

Khuen

More than 10,000 people belonging to the Khuen ethnic group live in the two Asian countries of Laos and China. The majority (approximately 9,000) make their home in Luang Namtha and Oudomxai provinces in north-west Laos.¹ More than 1,200 Khuen people live in nearby areas of south-west China. They inhabit a few small villages within Jinghong County in south-western Yunnan Province.² A small number of Khuen families also live on the west coast of the United States in Richmond, California and in Seattle, Washington. They were accepted into America as refugees following the 1975 Communist takeover of Laos.

The Khuen have appeared in published sources under several different spellings. Some publications have listed *Kuan* and *Khuen* as two separate groups, but they are the same people. It is important to note that the Khuen, who speak a Mon-Khmer language related to Khmu, are not the same as two other ethnic groups in Laos with similar names:



Tai Kouanne and Khmu Keun. The Khuen are also different from the *Khun*, a Tai group found in eastern Myanmar.

Many aspects of Khuen culture are similar to the Khmu, including their family names—which are taken from the names of sacred animals or plants. For the duration of their lives, the Khuen are not allowed to touch the particular animal or plant that bears their name.

The Khuen in Laos were converted to Theravada Buddhism under influence of the Lu people about 400 years ago. When Christian missionary William Clifton Dodd visited the Khuen more than a century

ago, he reported, 'A branch of the Kamu called Kwen [Khuen] have temples and priests teaching the Yun script, and they also have village and household spirits. The other non-Buddhist Kahs have the village and household spirits and then some.'³ In another Khuen village, Dodd wrote that 'the head man . . . told me that he was the head of nine villages. He and his people are Kwen, who are indigenous to this region. There are five villages that have temples. They are the Buddhists of this region. He says that some time ago there were about seventy houses in this village called Puka. But disease and death have reduced the

number to about fifty. . . . I had so many calls for medicine that I hardly had time to eat.'⁴ Buddhism enjoys less influence among the 1,200 Khuen people in China. Some have been converted to Buddhism, but most continue to worship a hierarchy of demons and ghosts. Every year, the Khuen hold a festival to worship the spirits of the

village and their ancestors.

Today there are between 100 and 200 Christians among the Khuen in Laos. They first received the gospel as early as 1902. Dodd reported, 'I had rapt attention from all. In the evening I had a still larger and more attentive audience. Many stayed after service to talk. They say they understand and would like to listen to such preaching every day. May the time soon come when they can have it. We left feeling that we have many kind friends among the [Khuen] and no enemies . . . they said that if they had someone to teach them they would like to learn Christianity.'⁵



Population:
10,250 (2000)
12,850 (2010)
16,200 (2020)
Countries: Laos, China, USA
Buddhism: Theravada
Christians: 200

Overview of the Khuen

Other Names: Kuan, Kween, Khween, Khouen, Kuanhua

Population Sources:

8,000 in Laos (1995, L Chazee)
1,000 in China (1991, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Chinese Linguistics*)
also in USA

Language: Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Khmuic, Mal-Khmu, Khmu

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 80%

Practising Buddhists: 55%

Christians: 1.9%

Scripture: work in progress

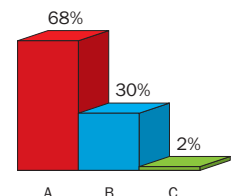
Jesul film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcast: none

ROPAL code: KHF (Khuen) and QAK (Kuanhua)

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