

THO

More than 60,000 Tho people live in the mountainous western regions of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa provinces. There are seven subgroups of Tho in Vietnam. Each group considers itself different and possess different customs. The small *Pong* group speaks a language considered distinct by linguists. The majority of Pong speakers (more than 18,000) live in Laos. Only about 3,000 Pong are reportedly located within the borders of Vietnam.

The Tho language is a Viet-Muong variety, related to Vietnamese, Muong and Chut. This linguistic relationship reflects the historical roots of the Tho. According to one source, "Around the end of the 17th century, driven out by upheaval, the Viet in low-lying

districts...and some Viet and Muong groups from mountain districts...settled in the present area of Tho habitation and intermarried with members of the *Cuoi* group who lived there to form a new community after a long period of evolution, more recently adopting the name *Tho*. This community is still quite heterogeneous, with many small groups, the most important being the *Keo*, *Mon* and *Cuoi*. This ethnic transformation has taken place on the foundations of *Viet* culture with regional variants and has been enriched by traditional *Muong* elements which later added *Thai* cultural elements."⁵¹

The Tho prefer to locate their villages at a low altitude against mountain

slopes running northeast to southeast. The Tho traditionally built their homes on stilts, but now more are constructing their homes flat on the ground.

The chief of a Tho village is called a *trum*. Every year the inhabitants of the village elect the man they believe is best suited for this honorable position. He is responsible for all village affairs, acts as a judge, and represents the people to officials in higher office. A *cau* (or secretary in charge of public order), is also appointed. In some locations the Tho still employ shamans, called *chu sac*, who lead the communities in all religious events.

The Tho grow many crops and also excel at hunting, fishing and catching birds. Tho women produce hemp, which is used to make nets, bags and hammocks. Tho women invariably wear a square white cloth turban.

The youth are allowed considerable freedom to choose their partner. The boys sometimes spend whole nights lying next to a girl he is attracted to. This ceremony is called *ngu mai*, which literally means 'women sleeping'. He is not allowed to have sexual relations with, or even touch

the girl. They lie next to each other and have heart-to-heart talks all night. For centuries this has been an event to test the young man's self-control. If he cannot control his lusts and touches the girl, his reputation will be destroyed and the couple will not marry.

Once they have decided to marry, a go-between is procured to arrange the dowry and details for the wedding between the two families. The wedding can be extremely expensive. Monthly visits are made by the bridegroom to his future wife's family. He brings an amount of money that has been agreed to in advance. If he should fail even once to bring the money the wedding is canceled and none of the money already given is returned.

When a Tho person dies the body is placed in a coffin made from a single hollowed-out tree trunk. The deceased is then buried in a direction parallel to the nearest stream. Ceremonies are held on the 3rd, 50th and 100th days after the burial. Before 1945 the corpse was kept by the Tho for between one week and one month in the family house before it was buried. Rituals at that time required the sacrifice of dozens of valuable buffaloes and other animals. These practices are no longer observed.

The Tho worship a large number of spirits and ghosts. The most important is worship of the spirit of the hero who first led the people to clear the land and establish their village. The spirits of the mountains, rivers, fire and earth are worshipped. Divination is also practiced by Tho shamans. At the end of the annual ritual, two coins are tossed (called *sin am duong*) on a plate to determine where the event and sacrifice should take place the next year.

There are no known Christians among the Tho in Vietnam. There are no Scriptures, recordings or any other evangelistic materials available in their language.



Pray for the Tho

- 1 The Tho are one of the most unreached people groups in Vietnam. Pray for a breakthrough to occur soon. Ask God to send Vietnamese evangelists to work among them.
- 2 The Tho are without the Bible, Gospel recordings, Jesus film or any other evangelistic materials in their language. Pray God would raise up translators to help bring God's Word to the Tho.
- 3 Pray against the spiritual forces that prevail in Tho society. Ask God to turn the people's hearts towards Him.



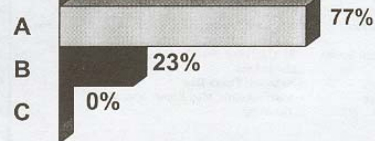
Population:
51,274 (1989)
63,700 (2000)
77,700 (2010)

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 Tho

Countries : Vietnam, Laos
Pronunciation : "Toe"
Other Names : Nha Lang, Moung, Pong, Poong, Tay Pong, Kha Pong, Kha Phong, Phong
Population Source : 51,274 (1989 census), also in Laos
Location : Nghe An, Thanh Hoa
Language : Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong
Dialects (2) : Tho, Pong

Subgroups (7) : Keo, Mon, Cuoi, Ho, Dan Lai, Ly Ha, Tay Pong
Religion : Animism, Daoism, Buddhism, Ancestor Worship, Shamanism
Christians : none known
Scripture : none
Jesus film : none
Gospel Recordings : none
Christian Radio : none
ROPAL code : TOU00 (Tho), KPN00 (Pong)