

Country Profile List: Thailand

Demographics

Population

Population

61,230,874 (2000 est.) world fact book; lycos;

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo

There are approximately 119 people per square kilometer.

Population growth rate: 0.93% (2000 est.)

Birth rate: 16.86 births/1,000 population (2000 est.)

Death rate: 7.53 deaths/1,000 population (2000 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 24% (male 7,386,231; female 7,107,010)

15-64 years: 70% (male 21,102,363; female 21,714,411)

65 years and over: 6% (male 1,726,043; female 2,194,816) (2000 est.)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo>

Ethnic groups

Thai 75%, Chinese 14%, other 11% www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo

The largest ethnic minority is Chinese. Other minority groups include Malays, Cambodians, Indians, non-Thai hill tribes, and some Vietnamese. Immigration is

controlled by a quota system. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/glance-thai/thailand.html#Population>

The majority of Thailand's people are ethnically Thai and Buddhist. The country has a substantial number of minority groups who have historically lived together. Of these the Chinese are the most numerous, particularly in urban areas, though they have become so thoroughly assimilated it would be difficult to isolate them as a distinct group. Similarly, while Laos and Khmer groups live in the northeast and west, nearly all regard themselves as Thai, culturally as well as by nationality concentrated in the southern provinces, and assorted hill-tribes who live in the far north; there are also sizeable communities of Hindus and Sikhs in large cities like Bangkok. http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/the_land/intro.html

Immigration

Most immigrants to Asian countries come from other Asian countries.

<http://www.discoveryschool.com/homeworkhelp/worldbook/atozhistory/i/273120.html>; **World Book 2001**

Deluxe

AIDS

Any discussion of the population of Thailand must take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS. AIDS results in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected **World fact book/**

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo

The AIDS rate for Thailand for people 15-49 in 1998 was 2.23%

www.overpopulation.com/faq/Health/infectious_diseases/AIDS/asia.html

According to the UNAIDS organization there will be 5.8 million people in Southeast Asia living with AIDS by the end of 2000. With the increase of mobility across country lines this spells out an epidemic across this region of the world.

Land

The area of Thailand is 514,000 sq/km divided between land (511,770 sq/km), and water (2,230 sq/km). Thailand is located in Southeastern Asia bordering the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, southeast of Burma. It borders Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Malaysia. Thailand has 3,129 km of coastline. The lowest elevation in the country is in the Gulf of Thailand, at 0m. The highest point is Doi Inthanon, at 2,576m.

The topography of Thailand is central plain, Khorat Plateau in the East, and mountains elsewhere. The climate is tropical with both dry and rainy seasons. The Southern isthmus is always hot and humid. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo> There are four natural regions in Thailand – the North, the Northeast, the Center, and the South. Sometimes Bangkok, because it is the capital and largest metropolitan city, may be considered a separate geographic region.

The North

Because of its varying geography, is ideal for many different types of agriculture. It has areas of mountains with rivers running in-between them. These valleys are ideal for growing rice and other crops. There are also areas of high forestation, with vegetation such as evergreens and certain broadleaf trees. The vegetation has been reduced by almost half since the 1960's, however.

The Northeast

Also known as the Khorat Plateau. It makes up 1/3 of Thailand's land area, but is not an ideal agricultural area. It is dry and has areas of intense flooding during the monsoon seasons. Three rivers run through this region: the Mekong, Chi, and Mun rivers.

The Central Plains

This central area of Thailand has been termed "the rice bowl of Asia." The soil in this region is very fertile. Four rivers merge into the Chao Phraya River, which provides irrigation and transportation. Wet-rice agriculture has been instrumental in supporting Thailand economically since the 13th century.

The Southern Peninsula

It is distinctive in climate, terrain, and resources. It consists mainly of jungle and mountains, but has narrow plains running along its coast. The rain forest attracts tourists. There is fishing, rubber production and tin mining in the peninsula. (all the above from [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+th0049](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+th0049); **World Book 2001 Deluxe**

Economy

Currency: 1 baht (B) = 100 satang
Exchange rates: \$1 = B45.23 (June 2001) <http://www.neatideas.com/exchange-rate/thai-baht-exchange-rate.html>; <http://www.x-rates.com/tables/THB.html>
The GNP/GDP: 388.7 billion USD (1999 est.)
Unemployment rate: 4% (1999 est.)
4.5% (1998 est.)
External debt: 80 billion USD (1999 est.)
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Econ>

Thailand had the world's highest economic growth rate from 1985 to 1995, averaging almost 9% annually. Increased speculative pressure on Thailand's currency in 1997, led to a crisis that uncovered financial sector weaknesses and forced the government to float the Baht. In 1998, the Baht hit its lowest point. However, by 1999 the economy turned around and expanded about 4%. Similar growth is expected in 2000. Thailand is following a recovery plan instituted by IMF.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Econ>

Government

National Government

King Phumiphon signed the current constitution on October 11, 1997. They have not accepted ICJ jurisdiction and operate on a civil law system with common law influences.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Econ>

The Thai Constitution provides for a monarch, a prime minister, and a legislature called the National Assembly. This is called a constitutional monarchy.

The monarch has an advisory role as head of state, and the prime minister heads the government.

The National Assembly consists of the House of Representatives with 500 members and the Senate with 200 members. The House members are elected by the people of Thailand and serve four-year terms. The senators are also elected but serve six-year terms.

The House of Representatives selects the prime minister, who is then formally appointed by the monarch. The prime minister in turn selects the Cabinet, which cannot exceed 48 members. **World Book 2001 Deluxe**

The monarchy is sacred in Thailand and it is against the law to criticize the institution, especially in public. Mocking or joking about the monarchy is a serious offense, punishable by imprisonment. www.thailand.com/travel/overview/overview_people.htm

Local Government

Thailand is divided into 76 provinces. The provinces are subdivided into more than 600 districts, about 6,600 units of local government called tambons, and some 60,000 villages. Each province has a governor, and every district has a district officer. These officials are appointed by the minister of the interior. Thai villages range in size from a few hundred to a few thousand people. Each village elects a headman to be its leader. The people within each tambon then select from among the village headmen a kamnan, or chief administrator, for their tambon. (See table below.) **World Book 2001 Deluxe;**

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Econ>

| Local Government | | | |
|------------------|--------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Sub-Divisions | Number | Ruling Official | Instatement Method |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|-----------|--------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Provinces | 76 | Governor | Appointed by Minister of Interior |
| Districts | 600+ | District Official | Appointed by Minister of Interior |
| Tambons | 6,600+ | Kamnan | Elected by people from headmen |
| Villages | 60,000 | Headman | Elected by village members |

Table compiled from **World Book 2001 Deluxe** by Philip Levant

Society

According to Section 30 of the Thai constitution, men and women have equal rights in all aspects accorded to Thai citizens. http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/th00000_.html

It seems that women's rights are upheld in the labor force. In 1985, 54.4% of the 716,181 government officials were female. Women occupied the posts of school teachers, university professors, scientists, doctors, architects, engineers, judges, public prosecutor, military and police officers, airline pilots, bank presidents, ambassadors, etc. As far back as 1949, Thailand had its first female member of parliament. Several other women have served in the cabinet in the past 20 years. And most recently, in 1993, the first female high-ranking government official served in the national administration. However, there still are obstacles confronting the female Thai labor force. There are unequal job opportunities for women when compared with men, less job security for women in industrial work, and social biases toward female workers.

http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/the_land/women.html

There are "deeply rooted attitudes in Thai society, such as those that view women as the submissive sex and [that] men should take the initiative and make the decisions in sexual matters." <http://www.aegis.com/news/ips/1997/IP970903.html>

Literacy

Definition: age 15 and over can read and write

Total population: 93.8%

Male: 96%

Female: 91.6% (1995 est.)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo>

Languages

King Ramakamhaeng of Sukhothai created the earliest Thai writing system in 1283. He was a nationalist and wanted an official Thai script that was purely Thai, free from Mon or Khmer influence. In 1357, a new script called King Li Thai script came to be used. The letter shapes of the King Li Thai script are based on the Sukhothai ones, although some were modified. In 1378, the city of Ayutthaya replaced Sukhothai as the capital of Thailand. The Ayutthaya Kingdom used the King Li Thai script, though changes were introduced through the process of time. In 1680, the King Narai script was brought into use. The King Narai script has been developed and preserved, and is currently the national Thai script. <http://thaiarc.tu.ac.th/host/thaiarc/thai/thaiwrt.htm>;
www.mahidol.ac.th/thailand/glance-thai/language.html

One website claims that the language has changed so little that modern Thai can read 13th Century Thai inscriptions. The Thai written language consists of 44 consonants, 32 vowels, and 5 tones, and is read horizontally from left to right (like English).
www.mahidol.ac.th/thailand/glance-thai/language.html

Thai is a dialectically varied language, one of several grouped in the *Tai* family of languages. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/thailand/th_glos.html Linguists classify Thai as belonging to a Chinese-Thai branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. Thai is tonal, uninflected, and predominantly monosyllabic. Most polysyllabic words in the vocabulary have been borrowed, mainly from Khmer, Pali or Sanskrit.
<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/thailand/man.html>

The Thai language has different pronouns, qualifying nouns, and verbs for the same objects and actions. Social-economic class and circumstance determine word choice, and/or vice-versa. There are, then, “four languages” of Thai: a royal language (rachasap), an ecclesiastic language, a polite everyday vernacular, and an earthy, “pungent” slang. Government officials will use Rachasap in formal and state occasions, for example, but may use standard Thai among themselves or at home.
www.mahidol.ac.th/thailand/glance-thai/language.html

Thailand incorporates 76 distinct languages, which are listed on the website below. But the main, or official, language is Central Thai dialect, which is taught in schools. Many people in Thailand speak the Central Thai dialect in addition to their own regional or ethnic dialect. www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/Thai.html; **World Book Deluxe** Thai is taught and used in the schools, used by the media, and used for government affairs.
<http://thaiarc.tu.ac.th/host/thaiarc/thai/thai.htm>

Although the national language is spoken by almost 100 per cent of the population, dialects are spoken in rural areas. Other principal languages are Chinese and Malay.
<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/thailand/man.html>

English, a mandatory subject in public schools, is widely spoken and understood, particularly in Bangkok and other major cities. In major cities the level of English can be quite good, but the Thais' ability to speak English diminishes as one moves further away from population centers. <http://www.thaimain.org/eng/thailand/thaispeak.html>

Urbanization

Thailand's capital is known internationally as Bangkok, but to Thai it is *Krung Thep*, or “City of Angels.” <http://www.thaimain.org/eng/thailand/capital.html> It is the most populated city, and area, in Thailand with over 6 million inhabitants. The next area that even

comes close is the *province* of Nakhon Ratchasima with 2,540,662.

www.chula.ac.th/college/cps/thaidata/99-order.html

Religion

About 95% of Thai practice and profess Theravada Buddhism. Approximately 4% of Thai, including most of the Malay in the South, follow Islam. 0.5% of the population is Christian, and the other 0.5% is Confucians, Taoists, Mahayana Buddhists, and Hindus. Although Thai practice many different religions, the strong faith, belief in, and respect for the Monarchy unites all Thai to live in harmony.

www.thailand.com/travel/overview/overview_people.htm;

<http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/religions/index.html>

Theravada Buddhism (95%)

The word Theravada means “Way of the Elders.” Theravada Buddhism is the only early Buddhist school that has survived. Theravadas emphasize the importance of Buddha as a historical figure, the virtues of the monastic life, and the authority of the *Tripitaka*. For them, the ideal Buddhist is a kind of saint called an arhat. Mahayanists and other Buddhists have often referred to the Theravada and similar schools as *Hinayana*, a term that means “lesser vehicle.” The Theravadans do not accept this term. **World Book Deluxe** There are about 27,000 Theravada Buddhist temples across Thailand. The majority of them are in the countryside. Buddhist monks are highly venerated for their chaste life, self-restraint, social benevolence, and knowledge of spiritual practice. To allow people to have more time to devote to religious practices, all major Buddhist holy days are declared national holidays. <http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/buddism/index.html>

It has been a Thai custom for Buddhist males over twenty years old to be temporarily ordained as Buddhist monks, usually during the annual Rains Retreat. Temporary ordination, ranging from a few days to three months, is open to everyone.

<http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/buddism/index.html>; **World Book Deluxe**

There is no concrete evidence as to when and where Buddhism was established in Thailand. It is presumed that Buddhism was first brought to the country during the 3rd century B.C. when Theravada Buddhist missionaries visited Suwannaphum, or the present Nakhon Pathom. Buddhist Indian emperor Asoke sent the missionaries under the leadership of Venerable Sona and Uttara. Once Buddhism was introduced, it became widely accepted and gained permanent ground.

Buddhism probably reached its height under the reign of King Li Thai of Sukhothai (King Ramkhamhaeng's grandson). It was during his reign that the first Buddhist didactic literary work (the "Tribhumikatha"), was written.

<http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/buddism/index.html>

Muslim (4%)

Muslims comprise Thailand's largest religious minority and are concentrated mainly in the southernmost provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and Satun. Islam was presumably introduced to the Malay Peninsula by Arab traders and adventures during the 13th century. Most Thai Muslims are Malay descent, reflecting the common cultural heritage Thailand's southernmost provinces share with Malaysia.

There are approximately 2,000 mosques in Thailand, about 100 of which are in Bangkok. Some 200 Muslim schools offer secular as well as religious instruction. All in all,

Thailand's Muslims enjoy full state support and are free to teach and practice their religion according to their own tenets. <http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/religions/Muslims.html>

Christianity (0.5%)

Catholic, European missionaries introduced Christianity to Thailand in the 16th and 17th centuries. Protestants of the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Seventh-day Adventist sects later joined the Catholic missionaries. Converts mainly came from ethnic minorities such as the immigrant Chinese. Despite the small number of Thai converts, Christians have made several major contributions in the fields of health and education.

Christians introduced Thailand's first printing press, and King Mongkut (Rama IV) learned English and Latin from Christian missionaries. Though King Mongkut reportedly told one of his missionary friends "What you teach us to do is admirable, but what you teach us to believe is foolish," during his monk-hood before ascending the throne, he nonetheless allowed Christian missionaries to give lectures, even in his own monastery. Christians introduced Western surgery, made the first smallpox vaccinations, trained the first doctors in Western medicine, and wrote the first Thai-English dictionaries.

<http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/religions/Christians.html>

Hindus, Mahayana Buddhism, Sikhs, and Others (0.5%)

The word *Mahayana* means "great vehicle." Most followers of the Mahayana live in Japan and other East Asia countries. The Mahayanists emphasize the existence of many Buddhas. They often focus attention on Buddhas in heaven and on people who will become Buddhas in the future. The Mahayanists believe that these present and future Buddhas are able to save people through grace and compassion. **World Book 2001 Deluxe** Mahayana Buddhists are found primarily among Thailand's ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese. There are some 21 major Chinese monasteries and 25 meeting halls. Vietnamese monks are found in 13 major monasteries.

<http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/religions/Mahayana.html>

The approximate 20,000 Indians residing in Thailand are almost equally divided between Hindus and Sikhs. Both communities are concentrated mostly in Bangkok. There are four main Hindu temples, and several Brahman shrines where Hindus and Buddhists worship together. The Sikhs are divided into two sects, and worship at two different temples. <http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/religions/Hindus.html>

Religious Freedom

All sources used claim there is religious freedom in Thailand, without ethnic or racial discrimination. Although the King and government must be Buddhist, they must support and accept the "religions accepted by the people."

<http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/religions/index.html>

Religious tolerance is a reality. "Although mostly symbolic, the Department of Religious Affairs provides subsidies to the different religious groups based on size of membership. Moreover, the state exempts churches from direct taxation except for property tax. Private confessional schools which receive less than B100 per student per term or trimester may request financial aid from the Ministry of Education for their teachers' salaries." **World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed**

Historical Aspects

Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country never to have been taken over by a European power.

Pre-History

Archeological evidence suggests there has been human habitation in the Thailand region for thousands of years. The preliminary economy was based on hunting and gathering because of the abundance of food. Rice cultivation is credited with moving the region into a more social and political organization. Bronze production was seen as early as 3000 B.C. and cultivated rice around the fourth millennium B.C.

The end of the first millennium B.C. saw the emergence of kingdoms whose names are found in the Chinese dynastic annals of this period. Funan was the most significant power in Southeast Asia in the second century B.C. It was a Hindu ruling class that controlled most of modern day Thailand. They were responsible for bringing the Hindu culture to Southeast Asia. Present day Nakhon Si Thammarat was part of the trade route on the South China Sea that dominated trade in Southeast Asia. The Thai conquered the states of the Isthmus in the thirteenth century but were never integrated into the mainstream culture because of barriers in religion, language, and ethnic origin.

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:7:./temp/~frd_ysTE

The history of Thailand begins in the 1000's A.D, when people known as the "Tai" migrated from Southern China into mainland Southeast Asia. The Tai came into contact with the Mon and Khmer people who already lived there, and adopted Buddhism from the Mon and Hindu practices from the Khmer. Foreigners began calling this region Syam as early as the 1000's. The Tai people began calling themselves, "Thai," or "free."

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There were several different Thai states, or small kingdoms, co-existing at this time. Some interacted freely, others did not. The kingdom regarded as Thailand's beginning is the Kingdom of Sukhothai.

Kingdom of Sukhothai (1238-1350)

Thailand corresponds its founding date with the establishment of the Sukhothai kingdom in 1238, meaning "Dawn of Happiness". Sukhothai began as a chiefdom under the rule of the Khmer empire. The oldest monuments in the city were built in the Khmer style or show clear Khmer influence. During the first half of the 13th century Thai rulers of Sukhothai overthrew the Khmer and set up an independent Thai kingdom. One of the victorious Thai chieftains, Si Inthrahit [Sri Indraditya] became the first king of Sukhothai. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/sukhotha.html>

The most famous ruler during this period was King Ramkhamhaeng, Si Inthrahit's son, from 1279-1317. He expanded Thai territory and is credited with developing and establishing the Thai writing system, or alphabet. A form of this alphabet is still used today. **World Book 2001 Deluxe;** <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/sukhotha.html>

King Ramkhamhaeng was a paternalistic ruler. He hung a bell in front of the palace gate so anyone with a grievance could ring it and ask for justice.

<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/sukhotha.html>. This was radically different from the Khmers, who believed in the divine right of kingship and treated the king as a lofty, inaccessible figure. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/monarchy/monarchy.html>

The Thai basic diet consisted of rice and fish. Although Sukhothai's economy was small-scale and agricultural, it was self-sufficient. Sukhothai engaged in trade with neighboring countries. It exported glazed ceramic wares known as "sangkhlok" to South China, and

as far as Indonesia and the Philippines. Evidence also suggests the Sukhothai kings paid tribute to the Chinese emperor in exchange for trade privileges along the Chinese tributary system.

The Sukhothai kingdom declined in the 14th and 15th centuries. In 1378, the Ayutthaya King Borommara I subdued Sukhothai's frontier city of Chakangrao [Kamphaengphet]. Henceforth Sukhothai became a tributary state of Ayutthaya.

Sukhothai later attempted to break loose from Ayutthaya but failed. In the 15th century Sukhothai was incorporated into the Ayutthaya kingdom as a province.

<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/sukhotha.html>

Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767)

An ancient community had existed in the Ayutthaya area well before 1350, the year of its official "founding" by King Ramathibodi I (Uthong). King Ramathibodi I and his immediate successors expanded Ayutthaya's territory northward toward Sukhothai and eastward towards the Khmer capital of Angkor. By the 15th century, Ayutthaya had established a firm hegemony over most of the northern and central Thai states, though attempts to conquer Lanna failed. Ayutthaya captured Angkor on at least one occasion but was unable to hold on to it for long. The Ayutthaya kingdom thus changed during the 15th century, from being a small state among similar states in central Thailand into an increasingly centralized kingdom wielding tight control over a core area of territory, as well as having looser authority over a string of tributary states.

<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/ayuthaya.html>

The larger territory called for a more complex form of government. An intricate administrative system allied to a hierarchical social system was in place by the reign of King Trailok, or Borommatrailokanat (1448-1488). This Ayutthaya bureaucracy contained a hierarchy of ranked and titled officials, all of whom had varying amounts of "honor marks" (*sakdina*). Here the Khmer influence regarding kingship reappeared. The Ayutthaya kings were at the apex of the social structure. They were Buddhist and ruled according to the dhamma (dharma). But they were also *devaraja*, god-kings whose sacred power was associated with the Hindu gods Indra and Vishnu. The kings of Ayutthaya were treated as if they were gods. This government-type eventually evolved into the modern Thai bureaucracy. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/ayuthaya.html>

Below the king there were roughly three classes of people. At the bottom of the social scale, and the most numerous, were the commoners (freemen or phrai) and the slaves. Above the commoners were the officials or "nobles" (*khunnang*), while at the top of the scale were the princes (*chao*). The one classless sector of Thai society was the Buddhist monk hood, or *sangha*. All classes of Thai men could be ordained. The monk hood was the institution that could weld together all the different social classes, the Buddhist monasteries being the center of all Thai communities both urban and agricultural.

<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/ayuthaya.html>

International trade policies turned Ayutthaya into one of Southeast Asia's richest emporia. Chinese and Muslim merchants were so dominant in Ayutthaya that an old Thai law dating back to the 15th century divides the Thai king's foreign trade department into two: a Chinese section and a Muslim section. The Chinese, with their large and versatile junks, were the most regular and sustained traders with Ayutthaya. The Ayutthaya kings willingly entered into a tributary relationship with the Chinese emperors from the 14th to the 18th centuries in order to conduct steady and profitable trade with Ming and Manchu China. The Thais recognized Chinese suzerainty and China's

preeminent position in Asia in return for Chinese political sanction and, even more desirable, Chinese luxury goods. Muslim merchants came from India and further west to sell highly prized clothes to Thais and other foreign traders.

The Ayutthayan port, which became an international market, lured Chinese and Indian immigrants, and later Japanese and Persians. The Thai kings welcomed the internationals and granted them complete freedom of worship. Several of these foreigners became important court officials. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/ayuthaya.html>

Ayutthaya had trade agreements with other neighboring and surrounding countries, and thus had merchandise from all over Asia. Eventually European traders became interested in Ayutthaya's market. The Portuguese were the first to arrive in 1511, followed by the Spanish in the late 1500's. The early 17th century brought the Dutch and British.

The French first arrived in 1662, during the reign of Ayutthaya's most outward-looking and cosmopolitan ruler, King Narai (1656-1688). French missionaries and merchants came to the capital, and during the 1680's, embassies were exchanged between King Narai and King Louis XIV. The French tried to convert King Narai to Christianity and attempted to gain a foothold in the Thai kingdom in 1687, by sending troops to garrison Bangkok and Mergui. When a succession conflict broke out in 1688, an anti-French official seized power, drove out the French garrisons, and executed King Narai's Greek favorite Constantine Phaulkon, who had been championing the French cause. After 1688, Ayutthaya had less contact with Western nations, but there was no policy of national exclusion. Indeed, there was increased trading contact with China after 1683, and there was continued trade with the Dutch, the Indians, and various neighboring countries.

<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/ayuthaya.html>

King Narai upheld all faiths in the kingdom to the point where Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte said that, except for Siam, there was nowhere in the world where various natives could live together in liberty of conscience.

Even so, King Narai commanded Pra Horatibodi to write a book for the study of Thai language entitled *Chindamani*. The purpose was to counter balance the French cultural influence. The king worried that the increasing numbers of Thai children attending catholic schools might adopt the European culture and be converted. The *Chindamani* summed up the elements, grammar, prosody, and versification of Thai language, as well as official forms of correspondence. It became a popular textbook and continued to be in use until the commencement of King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910). It is generally accepted as the first textbook of Thai language.

<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/monarchy/ayuthaya/narai.html>

Throughout much of its over 400-year rule, Ayutthaya was at war with its neighbors--the Khmer to the east and the Burmese to the west. In 1569, the Burmese King Bayinnaung captured Ayutthaya. After 10 years, Thai military leader Prince Naresuan led the Thai to independence once again. Two centuries later, in the 1760's, Burma staged another expansionist policy. Thai armies suffered massive defeats by the Burmese armies. In 1767, Ayutthaya was lost to the Burmese after a 15-month siege, and was burnt to the ground. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/history/ayuthaya.html>; **World Book Deluxe 2001**

King Taksin (1767-1782)

The half-Chinese general Phraya Taksin, former governor of Tak, drove out the Burmese and set himself up as king. He established the new Thai capital at **Thon Buri**, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. Although a small town, Thon Buri was near the mouth of the Chao Phraya River and therefore a suitable seaport. The Thai used trade to get

weapons and bolster the economy. The Burmese attempted to re-conquer the Thai, but failed. Following an internal political conflict in 1782, King Taksin's general Chao Phraya Chakri became king. <http://www.thaimain.org/eng/monarchy/thonburi/tak.html>; **World Book Deluxe 2001**

Chakri Dynasty (1782-1932)

Rama I

General Chao Phraya Chakri took the name Rama I and established the Chakri Dynasty, which still reigns today. He moved the capital across the river from Thon Buri to Bangkok. **World Book Deluxe 2001**; <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/monarchy/monarchy.html>
It was during Rama I's reign that the Grand Palace was constructed and the Emerald Buddha in the Chapel Royal was installed. Many historians state that the modern Siam dates from his reign. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/monarchy/rama1.html>
King Rama I reorganized the administrative government, which had fallen into chaos after Ayutthaya's destruction. The new government was still highly centralized with trusted officials in various offices. A commission of legal experts revised the country's laws in 1805, and came up with the Laws of Three Seals, or Law Code of 1805-1808. King Rama I also reformed the Buddhist Church. He tightened monks' discipline, revised the Tripitaka (Buddhist Scripture), since most of the authoritative books on the subject had been lost in the war, and restored twelve monasteries.
<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/monarchy/rattanakosin/rama1.html>

Rama IV (1851 - 1868)

King Mongkut entered a monastery before the accession of his elder half-brother King Rama III. He spent 27 years as an abbot before taking the throne. He was the first Thai king to learn English and correspond with foreign rulers, the Pope and the American president.

Rama IV's keen mind and quest for knowledge led him into encounters and situations no Thai king had experienced before. He had theological discussions with American missionaries living in Bangkok. He enjoyed arguing the differences between the Christian and Buddhist beliefs. He employed an English woman to instruct his children in the English language, which served as the basis for the movie *The King and I*.

<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/monarchy/rattanakosin/rama4.html>

Rama V (1868 –1910)

King Chulalongkorn achieved several advances for Siam. He abolished slavery, established the Public Revenue Development Chamber in 1874, to collect taxes and state revenue, promoted and fostered public education, established the Ministry of Education in 1894, for the regulation of nation-wide education, and took several measures to “modernize” the nation. He employed European officials for specific tasks such as building the first Thai railway, for example. Rama V was the first Thai king to travel abroad and meet European rulers. The contacts and agreements he made kept Siam from being colonized by other powers. Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country to maintain its sovereignty through the period of Western colonial expansionism. He also sent his sons to study in Europe instead of bringing in teachers as his father did.

<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/monarchy/rattanakosin/rama5.html>

Constitutional Monarchy (1932-Present)

The absolute monarchy ended on June 24, 1932, when a small group of civil servants and military officers staged a bloodless coup and demanded a constitution. [King Prajadhipok](#)

([Rama VII](#)) was already thinking along such lines and had already drafted a constitution. It was debated in the Supreme Council of State, agreed to, and became the first constitutional monarch. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/monarchy/monarchy.html> King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) continued to reign as a constitutional monarch but was forced to abdicate after three years. King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) ascended to the throne at a young age and spent most of his life studying abroad. His death in 1946, at the age of 20, brought his younger brother, Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), to the throne. It has been left to King Bhumibol Adulyadej to give the meaning to, as well as set the practical standard for, the role of a Thai king within a democratic framework.

<http://www.thaimain.org/eng/monarchy/intro1.html>

During World War II, Thailand was occupied by the Japanese invaders. Since then, the country has remained under control of a series of military governments until 1992. Elections made Thailand a democracy with constitutional changes of government. In 1973, civilians obtained control of the Thai government and established democratic rule. But this democratic order only lasted for three years when in 1976 the military regained power again. http://www.countrywatch.com/files/170/em_topic.asp?TP=HISTO&vCOUNTRY=170

People Groups

Thai 75%, Chinese 14%, other 11% www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html#Geo

The largest ethnic minority is Chinese. Other minority groups include Malays, Cambodians, Indians, non-Thai hill tribes, and some Vietnamese. Immigration is controlled by a quota system. <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/glance-thai/thailand.html#Population>

People groups in Thailand, categorized by Joshua Project

<http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpcxTHA.htm>

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Bengali | Nyaw (Yo) |
| Bru, Western (Baru) | Nyong |
| Burmese | Pattani Malay |
| Han Chinese (Fuchow, Min Pei) | Phay (Pray, Prai) |
| Han Chinese (Hokkien) | Phu Thai (Puthai) |
| Han Chinese (Mandarin) | Phunoi |
| Hkun (Khun Shan) | Punjabi |
| Japanese | Saek (Sek) |
| Khmer, Central | Shan (Thai Yai) |
| Khmer, Northern | So |
| Khmu | Tai, Black (Tai Dam) |
| Kui (Suei) | Talaing (Mon, Peguan) |
| Lao Phuan | Thai, Central |
| Lao Song (Song) | Thai, Northeastern (Isaan) |
| Lu | Thai, Northern (Yuan, Payap, |
| Malay (Melaju) | Khonmuang) |
| Mien (Iu Mien) | Thai, Southern |

All people groups below are linked from: http://www.bethany.com/profiles/c_code/thailand.html

Bengali

60,000 in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1716.htm>

The Bengali are considered to be the original inhabitants of the Bengal region of southwest Asia. This territory is divided politically between [Bangladesh](#) and West Bengal, a state in [India](#). Bengali is the native language spoken by most of the groups in this region. While the vast majority of Bengalis live in Bangladesh and northeast India, there are significant communities in a number of other countries (including Thailand) and other parts of India as well.

Although the Bengalis are primarily classified according to language, their culture remains very diversified. It is made up of various castes, such as the Brahman, Kayastha, Vaidya, Namasudra, Gandha Banik, Saadgop, Napit, Mahisya, Kanaani, and Subarnabanik. Their assortment of occupations and religious preferences has created other cultural distinctions as well.

The majority of Bengalis are [Muslims](#) (60%), while the rest are [Hindu](#) or Hindu zed animists. Bengali Hindu worship many gods, some of which are animals. Cows are sacred, but they revere monkeys, snakes, and other animals as well. They teach yoga and believe in reincarnation.

No information on missions progress in Thailand.

<http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8004.html>

Black Tai

20,000 Black Tai in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl371.htm>

The Black Tai Thailand are descendants of former captives of war from *Muang Thaeng*. They are widely scattered throughout Central and Southern [Thailand](#) in Nongkhai, Korat, Loei, and Saraburi. Their tonal language, Tai Dem, belongs to a larger cultural-linguistic grouping of people known as the Tai. The Tai include the Laotians, the [Shans](#), and others. The Black Tai, together with the [White Tai](#), were named for the color of their women's blouses. Today, both sexes dress in black. Women wear long cloaks with large sleeves, or black bodices with tight fitting, narrow sleeves and black skirts.

Their language (Tai Dam), can be partially understood by the White Tai, and those who have had prolonged contact with both groups become bilingual; however, each group has a distinct writing system.

95 percent of Black Tai in Thailand practice ethnic religions. Theravada Buddhism is mixed with folk animism, meaning that the people often seek help through supernatural spirits and objects. They believe in a multiple personal soul, and have ceremonies for recalling the soul and strengthening the individual personality within. They practice ancestor worship (praying to deceased ancestors for guidance), and believe that there are spirits within every object and person. They also believe in "guardian spirits," and "locality spirits," which are identified with different levels of society. These spirits must be appeased so that they might avoid curses and receive blessings.

Even though there are portions of scripture in their language and several missions agencies working among them, only a few hundred Christians have been found.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code/371.html

Burmese

60,000 in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl142.htm>

The Burmese are originally from the hills of Tibet in western [China](#). Today, they live in [Myanmar](#) (formerly Burma), in the Tanen Mountains, and steep river valleys of northwestern [Thailand](#). They speak Bama, a Tibeto-Burmese language. Many of those in Thailand also speak Thai.

The Burmese are the political, economic, and religious leaders of Myanmar. Myanmar has had a long history of coups, wars, and rebellions. Ethnic divisions and political unrest have been common since the first Burmese kingdom in the eleventh century.

Many Burmese fled to Thailand in hopes of finding a more peaceful climate.

Unfortunately, Thailand has had its own problems with governmental changes, military coups, and riots. The Burmese refugees placed an added strain on Thailand's economy. Sadly, the Burmese have lived in a constant state of instability, defense, bitterness, and fear.

The Burmese are predominantly Hinayana Buddhists, and the temple is the most important social institution in the village. It symbolizes unity among the villagers, and provides a wide variety of activities for the people. The Burmese have mixed Buddhist beliefs with their own *animistic* beliefs (belief that non-living objects have spirits). Their animistic beliefs center around inherently evil spirits called *nats*. The Burmese spend their lives trying to appease the nats so that they will be protected from any other evil spirits that may seek to harm them. All Burmese homes have altars for the spirits, as well as a statue of Buddha.

Two missions agencies are currently targeting the Burmese in Thailand. However, less than 1% of the Burmese community has come to Christ.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code2/142.html

Central Khmer

320,000 in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1883.htm>

The Central Khmer of [Thailand](#) are refugees from the war-torn country of [Cambodia](#) and [Laos](#). They occupy refugee camps and small villages located all along the borders of eastern Thailand and Cambodia. They speak Khmer, or Cambodian, which is an Eastern Mon-Khmer language.

The great Khmer Empire, which flourished between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, encompassed present-day Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and southern Vietnam. Its power declined when the Thai and Vietnamese conquered the Khmer and restricted them to the area that is now known as Cambodia.

Bombings, civil war, and war with the Vietnamese turned Cambodia into killing fields in 1970. Many Khmer fled to Thailand. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the thousands of refugees strained Thailand's economy.

In 1975, the Khmer Rouge regime nearly destroyed Cambodia. To depopulate the cities, three million people were forced into the countryside to do slave labor. Widespread starvation led to the deaths of over one million people in the name of the ideal of rural social reform. The people either fled north into Thailand, or took the trail of tears into Communist Laos. The Khmer who stayed in Thailand live in small villages or refugee camps. There, families are separated from each other and have few personal possessions. The shelters are made with thatch roofs, bamboo walls, and are built on stilts. More men than women were killed between 1975 and 1979, creating a skewed sex ratio among the Khmer. Today, mostly widows and orphans remain.

The Khmer have acquired the languages and cultures of their [Thai](#) neighbors. Ancient Khmer influences on the Thai are strong as well, giving the two groups a common ancestral bond. 94% of the Khmer are Buddhist today, although relics of ethnic religions such as ancestor worship (praying to deceased ancestors for guidance), and spirit worship are still important to them.

No information about missions provided. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code2/1883.html

Central Thai

18,300,000 in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1270.htm>

The Central Tai, or Siamese, live on the country's rich central plain. The Chao Phraya River waters the area, which includes the capital city of Bangkok. The Central Tai, who represent more than a third of the population, call themselves the *Khon Thai*, meaning "the free people."

Centuries ago the Tai lived north of Yangtzejiang in [China](#). Pressure by the Chinese gradually forced them southward. They conquered many peoples and cultures as they sought a new homeland. By the tenth century they settled in Central [Thailand](#). The Central Tai speak Thai, the official language of the country.

There are a wide variety of homes in the cities: multi-level cement houses, houses that are attached to or above shops, townhouses, apartment complexes, or wooden houses. The temple and school are prominent features in the villages. Water taxis transport people and cargo on polluted waterways that connect houses and other buildings.

Buddhism is the central and unifying force in Tai society and even maintains social control. Almost all of the Tai are devout followers of Buddha ("the enlightened one"), and seek to eliminate suffering and improve their future by gaining merit in pursuit of perfect peace, or *nirvana*. They believe that merit can be acquired through feeding monks, donating to temples, and attending worship services.

There are a number of missions agencies are working among the Central Tai. The Bible, the *Jesus* film, and Christian broadcasts are all available in the Tai language. However, less than 1% is Christian. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code2/1270.html

Chinese (Fuchow, Hokkien, Han)

10,537,000 Fuchow/Min Pei in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl562.htm>

1,082,00 Hokkien in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl623.htm>

The Han Chinese is the largest ethnic group in the world, numbering about 1.2 billion. Although the vast majority of them live in Mainland China, many have immigrated to other countries, and today reside in nearly every nation of the world. In a number of these countries, including [Laos](#), [Nepal](#), [Tanzania](#), [Cambodia](#), and [Thailand](#), the Chinese communities remain unreached with the Gospel.

Most Han Chinese speak one of the many Chinese dialects, which include Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hokkien. Although the dialects are very similar, the speakers of one Chinese dialect cannot understand the speakers of another. The Han Chinese continue to speak their various Chinese dialects, except for those in Thailand.

The Han Chinese began fleeing to other countries in 1276, after the Mongol invasion. Many other upheavals and conflicts followed, and the Chinese continued to settle in other nations, particularly in Southeast Asia. Wherever they went, the Chinese settled almost exclusively in urban areas and became involved in business and commerce. Today, they are very influential in the economies of many of these nations in spite of the fact that they represent only a small percentage of the population.

The Diaspora Han Chinese have generally maintained their traditional Chinese religion, which is characterized by a blending of philosophies. It has added elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism over the course of time. Their beliefs are centered on the concept of maintaining harmony.

The Han Chinese are very superstitious, consulting horoscopes in an attempt to determine what course of action will promote harmony and bring good luck. They also believe in a pantheon of spirits who inhabit the earth. The spirits of their ancestors supposedly roam the earth, and if treated properly, are benign and bring good luck. Ghosts are believed to exist as the spirits of people who are angry at the circumstances of their death; these spirits are said to be malicious and capricious. Deities are supposedly the souls of people who lived especially virtuous lives. They are believed to have spiritual powers that can be used to benefit those who worship them.

Although the Han Chinese still claim adherence to these beliefs, they seem to have little effect on their everyday lives. In fact, many of them are non-religious in practice.

Many of their adopted nations are open to the Gospel, and several evangelistic tools are available in their Chinese dialects. Nevertheless, only a few Diaspora Han Chinese in Laos, Nepal, Tanzania, and Thailand have converted to Christianity.

<http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8072.html>

Northwest Tribes (Hkun, Khmu, Northern Tai, Nyong, Yao)

14,000 Hkun <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl2064.htm>

29,000 Khmu <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl356.htm>

6,005,000 Northern Tai <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1906.htm>

12,000 Nyong <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1054.htm>

Most of the tribes in northwestern [Thailand](#) live along the lower slopes of the mountains.

They speak various languages, which come from either the Mon Khmer or Tai group.

Most of the people are bilingual, speaking both their native language and Northern Thai.

Many of them also use the Northern Thai script.

[China](#) is the original homeland of most of these tribes. They gradually migrated southward due to pressure by the Chinese. By the tenth century, a large number of them had settled in Thailand. Northern Thailand is the site of the early Mon kingdom, which was founded in the sixth century. The kingdom fell to the Thai during the thirteenth century, and this allowed the northwestern region to retain a degree of independence from Bangkok until the late nineteenth century. For the peoples in northwestern Thailand, warfare and resettlement have caused massive social displacement.

Except for the Yao, many of the tribal groups in this region have mixed elements of Buddhism with their traditional ethnic beliefs. For this reason, the people often seek help through supernatural spirits and objects. They believe that the spirits, known as *phi*, must be appeased with sacrifices and offerings.

Among the tribes of this region, the Khmu are the most spiritually respected. This is due to the fact that the [Thai](#) and the Lao believe that the Khmu have a closer link with the land and its spirits than other groups. The Khmu are respected as powerful magicians.

While most of the tribes of this region have at least one missions agency targeting them, there are currently no missions agencies working among the Nyong or the Hkun.

At the present time, none of the groups have an entire translation of the Bible in their language. However, all of them, except for the Nyong, have at least portions of the scripture. <http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8061.html>

Japanese

Many Japanese have moved to [Thailand](#) because it provides an offshore base for their export-oriented industries. Over 10,000 Japanese live in Bangkok, Thailand's capitol, which is located on the Gulf of Thailand coast. Regarded as temporary residents, the Japanese work in diplomatic missions, represent Japanese business interests, and provide technical aid.

The Japanese have been drawn to Thailand for four main reasons. First, [Japan](#) and Thailand are both monarchies with frequent royal exchanges. Second, they share a common religion, Buddhism. Third, the two countries have never been at war with each other. Finally, the Thai government has a laissez-faire approach to business with comparatively little red tape for potential investors. Japanese businessmen recognize Thailand as a civilized country where contacts are respected, government intervention is minimal, and [Thai](#) workers are industrious.

Perhaps the greatest threat from the Japanese influx is a blatant exploitation of the country. The Japanese are known for transferring limited and "old" technology to the Thai. The Thai resent the Japanese for refusing to promote them into management positions in the Thai-based companies. They are also angry because the Japanese train the Thai employees only for specific skills to profit Japanese business. Some critics of Japanese businessmen in Thailand feel that easy access to cheap golf courses and the nightlife or "red light" areas of Bangkok are more seductive than many Japanese investors would admit. Areas of nightclubs catering almost exclusively to Japanese businessmen have developed.

Shintoism is the native religion of many Japanese. It is rooted in *animism* (belief that non-living objects have spirits), and its many gods or spirits are known as *kami*. Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the sixth century. Today, most Japanese claim to be both Shintoist and Buddhist. However, many Japanese are indifferent and skeptical of established religion. On the outside, they seem to have few needs. However, many of them have become obsessed with materialistic pleasures, careers, and possessions.

No information provided about missions progress.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code2/2042.html

Kui

650,000 Kui in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1037.htm>

The Kui live in east central [Thailand](#), primarily in the Buriram, Sisaket, Surin, and Ubon provinces. They are also found living along the border of Cambodia. The Kui are called Sui by the Thai, which means "tax-paying." It is thought that the Kui were settled in the area long before the [Thai](#) arrived there, and that they were Mon-Khmer natives.

The Kui language, Kuy, has changed significantly over the years as the people have been influenced by the surrounding cultures, particularly the [Central Khmer of Thailand](#). Most are fluent in Khmer, although they speak Kuy in their homes. Those who have adopted other cultures do not like to be reminded of their Kui origin, and they regard Khmer as a superior language.

Seventy-eight percent of the Kui practice ethnic religions such as *animism* (belief that non-human objects have spirits). They believe in a spiritual realm that contains both good and evil spirits. Some spirits are associated with natural objects such as trees and fields. The spirits of deceased parents and grandparents are looked to for help and guidance. The Kui believe that some spirits cause illness, while others give magical powers to certain

individuals. The people must deal with sorcerers who can cause illness or death. They also rely on mediums to communicate with the dead.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, many of the Kui have become Buddhists as a result of influence from the Central Thai and Khmer. Many Kui communities now have temples in their villages.

Of the more than 200,000 Kui in Thailand, less than 2% of them know Jesus as their Savior. Although the New Testament is already available in the Kuy language, most of the Kui are illiterate. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code1/1037.html

Lu

50,000 Lu in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1900.htm>

China is the original homeland of the Lu; however, many have migrated south due to pressure by the Chinese. During World War II, when the establishment of a Communist regime ended the Lu kingdom, they fled to Burma and Northern Thailand. The Lu inhabit the tropical forests and valleys scattered throughout northern [Thailand](#), especially around Chiangrai at the border of Laos. Other Lu communities can be found in [China](#), [Myanmar](#) (formerly Burma), and [Laos](#).

The tonal language of the Lu belongs to the southwestern group of Tai languages. Most of the Lu are bi- or tri-lingual. Lu is used exclusively for talking to other Lu people, Central Thai is learned in school, and Northern Thai is used in town for trade and employment. They are proud of their native language and are eager to be identified as Lu.

Lu men are bigger, taller, and stronger than the [Shan](#) or [Northern Thai](#). They traditionally dress in blue coats, dark blue bell trousers with bands of red, yellow, or white, and large white turbans. The men are known for their unusual and picturesque sword dances. The women wear light blue embroidered jackets that are adorned with small pieces of silver. They also wear red or scarlet skirts and turbans.

Eighty percent of the Lu practice ethnic religions. Theravada Buddhism is often mixed with folk animism. They believe that non-human objects have spirits, and that people have multiple souls. They also believe that there are "territorial spirits," which are identified with different levels of society. In addition, they practice ancestor worship (praying to deceased ancestors for guidance). They live in fear of their gods and constantly strive to appease them with religious chants, rituals, and sacrifices. There is evidence that witchcraft is used to keep the people oppressed.

The Lu put great emphasis on reincarnation, believing that if they live a good life they will be reborn into a higher social order. If they are wicked, however, they will be reborn as degraded animals.

There are currently two missions agencies known to be working among the Lu of Thailand; however, progress has been slow. There are less than 300 known believers among them, and their only copies of the New Testament are from a 1933 translation, which they can no longer read. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code/1900.html

Malay

477,000 Malay in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl849.htm>

While the Malay are spread throughout southeastern Asia, the majority are centered in the country of [Malaysia](#). There, they make up about half of the population, sharing the country with Chinese and Indian minorities. The dispersal of the Malay was in progress by the fifth century A.D., when the Malay began to dominate local trade in southeastern Asia

and long distance trade between northwestern [India](#) and southern [China](#). Their domination of sea trade continued until the 1500's and even into the European colonial period. In addition to sea trade, some Malay may have been transported as slaves in the 1700's; others were political exiles. The most important Malay minorities live in [Indonesia](#), [Brunei](#), [Singapore](#), and [Thailand](#). Almost 400,000 live in Singapore, where Malay is one of the national languages. In Thailand, they are the majority population of the four southernmost provinces. There are smaller communities in [Madagascar](#), [Taiwan](#), [Myanmar](#), [Yemen](#), the [United Kingdom](#), and the southern [Philippines](#). In these countries they are referred to as "Coastal Malay."

The strongest characteristic of Malay identity that remains consistent regardless of their location is their adherence to the Islamic faith. Malays worldwide recognize a Malaysian law that defines a Malay as "a person belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks Malay (or any Malayan language) and professes the Muslim religion."

Although the Malay identify strongly with [Islam](#), they continue to practice many aspects of their pre-Islamic religions of Buddhism, [Hinduism](#), and ethnic religions. For example, they commemorate many important events in life such as birth, marriage, and death with non-Islamic rituals. It is common for Malay who live in rural areas to believe in ghosts, goblins, and spirits. Also, if medicine is unavailable, a shaman (priest or priestess who communicates with the spirits) will often be brought in to treat an illness. For these reasons, other Muslims see the Malay as poor Muslims who have distorted the doctrines of Islam.

Although tools such as the Bible, evangelistic literature, the *Jesus* film, and Christian broadcasts are available to the Malay, less than 1% of their population has accepted Jesus as Savior. <http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8101.html>

Northeastern Tai

18,500,000 NE Tai in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1298.htm>

The Northeastern Tai, also known as the **Siamese**, are dispersed throughout seventeen provinces in northeastern [Thailand](#). This area takes up nearly one third of Thailand's total land mass. It is basically flat, with a few mountains rising up through the plains. This area is one of Thailand's most beautiful terrains, and boasts an abundance of intriguing plateaus, cliffs, caves, rivers, waterfalls, and woodlands. The region is also noted for its archeological relics and monuments.

Hundreds of years ago, the Tai migrated southward from China's Yangtze-kiang province to escape Chinese oppression. As they traveled, they conquered many peoples along the way. During the eighth or ninth century, they began to settle along the Mekong River. By the tenth century, large numbers of Tai had reached Thailand and Laos. Today, they speak Northeastern Tai (Isan) in their homes, but some are also fluent in Chinese and Central Tai, the official language of Thailand.

More than half of the Northeastern Tai are Theravada (orthodox) Buddhist. Many of the Northeastern Tai continue to practice their traditional ethnic religions. They combine Buddhist teachings with *folk animism*, seeking help through the worship of spirits and objects.

No information provided about missions progress.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code4/1298.html

Northern Khmer

1,000,000 N Khmer in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1884.htm>

While the majority of the Khmer live in [Cambodia](#), approximately 1 million Northern Khmer live across the border in Southeast [Thailand](#). They are primarily concentrated in the provinces of Surin, Sisaket, Buriram, and Nakhon Ratchasima. Their native language, also called Northern Khmer (or Buriram), is distinct from, but similar to, Central Khmer. Since Thai is the only language taught in schools, many Northern Khmer are bilingual, speaking Northern Khmer while at home.

The great Khmer Empire, which flourished between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, encompassed present-day Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and southern Vietnam. Its power declined when the Thai and Vietnamese conquered the Khmer and restricted them to the area that now known as Cambodia. Now These Northern Khmer have virtually been absorbed into the [Thai](#) community, adopting their religious practices, customs, manners, lifestyles, and occupations. Ancient Khmer influences on the Thai are strong as well, giving the two groups a common ancestral bond.

The former Khmer Empire adopted Hinduism and Buddhism from India. Today, virtually all of the Northern Khmer in Thailand are Buddhist. However, relics of ethnic religions such as ancestor worship (praying to deceased ancestors for guidance) and spirit worship are still important.

The Bible has not yet been translated into Northern Khmer. Some of the younger generation can read Thai, but the older people cannot.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code2/1884.html

Northeastern Tribes (Nyaw, Phuthai, Saek, So, Western Bru)

50,000 Nyaw in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1050.htm>

156,000 Phuthai in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl369.htm>

25,000 Saek in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl355.htm>

50,000 So in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl2047.htm>

20,000 W Bru in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl2049.htm>

Most of the ethnic groups of northeastern [Thailand](#) live in villages along the Mekong River and its tributaries. They speak various languages, which come from either the Mon Khmer or Tai group. Most of the people are bilingual, speaking both their native language and one of the Tai or Lao languages.

[China](#) is the original homeland of most of these tribes. They gradually migrated southward due to pressure by the Chinese. As they traveled, they conquered many peoples along the way. By the tenth century, a large number of them had settled in Thailand.

Northern Thailand is the site of the early Mon kingdom, which was founded in the sixth century. In the thirteenth century, the kingdom was conquered by the Thai. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the Thai forced the Mon to leave their homes and relocate in the Mekong River region. Today, these tribes live along both sides of the river. Over the years, they have been absorbed by the dominant cultures of the region, particularly the Lao and the Thai.

The tribal peoples of northeastern Thailand are primarily farmers. They cultivate a wide variety of crops, such as rice, fruit, and vegetables, for both consumption and trade. They are poorer than most of the surrounding ethnic groups and are therefore dependent on the Thai for many goods and services. The villagers frequently meet with the [Thai](#) to trade meat and vegetables for necessary items such as clothing and salt.

All of these tribes are primarily Buddhist; however, most of them have mixed Buddhist elements with their traditional *animistic* beliefs (belief that non-living objects have spirits). The people often seek help through supernatural spirits and objects.

Ancestor worship (praying to deceased ancestors for provision and guidance) is also common. The ancestral spirits are thought to cause illnesses if they are not appeased. Families usually have small altars near their homes where sacrifices and offerings are made to the spirits. The people also believe that each village has a "guardian spirit," as well as various spirits that are linked to the elements of nature.

Many of the villagers who have little outside influence are still strongly committed to spirit worship. They rely heavily on "spirit doctors," who supposedly have great healing powers.

Although the tribes in this region have at least one missions agency targeting them, they remain unreached. Only one tribe, the So, have portions of the scripture in their language. The others do not yet have even a portion of the Bible in their native languages. At the present time, Christian broadcasts are only being aired among the Phuthai.

<http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8060.html>

Pattani Malay

2,384,000 Pattani Malay in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jp1838.htm>

The 1.1 million Pattani Malay form an ethnic community in the southern provinces of [Thailand](#). The Pattani, a devout [Muslim](#) people, are the descendants of Malaysian Muslims. Due to their dedication to the Islamic faith, the Pattani have a distinct identity in Thailand. A vast majority of the Thai are Buddhist; only 3% are Muslim. However, since the beginnings of the ancient Malay kingdom in Thailand, Islam has had a major influence on the culture.

The history of the Pattani Malay has been punctuated by revolt and revolution. Over the years, their unique Muslim culture has led to many separatist movements against the Thai government. Because the Pattani province is located a great distance from the center of the Thai government, the Pattani have developed a feeling of uniqueness and independence. However, each time the government tries to centralize control in the state, their independence is threatened. This has resulted in a resentment for the government. The *Jesus* film, Christian radio broadcasts, and the New Testament are available in the Melayu Pattani language; however, the Pattani remain less than 1% Christian.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code4/838.html

Phunoi

32,000 Phunoi in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jp11338.htm>

The Phunoi are a Tibeto-Burman group living in northern [Thailand](#). Little is known about them, except that they are closely related to the Bisu, Pyen, and Mpi, whose locations in Thailand are uncertain. Without specific information about the Phunoi, this profile is based on their location and the influence of their Thai surroundings.

The Phunoi are part of the Lolo linguistic groups, whose origins were possibly in northwestern China, and who seemed to be the dominant power in southern China during the eighth and ninth centuries. In the early ninth century, they mounted a series of raids as they made their way into Southeast Asia. They were later conquered by the Mon peoples. The language most Phunoi families use in the home is also called Phunoi, and it is a member of the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. Central Thai is the official language of

Thailand and is distinct from the Phunoi language. Many Phunoi are likely fluent in Central Thai.

The Phunoi are *ethnic religionists*. Ethnic religions are generally syncretistic, and most often blend aspects of *animism* and *ancestor worship*. Animism includes the belief that forces and aspects of nature (wind, rivers, trees, earth) are connected with spirits or supernatural beings. These spirits are hardly ever worshipped or consulted regarding moral issues of life. Rather, they are points of contact for people who are attempting to solve the urgent practicalities of life, such as securing food, curing illness, and averting danger. Most of these spirits are local deities who are not to be truly worshipped, but venerated and hopefully manipulated to the petitioner's advantage through sacrifice and ritual.

Ancestor worship is the belief that the spirits of deceased ancestors are alive and need to be fed and cared for. Ancestral spirits of mythical leaders often are believed to have power over matters of concern to the entire society, such as rain and the growth of crops and cattle; whereas, the spirits of heads of families and clans are said to influence matters of immediate concern to the particular families. The spirits are generally regarded as very helpful to their living descendants. They are propitiated through sacrifices and rituals in established ceremonies, as well as at times of crisis.

There are currently no Scriptures or Christian resources available in their language.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code5/1338.html

Punjabi

20,000 Punjabi in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1472.htm>

A vast majority of the Punjabi live in [India](#) and [Pakistan](#); however, large Punjabi communities can also be found in nearly thirty other countries. While the living conditions of the Punjabi differ greatly from country to country, they have retained much of their traditional culture and lifestyle.

The name "Punjabi" is used to describe both those who speak Punjabi, and those who inhabit the Punjab region (in India and Pakistan). Punjabi is an Indo-European language that is divided into six main dialects. It is primarily spoken in the major regions of India and Pakistan.

There are many different social classes and occupational sub-groups among the Punjabi. For this reason, it is difficult to adequately describe their lifestyle. The partitioning of India and Pakistan in 1947 largely shaped the Modern Punjabi culture. This event resulted in massive migrations that separated the Muslims from the Hindus and Sikhs. (*Sikhism* is a combination of Islam and Hinduism.) The incorporation of new government policies also had far reaching effects on the lives of the Punjabi.

Among the Punjabi there is no overall system of social control. Instead, each institution (such as businesses, homes, civil administration, religious organizations, and political organizations) has its own set of laws and disciplinary measures. It is commonly said among the Punjabi that "land, women, and water are the sources of all conflicts." This simply means that they deem it necessary to control the means by which one perpetuates his family and property.

The Diaspora Punjabi reflect the three major religions of their homeland: [Hinduism](#), [Islam](#), and *Sikhism*. Most of the Diaspora Punjabi speakers are Sikhs, except for those in Myanmar, who are mostly atheists. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that was founded in northern India during the sixteenth century. Its teachings have combined the elements

of both Hinduism and Islam in an attempt to find one god who transcends all religious distinctions.

Although there are many Christian resources available in the Punjabi language, few Punjabi have been reached with the Gospel. Even in predominantly Christian countries, such as Tanzania and Kenya, the Punjabi are less than 1% Christian. In other countries, such as Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma), no missions agencies are currently working among the Punjabi. <http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8044.html>

Shan

56,000 Shan in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl312.htm>

The Shan consist of several distinct people groups that are primarily located in [China](#), [Laos](#), [Myanmar](#), and [Thailand](#). In the Yunnan Province of southwestern China they make up the fifth largest minority group. They live in cities and farming villages along the Sino-Myanmar border.

The Shan belong to a larger group of people known as the [Dai](#). Before the time of Christ, the Dai spread themselves across southern China and other parts of Southeast Asia, living in separate tribes. In the twelfth century A.D., the tribes united to establish a local regime, known as the "Jinglong Golden Hall Kingdom." However, the Dai people as a whole were never independent from the Chinese throne. In the centuries before the Communist takeover of 1949, the Dai tribes slowly began to separate and form distinctive traditions and languages. Later, under Communist rule, the Dai who remained in China lived in self-ruling districts. The Shan settled as rice farmers in the Dehong region and eventually evolved into two groups: the lowland farmers or Shui Dai and the mountain nomads or Han Dai.

The Shan have many interesting courting traditions. One example is the "purse throwing game," in which a young woman throws a small purse to the young man of her affections. If he is interested, he catches the purse. If not, he allows it to fall to the ground. A more modern tradition takes place in a movie theater. When the room is darkened, the couple shines flashlights at each other. Wedding ceremonies are usually held at either home and are conducted by the local Buddhist monk. In some regions, the bride moves in with the groom's family; in other areas, the groom moves in with the bride's family.

Men wear button-down shirts with pants or sarong-type skirts. Some men have tattoos on their arms and chests. Women of all ages wear heavy, yellow make-up to protect their skin from the sun. They also wear jewelry every day. While single village women wear brightly colored dresses or sarongs with tightly fitted blouses, married village women wear more muted colors; older women often pin up their hair. Sandals and flip-flops are popular footwear. Those living in or near cities wear more modern styles, but even there women generally do not wear pants.

The Shan practice Theravada Buddhism mixed with animism. Colorful Buddhist temples, often built on stilts, are in the center of every village. Altars and pictures of Buddha can be found in each home. In the temples, the women sit in back while the men sit up front, since Shan society ranks men above women.

No information provided on missions progress.

<http://www.bethany.com/profiles/clusters/8037.html>

Southern Tai

5,000,000 S Tai in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl386.htm>

The Southern Tai live in about fourteen different provinces in southern Thailand. They usually live on the beaches and in the marshy swamplands, which gradually reach the foothills of jungle-covered mountains and into lush valleys. Although Thai is the official language of the country, most Southern Tai speak their tonal language, Dambro, at home. The Southern Tai lived in China centuries ago. However, relentless pressure by the Chinese gradually forced them to move southward. They conquered many peoples and cultures as they sought a new homeland.

By the tenth century, they were in southern Thailand in substantial numbers, mixing with the Mon-Khmer and Negritos of the land. A bloodless revolution in 1932, led by Westernized intellectuals, instituted a democratic constitutional monarchy. Since then, Thailand has had many governmental changes and military upheavals.

More than half of the Southern Tai are firm believers in Theravada (orthodox) Buddhism. The large Sunni Muslim influence comes from Malaysia. Southern Tai Muslims believe wholeheartedly in *semangat*, a "soul substance" found in everything from inanimate objects and animals to human beings. They believe that the loss of *semangat* results in poor crops, poverty, and illness. They believe that evil spirits cause illness, so every village has a *bomo*, which is a man of high moral character who puts himself into trances to exorcise the evil spirits and thus heal the sick person.

For the Southern Tai, Buddhism and Islam are both combined with folk animism, a practice in which they seek help through the worship of supernatural spirits and objects. Several missions agencies are laboring among the Southern Tai, but response has been low. Less than 1% of the Southern Tai are Christian, and the majority has never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel. The Bible and the *Jesus* film have not been translated into the Dambro language and no Christian broadcasts are available to the Southern Tai. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code3/386.html

Talaing

70,000 Talaing in Thailand <http://www.ad2000.org/peoples/jpl1030.htm>

The Talaing live in scattered settlements just north and south of Bangkok, and in the provinces of Khorat, Kanchanaburi, Lopburi, Pathum, Thani, Surat Thani, and Rat Buri. They speak a Mon-Khmer language called Mon. Most of the Talaing have integrated with the surrounding Thai and can no longer read their original script.

The Talaing migrated from the northern territories into what is now known as [Thailand](#) and [Myanmar \(Burma\)](#), and established the first great civilization in that region. They pioneered wet rice farming, introduced the nationals to Buddhism, and gave them their alphabet. Between the fifth and eighth centuries, their kingdom was at its peak. However, in the centuries that followed, they were at constant war with the Burmese.

The Talaing were finally defeated by the Burmese in 1757, and the time of their political independence ended. Today, most of the Talaing are the descendants of the fugitives who fled from the Burmese.

The Talaing have lived in village settlements for the last three to four hundred years. Their houses are similar to Thai homes, except that they are always situated east and west. Talaing families are not particularly patrilineal (male-dominated), except when dealing with the "house spirit." This deity is located in the home of the eldest living male of a lineage. The Talaing do not have formal weddings. Instead, when a boy and girl decide to marry, the boy's friends tell the girl's parents. The groom is allowed to move in

with the bride and her family for up to three years. The couple then establishes their own separate household.

Physically, the Talaing are taller and stronger than the Thai. Today, most of them dress like the Thai.

There are currently two missions agencies working among the Talaing of Thailand. However, less than 1% of Talaing have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code3/1030.html

People groups with lesser information

Han Chinese (Mandarin)

Pop: 477,000

Lang: Mandarin

Lao Phuan

Pop: 75,000

Lang: Phuan

Lao Song (Song)

Pop: 20,000

Lang: Song

Mien

Pop: 34,000

Lang: lu Mien

Phay (Pray, Prai)

Pop: 31,000

Lang: Phai

Christianity

Catholic Church

Missionaries (1993): 401 **Operation World**

In 1554, 2 Dominican priests took up positions as chaplains to Portuguese soldiers attached to the king of Siam and helped convert over 1,500 Thai. Franciscans came in 1583, followed by Jesuits in 1606. The vicariate of Siam was erected in 1673.

Violent persecutions in the 18th century left very few Christians, but more progress has been made since then. The first Thai bishop was consecrated in 1945, and the first monastery was founded in 1970 at Nongri. Catholics are concentrated in the central and northeastern areas, but can be found all over Thailand. In rural areas, Catholics are poor; in urban areas, a more even distribution of social-economic class is represented. **World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed.**

Protestant Churches

Missionaries (1993): 1,293 **Operation World**

Netherlands and London (NZG and LMS) missionaries arrived in 1828, followed by American Board missionaries in 1831, American Baptists in 1833, and American Presbyterians in 1840. The latter group focused mainly on Thai.

In 1934, Presbyterians, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and Lutherans formed the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). (The latter two joined later.) The CCT is currently the largest Protestant church in Thailand and is composed of Thai, Chinese and Karen

congregations. In 1957, all missions were integrated into the church, and include: a theological seminary at Chiang Mai, 37 primary and 5 secondary schools, 5 hospitals, 32 dispensaries, a mobile clinic, a rehabilitation institute, an agricultural farm, and an adult literacy department. **World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed**

Although the CCT is based in Bangkok, its strength has traditionally come from rural villages. The steady flow of villagers moving into the cities is creating problems for the CCT. <http://netra.payap.ac.th/cct/church.html>

In the 1990's, a Pentecostal/Charismatic "renewal" spread through many older churches, and numbered over 828,000 believers (4% Pentecostal, 6% Charismatic, 90% Independent).

Numerous other Protestant denominations are now active in Thailand. **World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed**

Predominate religion

The 1968 Constitution declares Buddhism as the state religion. (As noted above, 95% of Thailand is Buddhist.) "The king must profess and defend the Buddhist faith; 'Everyone notwithstanding his birth and religion, has an equal right to the protection of the Constitution'; there is full liberty to profess 'every religion, sect and religious belief' and to participate in the worship which is related to it; and protection is assumed against any act of the state which would violate the exercise of this religious freedom." **World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed**

Missiological Implications

1. The king is very important in Thai culture. Since Thai have a clearer understanding of what it means to have a king, helping them understand that God is their ultimate King may lead them to a relationship with Christ. Care must be taken, however, to not disrespect the Thai king since it is against the law to speak against the monarchy.
2. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes Buddha as a historical figure, the virtues of the monastic life, and the authority of the *Tripitaka*. Thai are therefore familiar with a religious, historical figure, a written authority, and virtuous living. Christianity is similar. Jesus is a historical figure, virtuous living is standard with true commitment, and the Bible is the infallible, written Word of God. The major differences lie in that Theravada Buddhism teaches that Buddha was not, and is not, a god, and one must work towards *nirvana*, or freedom from suffering. Christ offers the free gift of salvation, which ceases spiritual suffering. We need to help the Thai realize that peace and freedom from suffering, or nirvana, cannot be obtained without Jesus.
3. Buddhism is integrated into the Thai culture. For some the tie is so strong that if one is not Buddhist, one is not Thai. But for others, Buddhism is merely sprinkled over their lifestyle by the government. For example, I have a friend who taught at the Chitralada Palace School for nine months this past school year. Just before a Buddhist national holiday Thai teachers at the palace school, where princes and princesses attend, could not tell my friend which Buddhist holiday it was, why it was being celebrated, or even what the exact date of the celebration was. Even the most devote Buddhists had trouble explaining matter of fact information, she relates.

Perhaps Buddhism has a strong hold over the Thai culture, but not over the Thai hearts. We must go in and share the gospel with them. My friend shared that many of the students at the palace school had never heard of Jesus. It is a fantasy tale for them, like Santa Claus. Personal or one-on-one evangelism is a tremendous necessity.

4. Several sources say progress has been made with animist peoples in the rural, village areas. Surely these new Christians need help with discipleship.
5. Ancestor and spirit worship are still important to many village peoples. These people groups need to understand that the only spirit that can help them is God, for God is spirit.
6. The largest Protestant organization in Thailand, the Church of Christ in Thailand, is losing strength due to urbanization.