

More than 8,000 Yoy people live on both sides of the Mekong River in Southeast Asia. The majority—about 7,000—inhabit villages in the north-east Thailand province of Sakhon Nakhon. They are dispersed over three districts: Akat Amnuai,<sup>1</sup> Phang Khon<sup>2</sup> and Sawang Daen Din.

An additional 1,000 Yoy make their homes in the central Laos province of Khammouan. They live in a few villages at the intersection of three districts: Nakay, Grommarol and Bourapha. These districts are in the eastern part of the province, not far from the Laos-Vietnam border. The Yoy claim that they also have relatives living in Vietnam, but specific details or numbers have yet to be obtained.

The origins of the Yoy people are obscure. Although few researchers have ever studied this group, each seems to put forward a different theory on where the Yoy came from. One theory is that they originated in southern China where their ancestors, the Zhuang and Bouyei, are among the largest of China's minority nationalities today—each numbering in the millions. A branch of this group migrated firstly into Vietnam, and later into Laos and Thailand. Only extensive linguistic research can determine whether the Yoy language can be linked to these Northern Tai varieties in China, to see if this first theory holds any weight.

The second theory is that the Yoy are ethnic Giay people, a quarter of a million of whom live on both sides of the

China-Vietnam border today. The Giay language is also a Northern Tai variety.

The third theory is that the Yoy are in fact Saek people. Indeed today the Saek live in the same areas of both Laos and Thailand as the Yoy do.<sup>3</sup> While this may originally have

been true, there is no doubt that today the Saek and Yoy have distinct ethnic identities.<sup>4</sup>

While the origins of the Yoy may be obscure, there is no doubt that the Yoy in Thailand entered from Laos in the 19th century. Their existence was recorded in the Siamese records of 1857. In Thailand the Yoy call themselves Lao Yuai. They are hard-working farmers who harvest glutinous rice and maize as their staple crops. 'Other crops include cassava, basil, beans, onions, tomatoes, papaya, jackfruit, bananas and melons. Some families cultivate cotton.'<sup>5</sup>

The Yoy are professing Buddhists, although a close inspection of their religious practices reveals a regular dependence

on spirit-appeasement and animism. Elements of ancestor worship are also present.

Outside each Yoy village, the people construct a spirit shrine where at certain times of the year the villagers come and make offerings of pigs and chickens to the protective spirit they believe can bring them good luck, wealth and happiness in the coming year. If they do not keep peaceful relations with this spirit, the Yoy believe disaster will befall their community.

The Yoy live in a part of Southeast Asia with few known churches. They have lived for centuries with little knowledge of Christianity. Not surprisingly, there are no known believers among the Yoy today.<sup>6</sup>



Christian Far East Ministry



### Population:

8,250 (2000)  
9,250 (2010)  
10,300 (2020)

**Countries:** Thailand, Laos, Vietnam

**Buddhism:** Theravada

**Christians:** none known

### Overview of the Yoy

**Other Names:** Tai Yoy, Tai Yoi, Yoi, Yooi, Yooy, Yoe, Yay, Du'o'i, Duoi, Dioi, Giy, Yuai, Yueai, Lao Yuai

**Population Sources:** 7,000 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [1998 figure])

1,000 in Laos (1995, Asian Minorities Outreach)

**Language:** Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Unclassified

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 80%

**Practising Buddhists:** 55%

**Christians:** 0%

**Scripture:** none

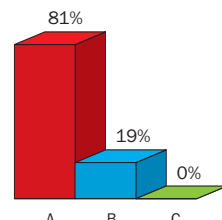
**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** YOY

### 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