under the control of a *Chao Muong*, or prince.

The Black Thai and White Thai are two of the few members of the great Tai race never to have embraced Buddhism. They are animists... "They believe that non-human objects have spirits, and that people have multiple souls... These spirits must be appeased so that they might avoid curses and receive blessings."<sup>46</sup> The Black Thai in Vietnam believe in the *King of Heaven* who founded the city of Dien Bien Phu, formerly called 'Heavenly City' by the Black Thai. They believe there used to be a vine that reached from the earth to heaven. One mother was upset because her son kept climbing the vine to fellowship with God. She cut the vine and ever since then the Black Thai have been unable to communicate with God.

The White Thai are also animists. Their communities "contain a number of statues and altars to the spirit of the



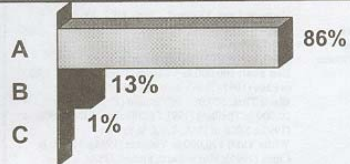
**Population:**  
1,040,549 (1989)  
1,292,300 (2000)  
1,576,700 (2010)

**Language:**  
Tai

**Religion:**  
Animism

**Christians:**  
2,000

## 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

soil, to the tiger god, and to *Tan Sin* and *Kouan-Yin*, local heroes now deified by the White Tai.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike most people in this region, the White Thai believe in a Sovereign, supreme God who is active in their lives... "One of their legends states that their ancestors emerged from a pumpkin in which they had taken refuge during a divinely decreed flood that drowned all the other inhabitants of the earth because of their wickedness."<sup>48</sup>

There are approximately 2,000 Thai Christians in Vietnam, mostly among the Black Thai, with less than 200 among the White Thai. Several years ago a young Black Thai man was imprisoned in southern Vietnam. He found Christ through the witness of a Vietnamese pastor who was incarcerated at the time for his faith. After his release, the young man returned to his village and shared his new faith. Impressed by the dramatic change in the ex-criminal's life, 753 Black Thai turned to Christ.<sup>49</sup> Translation work is currently in progress to make more of the Scriptures available to the Black Thai. The Black Thai and White Thai use an ancient Indic script based on Sanskrit, which may date back as far as the 5th century AD.

Despite the availability of weekly Gospel radio broadcasts and Scripture portions in the White Thai language since 1969, few have shown any interest in Christianity. The religious beliefs of the Thai contain influences from Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. Shamans are also active among the Thai. They are called to preside over important religious ceremonies and also required to fix dates for auspicious occasions such as weddings and funerals.

The Thai are not considered particularly resistant to Christianity. The vast majority just haven't had the opportunity to hear the Gospel.



## Pray for the Thai

- 1 Ask the Holy Spirit to break down the obstacles that have prevented the Gospel spreading throughout the six distinct language groups of the Thai minority in Vietnam.
- 2 Pray that many laborers would be raised up and sent out by God among the hundreds of Thai villages. Pray the Gospel would go forth in truth and with great power.
- 3 Ask God to glorify Himself through the lives of the Thai people. Pray many would soon be transformed from death to life.

## Overview of the Thai

**Countries** : Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, China, USA, France  
**Pronunciation** : "Tai"  
**Other Names** : Tai, Tay<sup>50</sup>  
**Population Source** : 1,040,549 (1989 census); includes  
**Red Thai**: 100,000 in Vietnam (1990 A.Diller); 25,000 in Laos (1991 CMA); also in Thailand and USA  
**Black Thai**: 500,000 in Vietnam (1990 A.Diller); 20,000 in Thailand (1991 J.Matisoff); 10,000 in China (1995); 3,000 in USA; 1,500 in France  
**White Thai**: 190,000 in Vietnam (1984); 10,000 in China (1995); also in Laos, France, USA  
**Phu Thai**: 150,000 in Vietnam (1993); 156,000 in Thailand (1993); 128,000 in Laos (1993); also in USA  
**Tai Hang Tong, Thai Man Thanh**

**Location** : Son La, Lai Chau, Hoa Binh, Nghe An  
**Language** : Dale, Tai, Southwestern  
**Subgroups (8)** : Thai Treng, Thai Den, Thai Chieng, Thai Thanh, Tay Muoi, Pu Thai, Tho Da Bac, Thai Moe Chau  
**Religion** : Animism, Theravada Buddhism, Shamanism, Daoism  
**Christians** : 2,000  
**Scripture** : Black Thai Portions 1982 (Mark, John, Joseph, Life of Christ), White Thai Portions 1969 (Mark and Luke 15)  
**Jesus film** : none  
**Gospel Recordings** : Tai: Black #00794, Tai: White #4322, Phu Thai #01711  
**Christian Radio** : available in White & Black Tai (FEBC-30 mins./week)  
**ROPAL code** : TYR00 (Red Tai), BLT00 (Black Tai), TWH00 (White Tai), THC00 (Tai Hang Tong), TMM00 (Tai Man Thanh), PHT00 (Phu Thai)