

## The Tak Bai Thai of Thailand

“Please tell us more about King Ramkhamhaeng!” exclaimed Klahan. The **Tak Bai Thai** boy and his younger brother, Chit sat expectantly before Awut, their grandfather. Awut smiled as he started his second round of stories. His grandsons love a good story, and Awut certainly had a wealth of old folk tales, told to him as a boy by his own parents. The old **Tak Bai Thai** man knew that a day will come when his grandsons would be more interested in the Internet and computer games than listen to old folk tales.

The **Tak Bai Thai**'s origins are linked to King Ramkhamhaeng of the ancient Thai kingdom of Sukhothai. This king extended the power of his kingdom from central Siam down south to the Malay Peninsula in the 13th century. To secure his foothold, he relocated thousands of his subjects along with their Buddhist faith into what is now northern Malaysia and southern Thailand.

Today these people are called the **Tak Bai Thai**. While they mainly occupy Tak Bai District in Narathiwat Province, they also live in Pattani and Yala provinces. Their language is quite different from standard Thai and is described as a variant of the language of old Sukhothai.

The 21,000 **Tak Bai Thai** live alongside their Muslim Pattani Malay neighbours. Both groups generally tolerate each other, though the ongoing insurgency by separatist Pattani Malay rebels has shaken the security of the **Tak Bai Thai**. The **Tak Bai Thai** are staunch Theravada Buddhists, having resisted the influence of Islam for centuries. Spirit worship is common. It is not known as to how many are Christians.

- Pray that the current separatist violence faced by the **Tak Bai Thai** may bring forth openness towards the Gospel.
- Pray against age-old spiritual strongholds of Buddhism and spirit worship over their hearts and minds.
- Pray for more workers to be raised and sent to the **Tak Bai Thai**. Pray for their safety amidst the political violence in the region.

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