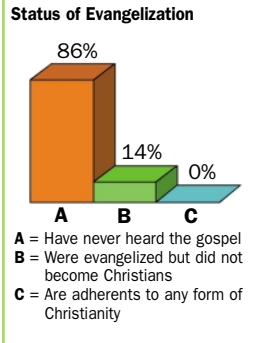


**Population in China:**  
 500 (1990)  
 640 (2000)  
 830 (2010)  
**Location:** Yunnan  
**Religion:** Animism  
**Christians:** None Known

### Overview of the Bit

**Countries:** Laos, China  
**Pronunciation:** "Bit"  
**Other Names:** Khabit, Phsing, Phsin, Buxin, Buxia, Buxinhua, Bid  
**Population Source:**  
 500 (1990 J.-O. Svantesson);  
 1,509 in Laos (1995 census)  
**Location:** S Yunnan: Mengla County in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

**Status:** The Bit are officially included under Khmu, who were counted as an *Undetermined Minority*.  
**Language:** Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Khmuic, Khao  
**Dialects:** 0  
**Religion:** Animism, Theravada Buddhism, Ancestor Worship  
**Christians:** None known  
**Scripture:** None  
**Jesus film:** None  
**Gospel Recordings:** None  
**Christian Broadcasting:** None  
**ROPAL code:**  
 BGK00 (Bit); BXT00 (Buxin)



Dwayne Graybill

**History:** The Bit have ethnic relatives in both Laos and Vietnam, yet their language is distinct from the Khmu whom they are counted part of in China. The Khmu claim to be the original inhabitants of Laos, living there before they were driven from the best land by Lao invaders from China during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup>

**Customs:** Funerals are elaborate affairs for the Bit. The deceased are buried in the mountains. A funeral house is constructed over the grave and is filled with the person's personal items such as a rice basket, drink pipe, bowls, and chopsticks. At the front of the grave a four-to-five-meter (13–16 ft.) pole is erected. A wooden bird and a shirt belonging to the deceased's wife or husband is attached to the top of the pole.

**Location:** In 1990 just 500 members of the Bit ethnic group were reportedly living in two villages in southern Yunnan province.<sup>1</sup> Approximately three times that number inhabit the forests of northern Laos. The Bit are located within Mengla County in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

**Identity:** The identity of the Bit — who are called Buxin by the Chinese — is a complicated matter. The Chinese officially view the Bit as part of the Khmu, but the Khmu do not belong to any of China's official nationalities. They were included in a list of *Undetermined Minorities* in the 1990 national census. In Laos, the Bit were counted separately in the national census of 1995.

**Language:** The Bit language belongs to the Mon-Khmer linguistic family, although scholars disagree on whether it is part of the Khmuic or Palaungic branch.<sup>2</sup> Bit is related to the Khmu language of Laos and Khao of Vietnam. In Vietnam, where the Khao are better known as *Khang*, they are one of 53 official minorities. The Bit language, which is nontonal, does not have its own orthography. Few older people can speak Chinese, but most people under the age of 40 are bilingual, having been educated in Mandarin.

**Religion:** The Bit practice a mixture of Theravada Buddhism and animism. They believe a person has five souls. After death, one soul remains in the house; one goes to the fields; one settles in the foot of the tree that was felled to make the coffin; one lives in the funeral home; and the last remaining soul flies to the sky.<sup>4</sup> Missionary William Clifton Dodd, who visited the Mengla area during the first three decades of the twentieth century, described the loose ties the inhabitants of the region feel to the Buddhist religion: "Buddhism presents a well organized front; and although we have yet to hear of any great mass movement of Buddhists into Christianity; yet it is true that Buddhism furnishes many preparations for Christianity. It includes a spirit of religious toleration. Its temples and monastery grounds are hospitable inns. In our tours of evangelistic itineration we habitually sleep in these temples, preach under the nose of the big Buddha, and sing our Christian songs in his ears. Often the abbot and the monks courteously join us in these services."<sup>5</sup>

**Christianity:** There are no Christian believers among the Bit in China or Laos, although there are many Christians among the related Khmu of northern Laos.