

Khorat Thai



Population:

10,100 (2000)
11,000 (2010)
12,100 (2020)

Countries: Thailand

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 50

Overview of the Khorat Thai

Other Names: Thai Khorat, Khorat

Population Sources: 10,000 in Thailand (2001, J Schliesinger [1999 figure])

Language: Tai-Kadai, Tai, Southwestern, East-Central, Lao-Phutai

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 99%

Practising Buddhists: 75%

Christians: 0.5%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

More than 10,000 Khorat Thai people live in Nakhon Ratchasima Province in central Thailand. They mainly inhabit two large villages, Ban Nung Thap Prang and Ban Nong Samrong, both in the Chok Chai District about 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of the provincial capital. Approximately 4,000 Khorat Thai people live in each village. A few thousand Khorat Thai live in smaller villages in and around Nakhon Ratchasima City.

A lot of confusion exists surrounding the identity and history of the Khorat Thai. Joachim Schliesinger, in his 2001 book *Tai Groups of Thailand: Profile of the Existing Groups*, explains: ‘Seidenfaden’¹ described the Khorat Thai as a group of people who are not of pure Thai stock but the descendants of Siamese

(Thai) soldiers and Khmer women . . . in the first half of the fourteenth century. Credner,² on the other hand, classified the Khorat Thai with the central Siamese. Linguists from the Mahidol University recently classified their language as a central Thai dialect, and the Khorat Thai as an individual Tai-speaking group.³

The Khorat Thai people themselves believe that they are descended from Thai soldiers sent from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima in 1827 to fight against Lao troops. The Khorat Thai attacked and pushed the Lao back across the Mekong River.

This group does not appear on most ethnographic lists of groups in Thailand because their language is only considered slightly different from standard Central Thai.⁴ They

do, however, consider themselves a unique ethnic group. Despite being surrounded by Isan (Northeast Thai speakers), the Khorat Thai speak Central Thai. This sets them apart from their neighbours and creates a strong sense of group cohesion.

Elderly Khorat Thai women dress differently from other Thai women. They wear the traditional Khmer-styled *chong kaben*, ‘a

long piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and down to the knees, from where it is pulled back between the legs and tucked in at the waist under a silver belt. . . . Old Khorat Thai women report that their mothers decorated themselves with silver anklets and gold armbands and necklaces.’⁵ In the past, Khorat Thai men were skilled hunters of deer, wild pigs and other animals, but these have become all but extinct in the area due to over-hunting. They have been forced to feed their families through agricultural



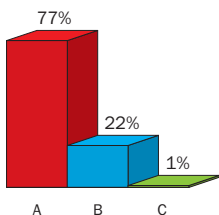
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means, and now they only hunt for small animals like birds, snakes and rats.

Almost all Khorat Thai families are Theravada Buddhists. In addition to worshipping Buddha, they ‘believe in an array of spirits, including those which reside in villages, houses, forests, trees, water and other objects in the natural surroundings. The most important spirit is the spirit of the village, called *jau ban*. Once a year in April, the villagers gather at the spirit house . . . to bring offerings of pigs’ heads, chickens, whisky and flowers to appease the protector of the village.’⁶

Very few Khorat Thai have believed in Christ, and there has been little gospel witness among this proud and needy people group.

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